

OpenTheo

June 7th: Joshua 5 & Luke 20:27–21:4

June 6, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Passover in the land. Jesus versus the Sadducees on the resurrection.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Joshua 5. As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted, and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel. At that time the Lord said to Joshua, Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time. So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath Haaralath.

And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them. All the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised.

For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord. The Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised, for they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.

When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. And the Lord said to Joshua, Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.

While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land.

And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year. When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked. And behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand.

And Joshua went to him and said to him, Are you for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, No, but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshipped, and said to him, What does my Lord say to his servant? And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.

And Joshua did so. Joshua chapter 5 begins with the response of the rulers of the land to the crossing over of Israel into the Promised Land. The crossing was an event proving the Lord's power, his presence with Israel and his intent to act on their behalf against the Canaanites.

The miracle was a statement, not just a way to overcome the tricky logistical problem of getting the people across the river Jordan. We should note the parallels with the statement of Rahab a few chapters earlier. In chapter 2 verses 8 to 11.

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you.

For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. We will see several more such responses as we go through the book. Just as Israel being brought out of Egypt was a demonstration of the Lord's power against the gods of Egypt and in the presence of the nations, so the entrance into the land serves a similar purpose.

The reaction of the people here reflects upon the great miracle that the Lord has accomplished at the Jordan, but it also looks forward to what he's going to do as he enters into the land with the people. At this point the Lord instructs Joshua to make flint knives and to circumcise the people a second time. As the Israelite males who had been born in the wilderness had not been circumcised.

Israel's entry into the land has a pronounced liturgical character. This is something that will be seen in the following chapter. Much as the departure out of Egypt was a sort of liturgical event, so is the entry into the promised land.

The liturgical form of the exodus and the entry into the land underline the fact that the Lord is orchestrating everything. He's going before his people. The liturgical form situates these events within frameworks of meaning, connecting them with other realities.

It highlights great symmetries and it also serves the purpose of memorialisation. David Howard makes the observation that if we carefully follow the chronology of the book, the crossing of the Jordan occurred on the seventh day of a seven-day period. The Lord brings his people into the rest of the land on the seventh day.

He is the one that sets the timing. A similar seven-day pattern can be observed in the defeat of Jericho in the chapter that follows. Being circumcised at this point made clear that they must enter into the land on the Lord's terms.

Moses' son had to be circumcised in an emergency circumcision in Exodus chapter 4, not having been circumcised earlier. Israel had to be circumcised before the Passover. It's possible that they had not celebrated the Passover for a few decades, since after they failed to enter into the land.

A number of the great circumcision events occur just as the Lord is about to bring a great judgement upon a place. Abraham and his household are circumcised just before the Lord comes to defeat the cities of the plain. Israel is circumcised just before the Lord brings judgement upon Egypt at the Passover time.

And then Israel is circumcised here just before Jericho is about to be judged. God is coming near to his people. He's coming near in judgement.

He's going to destroy his enemies, the wicked. And so the people have to be prepared. They have to cut off the flesh at this point.

Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant given in Genesis chapter 17. It was a pruning of the flesh of the male sexual organ, setting the people apart for bearing good fruit. It was also, in the more immediate context, the necessary preparation for the celebration of the Passover.

The removal of the foreskin at this point is seen as a sort of cutting off of the principle of Egypt. Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you, who think that the Egyptians would have claimed that the Lord had brought Israel into the wilderness to perish. But now they have entered into the land, and the Egyptians' mockery must cease.

We might also see this as akin to the cutting off of the leaven when they left Egypt. As the wild vines of the land are cut off, Israel is being placed within the land as a pruned and tamed vine, a planting of the Lord. Israel crossed over the Jordan on the day when the Passover lamb would typically be chosen, and they celebrated the Passover on the 14th day.

We should again note the symmetry. They leave with the Passover, and they arrive with the Passover. When they would celebrate the Passover in the future, they could recall both aspects of these events.

We see a similar thing in Christ's celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper looks back to the evening of the Last Supper, as Jesus is preparing for his death, and it connects with the theme of his death. But it also looks back to the event of the Resurrection, as Jesus broke bread and revealed himself in the breaking of bread to his disciples.

Likewise then, the Passover looks back to the deliverance from Egypt, and to the entrance into the land. They first eat the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, and the manna ceases that very day. This recalls Leviticus 23, verses 9-14.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath, the priest shall wave it, and on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord, and the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephor of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the Lord with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hymn, and you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God. It is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

They are fulfilling this as well. This celebration of firstfruits is associated with the Feast of

Unleavened Bread. The cutting off of the manna and the first eating of the fruit of the land is important.

The manna gathered each day was an omer, and the firstfruit offering was also an omer, translated here as sheaf. They are starting a new diet. They are no longer being fed directly and immediately from the Lord.

Rather, the Lord is providing them with rain, with the fertility of the ground and other things so that they can act as agriculturalists. This comes with new temptations. They can forget that all their food comes from the Lord.

They can think that they are the ones that are providing their food, and the Lord isn't really active. But yet, the Feast of Firstfruits is one of the ways to underline the fact that God is still providing for them. And the offering of an omer connects the fact that the fruit of the land is following the same fundamental principle as the omer that they received each day, the daily bread, of the manna.

This shifting to a new diet is also a sign of a raising in maturity. As they now have a much greater role in producing and preparing their food, they have risen to a new level of agency. But as the Book of Deuteronomy so often emphasises, as they enter into this new stage of life as a nation, they should not forget the lessons that came before.

The chapter ends as Joshua encounters the commander of the army of the Lord, presumably the angel of the Lord. This is reminiscent of Moses' account with the Lord at the burning bush in Exodus 3, verses 2-8. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.

He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, I will turn aside to see this great sight. Why the bush is not burnt? When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses! And he said, Here I am.

Then he said, Do not come near, take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. And he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The angel of the Lord came to lead them out of the land of Egypt, and we see his action in a number of points.

He presumably is the one described as the destroyer, who destroys the firstborn of the Egyptians. He is also present at the crossing of the Red Sea. Exodus chapter 23, verses 20 to 24 speaks of the mission of the angel.

and an adversary to your adversaries. When my angel goes before you, and brings you to the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow to their gods, nor serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them, and break their pillars in pieces. The description of the commander of the army of the Lord is similar to that of the angel of the Lord in the story of Balaam and his ass, or the story of David's sin in calling the census in 1st Chronicles chapter 21.

Joshua asks whose side the angel is on. The angel fights the Lord's battles, but he isn't straightforwardly on any human side, even though he will clearly support Israel. I think this looks back to the statement of the Lord concerning the angel, that if Israel carefully obeys his voice and does what he says, then he will be an enemy to their enemies, an adversary to their adversaries.

The Lord comes in judgment, not as a servant to Israel, not as one who is committed to their side as such. Rather, Israel must be loyal to the Lord, and as they are loyal to him, he will give them victory over their adversaries. Joshua recognises the authority of the angelic figure, and bows down to him.

This may be worship of God, or submission to a higher being who represents God. However, I think it is the former. As in the story of Moses and the burning bush, or the visitation of the angels to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre, this is a theophanic appearance of the Lord.

A question to consider, why do you think that the commander of the army of the Lord appears at this specific juncture, just after the Passover? Luke 20, verse 27, to chapter 21, verse 4. They came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, and they asked him a question, saying, Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers, the first took a wife and died without children, and the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died.

In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife. And Jesus said to them, The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age, and to the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die any more, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him. Then some of the scribes answered, Teacher, you have spoken well, for they no longer dared to ask him any questions. But he said to them, How can they say that the Christ is David's son? For David himself says in the book of Psalms, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son? And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, Beware of the scribes who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues, and the places of honour at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation. Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins.

And he said, Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them, for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on. Moving into the second half of Luke chapter 20, Jesus continues his challenge with the leaders of the people. Now he's challenged with the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection.

They give the example of a man who dies, and then his wife marries his brother, and then he dies, and then his brother, and then he dies, and so on with a number of brothers. The question being, whose wife is she in the resurrection? This depends, of course, upon the Levirate Law in Deuteronomy chapter 25 verses 5-6. The purpose of this commandment is in large measure to deal with the threat of death.

Death can condemn people to futility. It can mean that someone's name is lost and cut off. And so the brother is there to come in and to raise up seed for his brother who has died.

Acting on his brother's behalf, he ensures that his brother's name is not blotted out. There are two forms of death here. There's the physical death, and then there's also the death of one's legacy.

And the brother steps in to ensure that that second form of death does not befall his brother. Jesus answers the Sadducees by drawing a contrast between the sons of this age and the sons of the resurrection. Jesus' argument operates on the basis of the belief that marriage exists in this age to fill and replenish the earth, to fulfil humanity's calling and blessing to be fruitful and multiply, and also to deal with the threat of death which would cut off humanity.

The practice of Levirate marriage is a very pronounced way of dealing with that second issue, marriage in the face of death, so that life is continued. However, in the resurrection, there is a new principle of generation. Humanity is no longer founded in the event of birth, as the human race descends one generation from another, being born and

dying in the context of marriage.

No. The new principle is that of resurrection, regeneration. Humanity in this situation would be like the angels.

The angels don't marry, they are a numb procreating living host. The resurrection isn't just revivification and return to our existing form of life. It's the start of something new.

And it also has an eschatological character. I believe that this might be partly in view when he talks about the angels. The angels are a complete host.

They do not bear offspring. However, the full complement of humanity has yet to be born. Humanity, unlike the angels, is a growing number.

However, in the new heavens and the new earth, humanity will be a fixed number of persons, having reached their final state. And just as the angels are stewards of the heavenly temple, rulers under God and messengers under him, so humanity will achieve its full maturity. We will no longer be under the rule and the guidance of the angels, but will have risen into the full maturity of sons.

We will be sons of God, because we are sons of the resurrection. The language of sons of God is used of the angels in a number of parts of scripture, in Job chapter 1, in Genesis chapter 6, and in some of the Psalms. It presents the angels as representatives of God, as those who reflect God's character and act in his name.

And humanity will rise to that stage. We might also add on the side here that humanity will be the bride of Christ. The angels are always spoken of as males.

Zachariah 5 is not an exception. The angels are a band of brothers, but humanity differs from the angels in having women. Women are the glory of the human race, as Paul can talk about in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

And just as the king in taking a bride will raise her up over all the noblemen, so humanity will be raised up over all of the angels as the bride of Christ. Because we don't die anymore after the resurrection, and because the chief purpose of marriage has been achieved, now that there is no longer any need for birth, there is no longer marriage or giving in marriage in the resurrection. I certainly do not believe that this means that we cease to be male and female in the resurrection.

Nor do I believe that this means that the goods of marriage, associated with companionship and things like that, simply cease. Rather, the point is that an institution that existed for the purpose primarily of procreation is no longer needed, because resurrection has taken its place. To prove the resurrection, Jesus refers to the story of the Exodus.

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel is being raised up from slavery, and this is a raising up of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The action of the Exodus is being done in large measure on their behalf.

This implies future resurrection of them, that their part in history has not ceased. Why would it speak of God being their God? God is not the God of the dead. God is not the God of those who are in the past.

God is the living God. And so for God to be defined by those who are dead and never going to come back again, does not make sense. Rather, if the living God refers to himself in terms of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then they are not ultimately dead.

Having answered the question of the Sadducees so effectively, Jesus is congratulated by some of the scribes, and then he poses them a question. The question that he poses them concerns Psalm 110. It is a Davidic Psalm in which David refers to the Christ, the Messiah, as his Lord.

And this makes no sense if the Christ is merely his son. The Christ seems to be more than merely the son of David according to the flesh. How can we make sense of this? It is difficult to provide an answer without an understanding of the divinity of Christ.

Jesus addresses his disciples and warns them concerning the scribes, but ensuring that the rest of the crowds can overhear. He warns them of their love of the praise of men. He warns them of their spiritually abusive character, and the way in which they do not truly seek the face of God.

They merely make long prayers as a pretense. It is precisely such teachers upon which the greatest condemnation will fall. Jesus speaks to the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, showing great compassion and care.

But he reserves some of his strongest and harshest language for the leaders of the people, who take advantage of them and mistreat them. The scribes are predatory leaders. They consume the sheep, especially the most vulnerable.

They are also hypocrites. They are fixated on getting honour from men. And the story of the widow's two small coins needs to be read alongside this material.

People so often abstract material like this from its context, and read it just as a nice story about how we should be engaged in sacrificial giving. But that is to miss the tragedy of what's taking place here. We've just been told that the scribes devour widows' houses.

And then we're told that this widow is investing all of her livelihood in the temple. A temple that is about to be destroyed on account of the sin of the people and their rulers. This is not a story about healthy sacrificial giving.

It's about the way that corrupt religious leaders prey upon the weakest of all, and heap up judgement for themselves. The prophecy of the destruction of the temple that follows should be directly related to the oppression of such persons as the widow. The leaders of the people devour the houses of widows, so their great house will be devoured also.

A question to consider. What are some of the principles of Jesus' account of marriage that emerge from attention to his arguments with the Sadducees? What implications do these aspects of Jesus' account of marriage have for our broader understanding of marriage as Christians?