

Happy Monday Morning to all my friends and family on this amazing technological instrument we call "facebook." God bless all of you, wherever you are in the world, as you read, pray, meditate, live, and allow your "Gilgal" to be a great opportunity in your life.

YOUR GILGAL – A FANTASTIC PLACE IN YOUR LIFE!

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“Then the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.’ Therefore, the name of this place is called Gilgal to this day.” (Joshua 5:9; NKJV)

Gilgal! A place? A town? A region? Or something else? Perhaps you want to do what I do, and that is to look at the “maps” in the back of your Bible! That may ... or may not ... help. It is a penchant of mine to gain as much as I can relating to the meaning of names and words, the geographical references in Scripture, the many events in Scripture in their context and time frame, and to try to trace the footsteps of Bible people as they traveled from place to place.

So, in reading through the Old Testament many times, and particularly in the Books of Joshua and 1 Samuel, I kept running into the name “Gilgal.” I wanted to know more about this term that seemed to me, at least at the time of my reading, to be a “place.” So, “I hit the books again and again.” It is from my praying, reading and research, that this Devotional has been developed. A part of the reason for this is that I believe God meant more by what He included in His message to us ... the Holy Scriptures ... than just using words to fill pages. And so, the prayer, “Lord, help me find the meaning, the truth, the lessons about Gilgal.”

The name “Gilgal” is found 40 times in the Old Testament, but not once in the New Testament. Of those 40 times, the word or name “Gilgal” is found in the Book of Joshua 12 times and in the Book of 1 Samuel 13 times. In these two Books it is obviously closely associated with Israel during the time they were becoming established in the land of Promise following their Exodus out of Egypt.

There are a couple of “red flags,” among others, that I keep flying in my mind when I study the Scriptures. One has to do with the necessity to always consider the context in which a word, a term, a name, a thought, a teaching, a parable, and any other Biblical focus points may be found. The second is the absolute necessity to be careful not to “spiritualize” any of these focus points just to “try to prove a point.” One of the Professors in my doctoral program said on more than one occasion, “He who spiritualizes tells spiritual lies.” At the same time, I recognize that particularly in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, names of people and places have meanings that become very applicational, for the Hebrew language is a “picture” language. Therefore, I want to observe these “red flags” as we deal with the term, word, or name “Gilgal.” In other words, I need to ask: “Where, when, why, and to whom or from whom is this related, or to what thought, word, name, action? In that context, what meaning(s) and applications can we derive from its use in a particular passage or passages of Scripture?” Within those guidelines, let’s try to discover what truths, meanings, and applications we can from the use of “Gilgal” in the Word of God.

Let’s begin by looking at the basic word “Gilgal” and its compound formations. The Hebrew form of the word “Gilgal” is גִּלְגָּל. This Hebrew noun comes from the verb גָּלַל – gālāl, which means “to roll.” With one exception, the noun is joined with such adverbial concepts as “away,” “along,” “down,” “about,” “together,” or “upon.” It is usually prefixed with the prepositions בְּ, a preposition of place, translated by such English words as “in,” “within,” “among,” “at,” “by,” “on,” “before.” It indicates nearness. The basic word גִּלְגָּל – “Gilgal,” is almost always prefixed with the Hebrew definite article הַ – “the,” giving specificity to the noun and together with the preposition of motion, לְ – “to” “toward,” or “unto,” that gives rise to the suggestion that Gilgal was (and is) a place.

The word “Gilgal,” found in Joshua 5:9, the text for this Devotional, is the only occurrence of the word without a prefixed definite article הַ – “the,” or a prefixed preposition. However, we can discover the basic meaning of the word “Gilgal” from this form found in Joshua 5:9. This word with one of the prefixed terms is found in various places. Viewed in its different contexts the meaning and use of the word unfolds before us.

Now, we need to look at the meaning of the word גִּלְגָּל – “Gilgal.” Lexicologists suggest that the word means “a wheel,” “a circle,” or “something that rolls” or “rolls away.” This is why Joshua 5:9 is translated in the New King James Version as “rolled away,” as noted at the beginning of this Devotional. In this verse we note that God has stated clearly to the Israelites that He “rolled away the reproach of Egypt” from them. They were now free from that stigma.

In addition to its basic form in Joshua 5:9, the word גִּלְגָּל – “Gilgal,” with its various prefixes, as we have learned earlier, is used 39 times and translated within the parameters of the contexts. It is from these historical contextual uses that we can learn some very valuable lessons for our lives in the present ... at least the following seven. When we use of the word “Gilgal” its focus is on the following:

1. Commencement. Gilgal became a place of commencement. Can one even imagine the thrill experienced by the Israelites when they knew they were in the land God promised to them? In our life experiences, we notice that in the family of God there is great joy when someone repents of his or her sins, and places their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. That person is what the Scriptures declare, born again. He or she is a new creation in Jesus. That person is a child of God. That person is a part of the Bride of Christ. That person’s name is inscribed in the Lamb’s Book of Life. We know that is why Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected the first day of the week. But do we stop there? Absolutely not! It becomes a commencement for our lives.

Consider the following:

Perhaps an analogy will help. We all love cute, beautiful, adorable, sweet little babies. They grab our hearts. But they grow! They begin to recognize us and smile at us. They roll over, and begin to crawl. Soon they can sit alone. Though sometimes painfully, they have their first tooth. Then that miraculous day comes when they take their first steps alone. Then Kindergarten and the first grade ... and it seems like just a day or two later that they graduate from high school. All too soon the years pass by. Adulthood takes over. You know the rest of the story. But isn’t that what we anticipate? So it should be with a “new born” follower of Jesus. They begin to move forward from the moment of believing. They grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They begin to mature in faith. They respond positively to Biblical instruction received through the Sunday School classes, the sermons preached by the pastor or an evangelist, or from personal study in the Scriptures. They learn to pray as taught in the Word of God. They search the Scriptures, pray earnestly, and in time begin to know the direction God has for them in life. They can also learn from a person who knew all too well what it means to mature in the faith – the Apostle Peter. They read from Peter’s second letter: “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18; NKJV) How shall we relate this to “Gilgal?” From the many Scriptural possibilities, I want to use the following to demonstrate this truth.

2. Consecration. Gilgal became a place of consecration. The first time the sacred Passover was celebrated in the Holy Land was at Gilgal. “On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.” (Joshua 5:10; TNIV) Passover ... it was the fulfillment of God’s instruction through Moses: “So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.” (Exodus 12:14; NKJV)

3. Conversion. Gilgal became a place of conversion. This was not in an “evangelical” sense, but in the sense of a “change” in a life-practice, for their diet converted from one thing to another. The day after the Passover, the Israelites no longer ate manna, their former staple food, but began to eat the produce of the land. “... on the day after the Passover, ...the manna ceased ... and the children of Israel no longer had manna but they ate the food of the land of Canaan.” (From Joshua 5:11, 12; NKJV)

4. Conquest. Gilgal became a place of conquest. Gilgal was the base of operations for Joshua as the Israelites began their conquest of the Promised Land. "Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. The LORD said to Joshua, 'Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.' ... After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. ... Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal." (From Joshua 10k:7 – 10a; 15; See also the entire text of Joshua 10, especially verse 43. TNIV)

5. Commemoration. Gilgal became a place of commemoration. When the children of Israel were ready to enter the Land of Promise, the flood-swollen Jordan River lay before them. God spoke to Joshua: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them – the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your feet will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. ... No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ... you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them, ... do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go." (Joshua 1:2-3; 5a; 6b; 7b; NKJV)

The Lord then provided Joshua the credentials he needed to complete his responsibilities. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8; NKJV) God continued His instructions to Joshua by powerful words of encouragement, repeating His initial statement: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." (Joshua 1:5b; NKJV) This was followed by the Lord's promise to Joshua: "The LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (v 9b) When the Israelites followed the priests over on the dry bottom of the Jordan River, Joshua commanded the people to select one person from each of the 12 Tribes. "Joshua said to them: 'Cross over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and each one of you take up a stone on his shoulder; according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel, that this may be a sign among you ... these stones shall be for a memorial to the children of Israel forever.'" (Joshua 4:5; 7b; NKJV)

When the last of the Israelites had crossed "through" the Jordan River on dry ground, they "camped in Gilgal on the eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up בְּגִלְגָל – "in" or "at" Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, 'In the future when your descendants ask their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan what He had done to the Red Sea when He dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God.'" (Joshua 4:19-24; TNIV)

Where is "your Gilgal ... your stones of memorial ... your stones of remembrance?" Mine? A little white country church in a town on an Indian Reservation in the Yakima Valley, Washington. At the conclusion of a powerful youth service, November 19, 1944, I knelt at an altar and the Lord brought me בְּגִלְגָל – "into my Gilgal," that place I would always remember as the day of great transformation. It was there that I first learned what it meant to be "a new creation ... in Christ ... (for) old things passed away ... all things become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17.) In that moment, God "rolled away the reproach of my Egypt ... my past life!" I was made a new creation in Christ Jesus. Today, that place many miles from where I live, is the Place of Commemoration for my life. And where is yours? And now, we move us to a second lesson learned about the name "Gilgal" being a place.

6. Coronation. Gilgal became a place of coronation. "Then Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let's go to Gilgal, so we can renew the kingship there. 'So all the people went to Gilgal, and there in the LORD's presence they made Saul king.'" (1 Samuel 11:14-15a; HCSB) It was at Gilgal later, that David was reaffirmed as the king of Israel. "Then the king returned. When he arrived at the Jordan, Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and escort him across the Jordan." (See 2 Samuel 19:15; HCSB)

7. Continuation. Gilgal became a place of continuation. Many years passed by, and Gilgal became the beginning place for Elijah and Elisha to journey to Bethel. This journey ended when the LORD took the great prophet Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind. (See 2 Kings 2:1-14) Elisha, the apprentice to Elijah, then established Gilgal as one of the places from which he would continue the ministry committed to him, therein establishing himself as one of Israel's great prophets. "... Elisha returned to Gilgal..." (2 Kings 4:38; HCSB; read vv 38-41) The historic Gilgal did not always remain a place of purity. (Read Hosea 9:15-17; 12:11-14; Amos 4:4-6; 5:1-6) However, kings, prophets, and people returned to Gilgal on many occasions.

As we walk this pilgrim pathway, we must allow our Gilgal to be our starting place, and as needed, a renewing place for our consecration, to feast on the meat of the Word of God, move forward in our conquest of all God has for us in this life, maintaining holiness as our life-style under the enabling power of the Holy Spirit until that fantastic day when we will be caught up to eternal glory, to live in His presence forever. Today, let's commit our "Gilgal" to be that place of "commemoration" to which we return in memory of and praise to God for the day He delivered us from the bondage of sin, and cleansed our hearts that we might live the Spirit-filled life of "continuation," ever growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

On November 19, 77 years will have passed since I began my walk with Jesus. Have I ever returned to my "Gilgal?" Many times. Why? That is between God and me. It is true for every person! Faith is tested! Failure is tragic! Forgiveness is treasured! Yes, "Gilgal" remains a priceless place of mercy and grace! Go back to your "Gilgal" whenever you need to! Repent of any sins committed. Receive the mercy and grace He offers. Rejoice in His love. Reinforce your life in His Word. Report again for duty!

A more recently composed hymn, words and music, is John W. Peterson's 1961 anointed hymn. As you read these stirring words, I trust you will literally burst into song and sing them. It is story of that marvelous day when God rolled away our reproach ... the reproach of "our Egypt." God bless you.

HEAVEN CAME DOWN

1. O what a wonderful, wonderful day – Day I will never forget!
After I'd wandered in darkness away, Jesus, my Savior, I met.
O what a tender, compassionate Friend! He met the need of my heart.
Shadows dispelling. With joy I am telling, He made all the darkness depart.

CHORUS after each verse

Heaven came down, and glory filled my soul,
When at the cross the Savior made me whole.
My sins were washed away,
And my night was turned to day.
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul.

2. Born of the Spirit with life from above, into God's family divine,
Justified fully thro' Calvary's love – O what a standing is mine!
And the transaction so quickly was made when as a sinner I came;
Took of the offer of grace He did proffer. He saved me; O praise His dear name!

3. Now I've a hope that will surely endure after the passing of time.
I have a future in heaven for sure, there in those mansions sublime.
And it's because of that wonderful day when at the cross I believed;
Riches eternal and blessings supernal, from His precious hand I received.