

Joshua 5:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way.

Analysis

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This verse identifies the generation that received circumcision at Gilgal: "their children, whom he raised up in their stead" (beneihem heqim tachtam, בְּנֵיהֶם הֶקִים תַּחְתָּם). The verb heqim (הֶקִים, "raised up") indicates divine action—God Himself raised this generation to replace their fathers. This was not natural succession but providential preparation of a new generation for covenant faithfulness and conquest.

The phrase "in their stead" emphasizes substitution. The children inherit what parents forfeited—not through merit but through divine grace that transcends generational failure. This demonstrates both the tragedy of unbelief (parents forfeited blessing) and the hope of grace (children receive what parents lost). God's purposes continue despite human failure.

The repetition "they had not circumcised them by the way" underscores the neglect during wilderness wandering. Yet this neglect didn't nullify God's covenant. Upon entering Canaan, He commanded renewal of the covenant sign, incorporating the new generation into covenant relationship. Theologically, this illustrates that God's covenant is both continuous (same promises to successive

generations) and requires personal appropriation (each generation must receive the covenant sign and embrace covenant faith). From a Reformed perspective, this supports covenant theology's emphasis on both covenant continuity across generations and the necessity of personal faith for salvation.

Historical Context

The phrase "whom he raised up" emphasizes divine sovereignty in preparing successive generations. While the condemned generation died, God preserved and prepared their children. This required miraculous provision—forty years of manna, water from rock, preserved clothing and shoes (Deuteronomy 29:5-6). God's judgment on parents didn't extend to destroying children, but rather preparing them for obedience their parents refused.

The new generation had advantages their parents lacked. They witnessed the consequences of unbelief (their parents' deaths), learned from failure, and were shaped by hardship. Psalm 78 recounts how God commanded that fathers teach their children, so succeeding generations would "set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:7). The wilderness pedagogy prepared this generation for faithful obedience.

Ancient Near Eastern societies transmitted property and status through family lines. Israel's covenant operated similarly—children inherited covenant promises and responsibilities. However, unlike pagan religion which viewed divine-human relationships as automatic ethnic continuity, Israel's covenant required both divine faithfulness (preserving the covenant people) and human response (faith and obedience). The circumcision at Gilgal marked this generation's incorporation into covenant privilege and responsibility.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does God's raising up a new generation after the previous one's failure encourage hope when spiritual leadership or previous generations have failed?
2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between inherited covenant promises and personal covenant responsibility?
3. How can we ensure that the next generation learns from our failures and embraces faith rather than repeating our unbelief?
4. In what ways does the pattern of children inheriting what parents forfeited illustrate both the tragedy of squandered opportunities and the hope of divine grace?
5. How does covenant theology's emphasis on raising children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' (Ephesians 6:4) connect to this passage's themes?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת בְּנֵיהֶם הֵקֵם יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֲתָם
H853 And their children H1121 whom he raised up H6965 H8478 H853
כִּי לֹא הָיוּ מְעֻלְּמִים בְּיָמָיו יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
H4135 because they had not circumcised H1961 H3588 H3808 in their stead them Joshua H3588
כִּי לֹא הָיוּ מְעֻלְּמִים בְּיָמָיו יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
H6189 for they were uncircumcised H1961 H3588 H3808 because they had not circumcised H4135
אֲתָם בְּדֶרֶךְ:
H853 them by the way H1870

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 1:39 (Parallel theme): Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

Numbers 14:31 (Parallel theme): But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

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