**Circumcision at Gilgal**

Often we see politicians testifying in court or before Congress on television. It seems to be mostly political theater as the “questioners” are really just making statements. When questions are asked, those who are questioned rarely give straight answers and just try to run out the clock. Asking questions that can only be answered with yes or no is no guarantee of a valid response. During his testimony in the Monica Lewinsky investigation, Bill Clinton famously said that his answer depended on what the definition of “is” is. Skilled salesmen often use the assumptive method of sales where they something like “Do you want to buy the black dress or the red dress?” They are trying to make it a binary choice of which color rather than the choice of buy (yes) or don’t buy (no). In our study or Joshua chapter 5, we see Joshua asking question and not getting an expected response.

At the beginning of the chapter, the news of the miraculous crossing of the Jordan is heard of throughout Canaan and the kings of the land were afraid to fight the Israelites. God told Joshua to circumcise the men. In verse 5, we learn that the reason was that no male born after they left Egypt had been circumcised while they traveled in the desert. Joshua carried out God’s instructions after which God told Joshua that He had rolled away the reproach of Egypt. The statement about Gilgal seems to be related to its meaning which is wheel or circle which may refer to the 12 stones that were rolled from the Jordan River to their camp. The reproach of Egypt probably refers to how the Israelites had participated in idol worship while they were in Egypt. The circumcision represented a renewal of the covenant that God had first made with Abraham. Note that God waited until they had crossed the Jordan before ordering the circumcision. The operation would leave the army vulnerable to attack since the men would be incapacitated for several days (see Num. 34:24-25). While they had defeated Moabite kings east of the Jordan, those on the western side remained a threat but Joshua followed God’s instruction without question (see Ex. 4:4). God built a hedge of protection around them with His act of parting the Jordan River which terrified the Canaanites

God’s will was demonstrated in the timing of their arrival in Canaan. In chapter 4 we read that they camped at Gilgal on the 10th day of the first month. In Exodus chapter 12, God established the first month of the Hebrew year as the month they were to observe Passover. This apparently was not observed properly as they wandered in the desert, an omission immediately corrected as they celebrated the Passover on the 14th day. The following day they ate from the fruit of the land after which manna was no longer provided by God.

The last 3 verses of the chapter record a curious meeting. Joshua was probably scouting out the defenses of Jericho when he encountered a man holding a sword in his hand. Joshua asked what seems to be a reasonable question, “Are you for us or for our enemies?”. The response was not what he expected. The man replied ”Neither but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come” (in the KJV he says “Nay”). Joshua realized that this person was Jesus Himself (in a preincarnate appearance) and he fell prostrate before Him and asked what message did He bring. Jesus told him to remove his sandals since he was only holy ground in the presence of God just as God told Moses the same at the burning bush.

I like the KJV version of the answer to Joshua’s question “Are you for us or for our enemies?” the answer was “Nay” or “No” which is not an answer to the question. Jesus would often not respond directly to a question or answer a question with a question. Here Joshua saw only a binary choice, this person is either for us or our enemies. Joshua was probably planning the attack in his mind as the commander of the Israelite army. As the leader he wanted to know if this man would follow him, would he be on his side. Jesus response that He was the commander meant that He was on the side of God and it was up to Joshua to follow Him (don’t think of God as your co-pilot). The message for Joshua mentioned in verse 14 was probably the instructions for the siege of Jericho which we will see in the next chapter was an unconventional maneuver that Joshua could never have planned himself.