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I puzzled over this week's Old Testament passage for a long time. It is hard to see its connection to the other readings. But if we read this ancient story through a lens refracted by the forgiveness and celebration themes highlighted in the other lectionary texts, there are at least tentative connections.

"Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt. And so that place is called Gilgal to this day." I'm sorry, but that seems like a pretty forced folk etymology for the place named Gilgal. But it does say something about how at least the author of Joshua understood the significance of the first encampment on the other side of the Jordan.

This is the place where God starts over with Israel. The time of punishment and suffering is over, and the time of forgiveness and fresh starts has arrived. With Moses as mediator-leader, but under God's sovereignty, after slavery in Egypt comes deliverance through water and lawgiving at Sinai. With Joshua as mediator-leader, but still under God's sovereignty, after wilderness wanderings comes deliverance through water and covenant renewal at Gilgal.

This is why the first thing this weary army does upon setting up camp in hostile Canaan is to disable all the warriors through flint-knived circumcision. (Ouch.) This is why they celebrate the Passover with all due diligence to keep God's commands to Moses.

God has forgiven Israel. Israel celebrates God's forgiveness and then moves quickly to demonstrate its loyalty to God's will by keeping the provisions of the covenant.

That word "provision" has double potential here. The wilderness days were provisional. Not where they had been but not yet where they were going, Israel lived a provisional life that relied on the provision of God. Now in the land of promise, the days of provisionality appear to be over. Israel begins to eat the ordinary produce of

the land of Canaan.

Eventually they will grow their own produce. And so immediately, the provisional provision of miraculous manna ends. Israel will always remember that miraculous provision but will no longer need it.

There is a kind of “coming home” theme in all this week’s readings. Israel comes home to a promised land from which the people have been absent since their mothers and fathers were buried there. The psalmist confesses in order to come home to God and be at home in his own body. The straying son comes home to the waiting, forgiving father. Humanity comes home to a reconciling God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

It would be nice if this were the last word. Everybody would get to stay home. But powerful forces within us, both individually and collectively, drive us out of our homes. Israel ends up in exile. Believers who love God sin again and find themselves once more in need of forgiveness. Our sin drives us into internal self-exile, exile from relationships with others and exile in relationship with God—who is our only home, our origin and our destiny.

*Additional lectionary columns by Gushee appear in the March 9 issue of the Century —click [here](#) to subscribe.*