

# JOSHUA—WEEK 4

## GOD’S COMMAND



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Joshua, Week 4 — God's Command*  
*The Cover Picture is by Jean Fouquet (1420–1477)*  
*On display in Paris at the Bibliotheque nationale de France.*

Joshua is ordered to circumcise the army, which “rolls away” the reproach of Egypt. This prepares them to conquer Jericho, which God has given them. Joshua has a humbling encounter with the commander of the LORD’s army.

Lastly, the LORD instructs them to knock the city walls down by marching the ark around it and blowing the shofars, which they do.

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1 Joshua 5:2–8

*At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.” So Joshua made flint knives for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness, on the way as they came out of Egypt, had not been circumcised. For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people who were men of war, who came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they did not obey the voice of the LORD—to whom the LORD swore that He would not show them the land which the LORD had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Then Joshua circumcised their sons whom He raised up in their place; for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.*

*So it was, when they had finished circumcising all the people, that they stayed in their places in the camp till they were healed.*

This is nuts (from a secular point of view). In fact, this is the most dangerously stupid thing Joshua has done yet. Now the Israeli army is really vulnerable, much more than before. They'll have limited fighting ability for many days while they recover from circumcision. Any attack from “the locals” would be devastating.

But the secular point of view is totally wrong. The Israeli army is well protected, by God's providence in the first place, and by the melted hearts of the people and kings of Canaan in the second place. The LORD has this all planned out—foreordaining the means as well as the ends.

So, with that taken care of, the real priorities can be attended to. Israel hasn't been circumcising their male children. That needs fixing. But why flint knives?

Flint knives are Stone Age technology. You can make “knives” by chipping away at a flint rock with another rock. The flakes that break off have very sharp edges that can be used as knives, arrowheads, spearpoints, etc.

But these folks have been using bronze to make things (like the altar in Exodus 27) for a long time. Why revert to Stone Age technology just for this one thing?

Well, the inside of a rock is sterile (though the Israelites don't know anything about sterility). Thus, these freshly flaked flint knives are less likely to cause infection than regular knives.

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Isn't that interesting? Even the most obdurate skeptic admits that the book of Joshua was written thousands of years before the discovery of microbiology.

Yet here's an instruction that seems ridiculous but makes perfect sense in light of modern science.

*Then the LORD said to Joshua, “This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” Therefore the name of the place is called Gilgal to this day.*

*Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.*

What is *the reproach of Egypt*? And why is the reproach “*rolled away*” instead of simply taken away or removed?

Note when this happened. The LORD says this to Joshua right after the troops are done being circumcised, not on the day they crossed the Jordan. (They needed to be circumcised because while Israel was in the desert, they didn’t circumcise the male babies, who are now the men who crossed the Jordan.) Thus, what rolled away the reproach of Egypt has to involve the circumcision.

Okay, but again, why call it “*the reproach of Egypt*”? And why “*rolled away*”?

The Hebrew word that’s translated as reproach (הַפְּחָד her-pah) means reproach, taunt, scorn. Thus, it’s not a reference to anything Israel did wrong but a reference to how they had been reproached, taunted, or scorned by people. That’s a clear reference to the scorn of slavery in Egypt. That’s *the reproach of Egypt*.

But Israel is God’s chosen people, who are the heirs of a covenantal promise of this land. Still, without the covenant sign of circumcision, they’re just runaway slaves.

Now, with everyone circumcised, their status as God’s covenant people is restored. Their reproach is rolled away. Okay, but why say “rolled away” instead of removed or cleansed?

The Hebrew word translated here as “roll” (גָּלַל, ga-lal) is derived from the verb with just the consonants (גִּלּ gll), which means to be great in rank or dignity. The connection is the root verb for both (גָּלַהּ, glh) which means to uncover or display (a good thing). Circumcision is an uncovering that brings dignity.

Ga-lal (“roll”) is a reference to the restoration of Israel’s dignity as God’s chosen people.

The manna ceasing after they celebrate the Passover is perfect too. For four decades God gave manna to the Israelites—as long as they needed it. Now they don’t.

This seems rather ordinary. It is ordinary. God’s provision of the manna was one of the greatest miracles of all time, yet when it had served its purpose, it simply ceased. No fanfare.

Many of God’s greatest blessings are ordinary. Thus, we don’t think much about them—nor give thanks.

Praise God from whom *all* blessings flow.

3 Joshua 5:13–15

*And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?”*

*So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.”*

*And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?”*

*Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so.*

In this passage, the New King James Bible capitalizes “Man,” “His,” “Him,” and “He” the same way it capitalizes “He” when “He” is God. This is no ordinary man.

And this “Man” has the drop on Joshua, *with His sword drawn in His hand*. Given that “He” just popped up out of nowhere, Joshua must be scared out of his wits.

But somehow Joshua has the courage and presence of mind to stand his ground. He even moves toward the Man and asks Him, point blank, “*Are You for us or for our adversaries?*” The question is rhetorical, since if He was for Joshua’s adversaries, His sword would have already found Joshua.

The Man’s comeback line is one for the ages— “No.”

Joshua’s narrow, self-centered perspective needs adjusting. “Not everything is about you, Joshua.”

The Man goes on to say that He commands *the army of the LORD*. Joshua immediately gets a clue and prostrates himself in worship. Then he asks, “*What does my Lord say to His servant?*” Good save, Josh!

Then He gives another surprise— “*Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.*”

This is humbling beyond being face down in worship. Nothing Joshua is thinking about is even relevant.

This lesson is amazing in light of Joshua 3:7 where the LORD says to Joshua, “*This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.*”

One moment God is elevating Joshua to a role of unquestioned leadership, with a whole nation of people who would follow him off a cliff. The next moment, God is dope-slapping him like a fool.

That’s His pattern. The same thing happens to Peter, Thomas, Paul—virtually all the great saints.

It’s a key part of God’s leadership package. This stands in stark contrast to secular leadership, where the sword of Damocles is the counter-point to the blessings of being at the top.

Crushing humiliation is often how God keeps his leaders on track.

4 Joshua 6:1–7

*Now Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in. And the LORD said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him."*

*Then Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant, and let seven priests bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD." And he said to the people, "Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the LORD."*

The citizens of Jericho have retreated within the city walls and closed its gates. This is normal preparation for war when a city faces a superior army. It's why ancient cities had walls. Jericho is preparing for a siege.

This confirms everything that Rahab said. Their hearts have melted. Joshua can see the obvious implications, and the LORD points this out.

Then the LORD gives Joshua another one of His "unique" military plans—no siege needed. We're going to do it with seven trumpets made of rams' horns (shofars) and the ark. Make just the right noise and the walls come a tumblin' down.

No one does "shock and awe" like the LORD.

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As usual, this sounds crazy. It's a test of faith. Despite the track record, each new "crazy" request is a challenge. Will they follow, or will a secular mindset take over?

This will be the question for the rest of the Old Testament. Sometimes God's people follow and good things happen. Sometimes they don't and bad things happen. We will see both play out here soon.

Both often play out in a single life. Such is the story of David—and Saul, and Samson, and pretty much everyone else except prophets. (Jonah is an exception to the exception.)

Of course, this applies to us too. Our faith varies. Everyone has bad days, even with their faith. God shows Himself faithful, but memories fade. Our sinful nature works against remembering things correctly.

So, we fall. And get up again. And fall again. And ...

Do not be discouraged by this. It even happened to Jonah.

5 Joshua 6:8–16 (ESV)

*And just as Joshua had commanded the people, the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the LORD went forward, blowing the trumpets, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD following them. The armed men were walking before the priests who were blowing the trumpets, and the rear guard was walking after the ark, while the trumpets blew continually. But Joshua commanded the people, "You shall not shout or make your voice heard, neither shall any word go out of your mouth, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout." So he caused the ark of the LORD to circle the city, going about it once. And they came into the camp and spent the night in the camp.*

*Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD walked on, and they blew the trumpets continually. And the armed men were walking before them, and the rear guard was walking after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually. And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.*

*On the seventh day they rose early, at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times. It was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times. And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.*

OK, this is going according to the plan. But what about the Sabbath? Didn't they break for the Sabbath?

Nope. The LORD makes the rules and He can make exceptions. Remind you of anything?

*On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" And Jesus answered them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?" And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." — Luke 6:1–5*

Jesus healing the woman on the Sabbath in Luke 13:10–16 might be an even stronger example. The point in both passages in Luke is that the rules are for us, not the rule-maker.

This is warm-up for some tough verses to come. This passage expands our vision of God. We tend to think of God as creating the physical universe, but He created the moral universe too.

Our concept of right and wrong was given to us by God. If He says marching on the Sabbath is wrong, then it's wrong. If He says it's okay this week, then it's okay this week. That's not too complicated.

But heavier issues of right and wrong are coming.

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We think that a lot of things are right because they feel right. That's not the standard.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Are there any old technology things you prefer to the modern version?
2. What is your greatest ordinary blessing?
3. When has humiliation proved useful?
4. Ever suddenly remembered a faith strengthening event you had forgotten?
5. When have your feelings misled you?

*Items for prayer:*