

Hope After Broken Promises

Joshua 5

Introduction: Trust is something hard to gain and easy to lose. Being trusted is something we all hope people would do to us, though all of us have a hard time giving it to others. Trust gives us confidence, comfort, and frees us from constant cynicism. If we are honest, we each have been on the receiving and giving end of breaking trust, which has devastating consequences.

What happens when trust is broken?

When trust is broken, confidence leaves, fear is magnified, joy is diminished, peace leaves, rest is gone, shame is heightened, and anxiety is multiplied. Broken trust leaves us **uncertain and tentative**. Though there is always forgiveness for sin in Jesus, trust is something that does not come back immediately but has to be given and gained. Breaking of trust is devastating in any relationship.

This is where a generation found itself heading into the Promised Land. Their parents generation had broken trust with the Lord, and the consequences they felt and faced were devastating, including the loss of life in the wilderness. There were questions that came to mind, as to God's keeping of His promises:

Would God keep His end of the covenant? Would God go back on what He promised? Did the people out-sin His ability or willingness to come through?

This is why, before entering into their battles and taking of the land, God had to reintroduce or reinstate a sign and a sacrament, two symbols of remembrance that would proclaim to the people that **God keeps His promises, even when His people do not**. This section of the narrative sees God bring back the sign of **circumcision**, have the people celebrate **Passover**, and stopped raining **manna from heaven**, so that this generation would know that God was with them and would provide for them. This generation needed to know that God **can be trusted with everything, that He will always do what He says, and He will never fail**.

What is our hope in the midst of broken promises? What is your hope in the midst of suffering, trial, and harsh treatment? *That God is in charge, that He never wastes anything, that when He does anything it has meaning, and He works all things out for His glory and our ultimate good.*

Before we walk through this text, we have to understand the background of why circumcision was so important to this generation of Israelites.

What was circumcision, and what role did it play between God and His people?

Circumcision was a **sign of a covenant between God and Abraham**. It was an **external reminder** of Abraham's faith in God (Gen. 15:6), it was a mark of a covenant that was **everlasting** (Gen. 17:7, 8, 19), and it was to be **perpetuating** for every male child when he was 8 days old. This is summed up in this address from God to Abraham in Genesis 17:

Genesis 17:9-14 - And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. 10 This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: **Every male among you shall be circumcised**. 11 You shall be **circumcised** in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. 12 He who is eight days old among you shall be **circumcised**. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, 13 both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be **circumcised**. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an **everlasting covenant**. 14 Any uncircumcised male who is not **circumcised** in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

This sign was necessary for the people to participate in the Passover celebration (Exodus 12:48-49). However, when the people of Israel sinned and were cut off from entering the Promised Land, they also stopped circumcising their children (Numbers 14). Why they did this is not explicitly stated in the text, but it is clear that those who were 40 and under had not received the sign of this most important covenant. Now God was going to show His grace and the fact that He was a promise keeper and reinstated this symbol.

The question we ask heading into the text: Can we trust God when things don't make sense, when things are broken around us (even when we broke them) , and when we have suffered?

I. **We can have certainty that God keeps His promises (1-9)**

A. God Keeps His Promises even when His ways seem strange to us

- **The command to circumcise went against all conventional wisdom**

The fact that God would have Joshua circumcise the men of Israel was gracious, but the **way** He did it was strange. The people were gathered a little over a mile from Jericho (who had an army), the Jordan River was flooded again behind them, and now God called for the fighting men to be incapacitated. If you remember **Genesis 34**, Simeon and Levi avenged the rape of their sister Dinah by having Shechem and the Hivites circumcise themselves, and they came in and killed all the men while they were healing. If you are an Israelite, you know this story, and wonder if history will be repeated on the banks of the Jordan.

- **When God did one thing, He was doing many other things**

God is not bound to our thoughts, ways, and economy. Notice that as God was gathering the people on the other side of the Jordan, the hearts of the Canaanites were melting and their spirit was drying up within them (5:1). In other words, as the people were in pain, wondering what God was doing, God was actively going before them, preparing the way. He was clearing their path and making sure that their victory would be secure, and the people of Israel simply had to trust, wait, and obey. You see, when God does one thing, He's really doing a million things. As you are in a position of waiting, wondering why you lost your job, why you are still single, why you can't move out of wherever you are living, why you are dealing with constant pain, and why it seems like no one in your life is changing, God is at work preparing, actively working all things out in a cosmic harmony that culminates in His receiving glory! His way of working is gloriously strange, because in all of our creativity and imagination, we could never weave together all the things God does, and we would be left wanting. God's way of working leaves us **dependant on Him, trusting Him even when we cannot see nor perceive what good outcome could ever come from our pain**. Yet God is producing in us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison, even though now we deal with momentary affliction (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

B. God Keeps His Promises even when we don't keep our end of the bargain

- **When God promises that are everlasting, He means it**

Why did God choose Israel to be His people? Because He wanted to (Deut 7:6-11; Ezekiel 16). Why does He choose to save anyone? Because He loves (Eph. 1:2-4). Why did He continue to endure with Israel, why did He bring them into a land He promised even though they complained, grumbled, and refused to trust Him? Because He made a covenant with Abraham that was ratified with Himself that He does not break. In other words, God cannot go back on His word. When He declares something,

anything, He does not change and will fulfill it. This is why we can be sure that He who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it (Phil. 1:6). His keeping of His promise IS NOT DEPENDANT on us keeping our end.

- **We sacrifice benefits and experience consequences in unbelief, but do not nullify the promise**

However, this does not mean that we can sin without consequence. Israel felt the pain of disobedience, and that came in the form of judgment, punishment, and loss of blessing.

What does this look like for us? The call to those who follow Christ is to obey His commands (1 John 2:3), walk like Christ walked (1 John 2:6), we love our brother (1 John 2:10), we practice righteousness (1 John 3:10), we have the Spirit (1 John 3:24), and we love God and keep His commands (1 John 5:3). This means that we are called to respond to the salvation that only God can bring, and yet, we know we will do it imperfectly. There will be times that we fall short, we will sin, and in sinning, we will face consequences and loss of fellowship. Yet, those who are truly believers will not be cast out, but we know we have a Savior who is an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is our propitiation, taking our place and our sin on Himself (1 John 2:1-2).

C. God Keeps His Promises, but that does not absolve us from responding in faith

- **The lesson from the past generation: a sign is only as good as what it signified**

Here is the irony of this entire situation: the generation who received God's mark, God's sign of the covenant failed to live up to the covenant. They had every opportunity and advantage, and yet they failed. This illustrates a hugely important understanding of this sign: it was only as good as what it represented. Here is what Paul says about circumcision in Romans:

Romans 2:28-29 - For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Romans 4:11-12 - He received the **sign of circumcision** as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, 12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Circumcision did not save and did not guarantee obedience to the covenant. It was a seal for Abraham to remember and for subsequent generations to do as well. The seal we have today is the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer as a seal, a sign, a guarantee that God keeps His promise.

Ephesians 1:13-14 - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with **the promised Holy Spirit**, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

- **The lesson from the present generation: a sign is good/helpful when it confirms what is true**

Circumcision was never supposed to be the point, but pointed to the point. When God had this generation circumcised, it was a sign that God had **rolled away the reproach of the people from Egypt**. In other words, the outward sign showed what God did in the people, and their response of faith. Circumcision is an outward sign that shows a heart that has been transformed by God.

Deut. 10:16 - Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

Deut. 30:6 - And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Jeremiah 4:4 - *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord; remove the foreskin of your hearts*, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

Colossians 2:11-14 - In him also you were circumcised with a **circumcision made without hands**, by putting off the body of the flesh, **by the circumcision of Christ**, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.**

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

True circumcision is something that happens to our heart by Christ. This is how God keeps His promise to us in Christ. It is not the power of external signs but the power of Christ to take a heart of stone and turn it into flesh.

This is exactly why we do not trust in externals for salvation or our standing with God. It was the generation that was without a sign that was faithful. Far too often I hear that someone believes they are a follower of Christ because of something **external**: I went to church, raised in a Christian home, was baptized, prayed a prayer in Sunday School, raised my hand at camp, went to a Christian school, etc. None of these is wrong or bad, but **NONE OF THESE SAVES**. These are external things that can come about AFTER salvation, but have no bearing on our being made righteous with God. Only Christ can make us alive, and only faith in Christ brings salvation. Baptism, membership, service, obedience, and the rest come as a result of salvation brought by God in Christ.

II. **We can have certainty that God keeps providing (10-12)**

Not only does God faithfully keep His promises, He is the ultimate provider. We can trust Him because He is the One who sustains. For Israel entering the Promised Land, they needed to remember that the same God who provided during their wandering was the same God who would continue to provide for them in the fulfillment of the promise.

A. **God's provision of physical sustenance shows His grace (12)**

- **He provided in miraculous ways**

When Israel left Egypt, they were an immense group and travelling band who had provisions for a time, but were launched into a desert to journey toward a place they had never seen. It did not take long for the people to complain about the accommodations, grumbling that somehow dying in Egypt would have been better than this! God faithfully provided bread from heaven called manna (see Exodus 16), meat from birds, and water from rocks (Exodus 17) as the people wandered. Even after the generation was cut off from the Promised Land (Numbers 14), God faithfully provided manna everyday for 40 years, so that His people never died of hunger. As the people stepped foot in the land, the manna stopped. God was no longer going to provide in supernatural ways, but He was going to provide from the produce of the land. This was not only a fulfillment of a promise, but presented a new challenge: **was it easier to trust God to provide in miraculous ways or regular, run of the mill, normal ways?** The answer is that each provide unique challenges.

- **He provides in "natural" ways -**

What God did for them in the land is what He does for us today: provides daily for our needs. He does this for several reasons:

With Common Grace, which displays His nature to the world - Matthew 5:45 - *For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust*

With full sufficiency, so that we do not have to worry - Matthew 6:30-33 - But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

As a means of contentedness, meaning we do not need anything else to truly be content in this world - 1 Tim. 6:8 - *But if we have **food and clothing**, with these we will be content*

God is the ultimate provider, sustainer, and giver of every good gift. He gives grace to believer and unbeliever alike. He provides sunshine, rain, soil, growth, harvest, food, and water to all people, everyday, for billions around the world. We love to give God acclaim when He provides in huge, unexpected ways (a NEW JOB, the house closed escrow, she said YES) and we should, but it is often a bigger challenge for us to see God as THE provider in the everyday, mundane, normal provision. This is why we form a habit of praying before meals: not to bless the food to our bodies, like prayer ups the nutritional value of my Hot Pocket (because apparently no amount of prayer can do that), but because we want to be purposeful to remember God's gracious hand in every part of life. God was cutting off the manna, but now the challenge to rejoice and give thanks changed, but the goal was the same: **trust and give thanks to God for being the ultimate provider for mankind.**

B. God's provision of spiritual sustenance shows His greatness (10-11)

- **Passover was a sign of remembrance** - looking back to look forward

Finally, they were going to celebrate the Feast of Passover, not only because they would have the means of sacrifice, but this would help the people remember that God miraculously brought the people out of Egypt (Exodus 12), when Israel sacrificed a lamb and put the blood on the doorpost. The cost of not doing this would be the firstborn son. Israel was to remember what God did in the past and look forward to what God would continue to do for them as they entered the land.

- **Passover was a sign of remembrance** - the acknowledgement of our need for redemption

Passover also reminds us of this: we need something outside of us for redemption. Just as an unblemished lamb needed to take the place of the oldest son in the household. so Passover was the time Jesus showed Himself to be the New Covenant, the Passover Lamb that would take away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). When we celebrate communion, we remember that it was Jesus' death and blood shed on the cross that was poured out, signifying a New Covenant, one that we remember and proclaim until He comes again (Matt. 26:26-29)

Points of Commitment:

- How does the fact that God always keeps His promises, even though His ways may seem strange, help us in our day to day pursuit of Him? How does this affect our anxiety, confidence, and contentment?

- What are subtle (or not so subtle ways) that we trust the externals around us for our standing with God? What does it look like to circumcise our heart?
- What would be different in our life if we saw God as the ultimate provider of all things? What would that do to our view of the things we had and the things we desired?

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 - F. **God Keeps His Promises, but that does not absolve us from responding in faith**
- IV. **We can have certainty that God keeps providing (10-12)**
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