

The Issue of Circumcision (Revised)

(Is Circumcision for All Believers?)

Introduction

We cannot consider the question of circumcision of the flesh without first defining humanity from YHWH's perspective. There is a common practice when considering Scriptural faith to divide humanity into Jews and non-Jews, yet YHWH never classified humanity in this way. From YHWH's perspective we have His 'chosen' set-apart people and the nations or the goy (gentiles/heathens). So, just who are His 'chosen'? Pre-Mashiach we would have considered the descendants of Ya'akov (Jacob) to be YHWH's 'chosen' but today we would say it is the 'body of Mashiach' which represents YHWH's 'chosen' and reverting to modern parlance, this 'body' comprises both believing 'Jews' and believing 'non-Jews' according to the apostolic Scriptures. Whilst the question of circumcision of the flesh is not an issue for 'Jews' as a whole, it has created much controversy for non-Jewish Believers in Mashiach and it is this section of the 'body of Mashiach' we are concerned with.

But before we can decide the relevance circumcision has to us all individually, we must first establish how circumcision of the flesh is viewed by YHWH. To understand the relevance circumcision has to both Jews and non-Jews sharing the same faith, we need to understand circumcision - from YHWH's perspective. To do this we need to consider the life of Abraham and what effect circumcision had on his life - from YHWH's perspective.

Abram to Abraham

Although YHWH first made His covenant with Abram (Gen.12), He then made a second covenant with Abraham, (Gen.17). As the two elements, the recipient's progeny and land, form the subject matter of both covenants we need to ask why YHWH considered a second covenant necessary. Admittedly circumcision was added for the second covenant, but we will see that circumcision was always intended and would most probably have eventually become part of the first covenant. So, why a second covenant of similar content to the first and why the name change from Abram to Abraham?

The principal reason for a second covenant was the result of Abram and Sarai taking matters into their own hands. Having promised Abram that he would father a son and Sarai subsequently remaining unable to conceive, Sarai gave her maid to Abram and he bore a son, Ishmael, to Hagar. Evidently this was contrary to YHWH's intentions and the consequential affect was the second covenant of Genesis 17. Abram had fathered the 'wrong' son and YHWH saw a need to separate the past from the future. YHWH achieved this separation via the name change and it was the change in the man's name that required circumcision of the flesh. The new name and circumcision of the flesh were integral each to the other.

Sarai was barren only until her husband had been circumcised. This is a very telling point because it proves that it was always YHWH's intention for a circumcised seed to carry His covenant, thus it was not possible for Sarai/Sarah to conceive until after Abraham's circumcision. It was Sarah who was to be integral to the covenant not Sarai. The name change from Abram to Abraham reinforces this fact, but it can only be seen through the Hebrew language.

In the Hebrew, Abram is spelt **אַבְרָם** (Hebrew reads from right to left) so we have *aleph* (א) *bet* (ב) *resh* (ר) *mem* (ם) and the name tells a story. The name begins with *aleph* (א) and ends with a *mem* (ם). The word 'am' (אם) means nations, peoples, or womb. In the midst of the name, we have the word 'bar' (בר) which means son; thus, a son of Abram will lead to nations. With the name change to Abraham **אַבְרָהָם** we have *aleph* (א) *bet* (ב) *resh* (ר) *hey* (ה) *mem* (ם). We still have everything that is in the previous name, we still have 'am' (אם) (nations) and 'bar' (בר) son but the letter hey has now been added which is profoundly significant. Because now in the midst of this new name we have a new word 'brah' (ברה) *bet, resh hey*, which means to cut. So, at the heart of this new name, we see the cutting of a covenant and it is at this point that YHWH's covenant is cut into man via the circumcision of the flesh. Circumcision is to be the sign of the covenant, that is, it is the sign of covenant membership.

Whilst nations would flow from both Abram and Abraham there is a difference in the seed. From YHWH's perspective the Ishmael born of Abram was not the same as the Yitzchak born of Abraham, the latter was born of circumcision whereas the former was not and this is the crux of it. It was to be the seed of the circumcised Abraham that would henceforth cut the blood of the covenant. It was Abraham's descendants and not the descendants of Abram that would carry the covenant and most specifically only those through the line of Yitzchak (Isaac) and Ya'akov (Jacob).

The name change was necessitated because Abram had born a wrong son, thus from YHWH's perspective the new man Abraham was required, hence His comment when He commanded Abraham to sacrifice Yitzchak,

And He said, "Take your son, now, your only son Yitzchak, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I command you."
(Gen.22:2)

And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy, nor touch him. For now, I know that you fear Elohim, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Gen.22:12)

It was the mark of circumcision that separated Abram from Abraham. It was the mark of circumcision that, insofar as YHWH was concerned, made them two different people. But Abraham's circumcision had a greater effect; from YHWH's perspective it severed the genealogical relationship between Ishmael and Yitzchak. In YHWH's eyes not only were these two born of different mothers but also of different fathers as the above verses confirm.

The location of the 'mark of the covenant' is significant because it connects with the 'seed' and is a physical reminder of personal covenant membership. Circumcision of the flesh is the only 'entry pass' into the covenant there is no alternative means of entry specified by YHWH.

Whilst the two covenants are similar, they are not the same. There is a remarkable difference in the land area promised to Abram in Genesis 15 and that promised to Abraham in Genesis 17. Abram was to inherit all the land from Egypt to the Euphrates River, whereas Abraham was only given the land of Canaan. This change in the land area is proof that YHWH views Abram and Abraham as two different persons. Abram's descendants would include the progeny of Ishmael a.k.a. the Arab nations who do occupy the area promised to Abram, whereas the descendants of Abraham with respect to YHWH's covenant are the progeny of Yitzchak and Ya'akov who are restricted to Canaan.

When we consider the record of Abram/Ishmael and Abraham/Isaac, it is evident that circumcision of the flesh is a crucial factor of separation in YHWH's covenant plan. If YHWH is unchanging – the same today as He was yesterday and will be tomorrow, then the effect circumcision of the flesh has on His covenant plan must also remain the same.

Circumcision Is the Sign of Set-Apartness/Holiness

YHWH commanded for all males to be circumcised eight days after birth: why eight days? The number eight is symbolised by the letter *chet* (**ח**) in Hebrew which means 'a fence' or 'separation.' This is more visible in the Paleo Hebrew script (**𐤇**) thus through circumcision the physical descendants of Abraham were to be set-apart, separated from the rest of humanity. Eight also symbolises a new beginning in the Scriptures, such as the Eighth Day. Just as circumcision created the new covenanted/set-apart man Abraham, so also on the eighth day did the newly born child change becoming a covenant/set-apart child. YHWH tied together the symbolism of separation to His mark of the covenant – circumcision of the flesh, making circumcision of the flesh an essential element for set-apartness/holiness.

Circumcision of the Flesh and Circumcision of the Heart – Torah (Law) Requires Both

YHWH never changed the integrity He established between circumcision of the flesh, separation and covenant, yet there is today a modern conception that circumcision of the heart has superseded circumcision of the flesh. Nothing is further from the truth and Scripture itself denies this conception. For example, Moshe commanded that Israel be of circumcised hearts in Deuteronomy 10:16: there is no mention for this to replace circumcision of the flesh. Circumcision of the heart is again mentioned in a later verse; Deut.30:6 but here also it is not at the expense of circumcision of the flesh. Moshe knew that **to be in a proper covenant relationship with YHWH, Israel had to be circumcised in the flesh AND circumcised of the heart.**

Whilst Jeremiah 4:4 provides further confirmation that both forms of circumcision are required, there is another verse in Jeremiah worth examination,

“...Pay attention to what I say. Then I will be your Elohim and you will be my people. In everything, live according to the way I ordered you, so that things will go well with you.” (Jer.7:23)

What we have here is a 1-2, 1-2 order, a first and second sequence repeated,

Pay attention to what I say1.

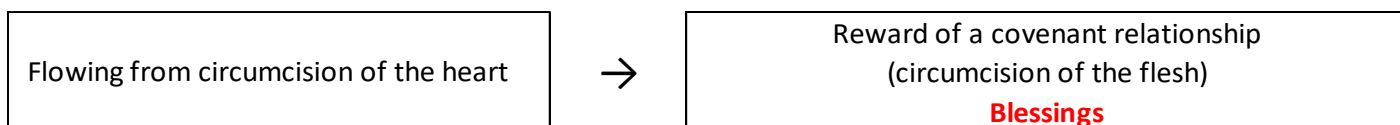
Then I will be your Elohim and you will be my people2

Live according to the way I ordered you1

So that things will go well with you2.

When we analyse the first sequence of the verse, we see that circumcision of the heart (observance of Torah) must precede circumcision of the flesh (covenant relationship) that is, circumcision of the flesh must flow **from** circumcision of the heart. This premise is reiterated by the second sequence - only prior observance of the Torah will generate the rewards (blessings) of a covenant relationship.

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|--|----------|--|
| <i>Pay attention to what I say</i> Obedience Circumcision of Heart | } THEN } | <i>Then I will be your Elohim and you will be my people</i> Relationship Circumcision of flesh |
| <i>live according to the way I ordered you</i> | THEN | <i>things will go well with you</i> |



*It is the parent's circumcised heart that leads to an infant's circumcision of the flesh.

Jeremiah 9:25-26 must erase any further doubt on this issue, here we are told that because they are uncircumcised of heart, Israel will be punished in the same manner as those uncircumcised in the flesh, that is, in the same manner as the nations.

Circumcision of the flesh could never be superseded with circumcision of the heart because they serve two quite different purposes with vastly different effects. Circumcision of the flesh is the mark that one is in a covenant relationship with YHWH and therefore set-apart/holy, whereas circumcision of the heart is the mark of Torah observance. Thus, circumcision of the flesh is the mark of the covenant and circumcision of the heart is the mark of the Torah obedience. As just said, to be in a proper covenant relationship with YHWH, a person must be circumcised in both the flesh AND heart.

Who Should Be Circumcised in the Flesh?

There is some confusion about the necessity for non-Jewish Believers to be circumcised in the flesh, yet YHWH is not an Elohim of confusion, so the answer must be found in YHWH's Scriptures. Clearly anyone seeking salvation must establish a correct relationship with YHWH, that must be a covenant relationship, but YHWH only offered the descendants of Abraham through Yitzchak and Ya'akov this privilege. This being the case, where does this leave those who are not of the covenant seed, those who are not directly descended from Abraham? Well, whilst the covenant belongs exclusively to Abraham's descendants, it has always been possible for foreigners, that is, those not of the circumcised seed, to become one with them and enjoy the same covenant relationship with YHWH, such is confirmed in Ezekiel,

And it shall be that you divide it (the Land) by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who sojourn in your midst and who bear children among you. And they shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel – with you they have an inheritance in the midst of the tribes of Israel, (Ezek. 47:22).

Foreigners (gentiles) choosing to live amongst the Israelites were to be considered as native-born Israelites. This means that the covenant was equally available to the foreigner provided he accepted a Torah observant lifestyle,

There is one Torah for the native-born and for the stranger who sojourns among you. (Exod. 12:49).

There is only one Torah/ Law for both Jews and Gentiles

And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. (Gen.17:14)

For complete equality with the sons of Israel the foreigner must live in obedience to all the Torah which requires circumcision of the flesh. The apostolic Scriptures refer to the adoption of the gentiles into Israel as 'grafting into the Olive Tree' (Romans chapter 11) and the rules stipulated in the above passages must apply. But if the reader requires more proof it can be found in the words of the apostle,

And if you are of Mashiach, then you are seed of Abraham, and heirs according to promise. (Gal.3:29).

The apostle says 'seed of Abraham' not Abram, Abram had no connection to the covenant promise, thus we must be of the circumcision. How can we be benefactors of the covenant and remain uncircumcised in the flesh when circumcision of the flesh is the 'entry card' to the covenant. We cannot be joined to Israel and remain different, that is absurd.

The Situation Post Mashiach

Through Mashiach we have a new element to the issue of circumcision of the flesh and the apostle's words in (Gal.3:29) reflect this,

"And if you are of Mashiach, then you are seed of Abraham, and heirs according to promise." (Gal.3:29).

This statement infers that membership of the 'body of Mashiach' is to be seed of Abraham that is, a circumcised seed. In other words, you cannot be one without the other. This makes perfect sense when we consider the words of Mashiach and the apostle,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

"Because through Him (Mashiach) we both have access to the Father by one Spirit!" (Eph.2:18)

When we put these three passages together the obvious is that only Believers in Mashiach can have a proper relationship with YHWH. A little earlier in his epistle to the Ephesians the apostle is even more emphatic,

“That at that time you were without Mashiach, excluded from the citizenship of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no expectation and without Elohim in the world.” (Eph.2:12).

The Israel referred to in this passage cannot be the ‘Jewish’ Israel of today but is the Israel of YHWH which, according to the Gospels and the apostolic Scriptures, is synonymous with the ‘body of Mashiach.’ This truth is further affirmed by Mashiach’s instruction to His disciples during His last Pesach (Passover) with them,

*And taking bread, giving thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you, do this in remembrance of Me.” Likewise the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you.” * (Luke 22:19-20).*

*Many translations have renewed covenant, but this is incorrect. The covenant was cut in blood and its breach required the death of the guilty party which inevitably brings the agreement to an end. Thus, an entirely new covenant was instituted by Mashiach via His (pure) blood. The apostle annuls any argument to the contrary by describing Mashiach as the mediator of a better covenant (Heb.8:6). What is more the Greek (*Kainos*) means new. When renewed is meant the Greek (*Anakainizō*) is used as in Heb.6:6.

It is Mashiach’s specific instruction ‘do this is in remembrance of Me’ which concerns us. By these words Mashiach could not have been referring to the bread alone because by default this would exclude the wine. Also, if He were specifically referring to only the bread and wine, He would have said these words after the wine. But Mashiach was referring to the ceremony itself: instructing us all to continue the Pesach (Passover) feast as required by His Father’s Torah but now He is making Himself the emphasis of this feast, not Egypt.¹

By instructing us to continue celebrating this feast ‘in remembrance of Him’ Mashiach is by default instructing all those who are ‘of Him’ (Gal.3:29) must be circumcised in the flesh because the Father has decreed no uncircumcised person may participate in this celebration,

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee and will keep the Pesach (Passover) to YHWH, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. (Exod.12:48).

Insofar as the Scriptures are concerned there is no reason for confusion when it comes to circumcision of the flesh for those in the ‘body of Mashiach.’ Further, the desire of all in the ‘body of Mashiach’ is to live with Mashiach in the Land through the Millennium however, entry into the Land is restricted to those circumcised in the flesh.

Circumcision of The Flesh is a Requisite for Entering the Land

Unfortunately, there is a degree of ignorance concerning the destination of Believers. Contrary to what some think and what is taught in the Church Believers are destined to live in the Land throughout the millennium with a rejuvenated physical body. We do not obtain spiritual bodies until the end of the millennium i.e., on the Eighth Day. Paul tells us we are grafted into Israel (Rom.11), so our destiny is the same as that of Israel and the descendants of Abraham were never promised eternal life. So now, let us look at the book of Joshua when the Israelites were about to enter the land,

And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. (Jos.4:19).

¹ Mashiach’s influence on the Pesach celebration is dealt with in a separate article ‘The Festival of Unleavened Bread & Pesach Part 1’ which can be found at www.undertorah.com

The above is the account of the people entering the land at the time of Pesach. Now look at what YHWH instructed a few verses later,

At that time YHWH said to Joshua, "Make knives of flint for yourself and circumcise the sons of Israel the second time." So, Joshua made knives of flint for himself, and circumcised the sons of Israel at the Hill of Foreskins. And this is why Joshua circumcised them: All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of battle, had died in the wilderness on the way, after they had come out of Egypt. For all the people who came out had been circumcised, but all the people who were born in the wilderness on the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised. (Jos.5:2-5).

This instruction was given after Moshe (Moses) had told the people they must circumcise their hearts (Deut.10:16, 30:6). Knowing that it was the time of Pesach, it is clear from Joshua that YHWH was not referring to circumcision of the heart when He instructed that no uncircumcised man could eat of the Pesach (Exod.12:48).

Part of the promise was the land and we must not ignore that immediately Joshua led Israel into the land YHWH instructed him to circumcise the whole nation. We know they entered the land at the time of the Pesach (Passover) celebration and this alone would have required them to be circumcised but there is another underlying reason for this circumcision. Remember the land was never promised to Ishmael but only to the circumcised seed; **the seed of the covenant**, this also would necessitate all the residence of the land to be the product of a circumcised seed, including those today who wish to enter the land.

Only those in covenant will enter the land and we should look at what is said in the Book of Jubilees concerning circumcision of the flesh in relation to the covenant,

*And on the self-same day was Abraham circumcised and all the men of his house and all those whom he had bought with money from the children of the stranger, were circumcised with him. This Torah (Law) is for all generations **forever** and there is no circumcision of the days and no omission of one day out of the eight days; **for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tablets.** * (Jub.15:24-25)*

*The tablets referred to are heavenly tablets that is, they are in heaven, this is not a reference to the two tablets given to Moshe (Moses) at Sinai.

*And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs **not to the children of the covenant** which YHWH made with Abraham, but to the children of destruction; **nor is there moreover, any sign on him that he is YHWH's** but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth and to be rooted out of the earth, for he has broken the covenant of YHWH. (Jub.15:26).*

*There are some who refuse to recognise the authority of the apocrypha and I would refer these people to the separate article 'Exclusivity (Or Not) of the Canon of Scripture' under 'End Time' articles at www.undertorah.com.

The message in these two passages from Jubilees puts circumcision beyond argument and it is YHWH's Messenger/angel that is speaking to Moshe in the book of Jubilees, so its credibility is beyond question. Objections to circumcision mostly arise from misconceptions of what is written in the epistles from Paul and it would be remiss not to straighten out these misconceptions. So, let us examine what Paul has said concerning this issue.

An Examination of Paul's Comments on Circumcision

Before we start it is important to understand that in most instances the apostle uses the terms 'circumcision' and 'uncircumcision' as metaphors for Judaizers and gentiles, respectively. This realisation is critical for a proper understanding of the apostle.

Circumcision of the flesh has never been an issue for the descendants of Ya'akov (Jacob) a.k.a. the Israelites and Paul tells us that Believers are grafted into Israel (Rom.11:11-24, Eph.2:19). In Romans Paul uses the metaphor 'natural olive tree' to describe Israel, no doubt he is recalling YHWH's words in Jer.11:16 where YHWH refers to Israel in this way. In Ephesians he tells us we are equal citizens of Israel. The essence here is that if gentiles are grafted into and equally Israelites, they cannot be different from Israel. Indeed, two verses from Exodus make this very plain,

And when a stranger sojourns with you and shall perform the Pesach to YHWH, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and perform it, and he shall be as a native of the land. But let no uncircumcised eat of it. There is one Torah (Law) for the native-born and for the stranger who sojourns among you." (Exod.12:48-49)

Anyone wanting to join to Israel had to follow the same rules as those given to Israel and we will see the apostle Paul expounds this same principle.

The crux of Paul's argument concerning circumcision is seen in a single verse from Acts,

And certain men came down from Yehudah and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised, according to the law of Moshe, (Moses) you are unable to be saved." (Acts.15:1).

The problem for Paul and indeed all the apostles, was the insistence by Judaizers that physical circumcision was a prerequisite for salvation. Whereas the apostles argued that circumcision was not a salvation issue. Paul emphasizes this point explaining that Abraham was uncircumcised when he was called and that it was his belief for which he was accredited righteousness, not his circumcision (Rom.4:9-12). Abraham was certainly called into covenant whilst uncircumcised but was later required to wear the seal of the covenant i.e., circumcision. I can only reiterate circumcision of the flesh is the sign of covenant membership. If we are heirs to the covenant promise (Gal.3:29) how can we be exempt from wearing the seal of the covenant, when Abraham himself was not exempt. None of the apostles had authority to undo what YHWH decreed and contrary to popular understanding, Paul never removed the necessity of circumcision of the flesh for gentile Believers. We will now consider some verses that are presented by those who oppose circumcision of the flesh.

1Corinthians 7:18-24

Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. The circumcision is naught, and the uncircumcision is naught, but the guarding of the commands of Elohim does matter! Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? It matters not to you, but if you are able to become free too, rather use it. For he who is called in the Master while a slave is the Master's freed man. Likewise he who is called while free is a slave of Messiah.. You were bought with a price, do not become slaves of men. Brothers, let each one remain with Elohim in that calling in which he was called.

The teaching of the Judaizers was that only Jews can be saved and circumcision of the flesh was what separated Jews from the gentile nations. Thus, for gentiles to be saved they had to become proselyte Jews, and this required they be circumcised. Paul is here arguing that it is unnecessary to become Jewish to be saved but for all to remain as they were when they were called. You may argue, "How could a Jew become a non-Jew," as is inferred by Paul's words in the above passage? Well, we will see from the following historical

records that many Jews underwent a surgical procedure (epispasm) to undo their circumcision and become like 'Greeks' (gentiles) what Paul describes as 'uncircumcision.' The following refers,

"They hid the circumcision of their genitals so that even when naked they might appear as Greeks (gentiles)." (Josephus: The Jewish Antiquities of the Jews, Book XII, chapter V).

DR. Solomon Zeitlin, a noted Jewish historian, says: "They hid the fact of circumcision by drawing forward the prepuce so that they resembled the Hellenes (Gentiles). The book of Maccabees also refers to this practice by Jews,

"They made themselves uncircumcised." (1Macc.1:15).

That Jews wanted to resemble gentiles was equally condemned by Paul as the insistence by the Judaizers that gentiles must be circumcised for salvation. How could Paul be opposing YHWH's decree for circumcision when he says, *'but the guarding of the commands of Elohim does matter.'* Remember he is talking to a gentile congregation. The essence of the above passage is – A person's status whether circumcised (Jewish) or uncircumcised (Gentile) does not matter when converted and coming to faith in Yahusha (Jesus) but keeping the commandments, which include circumcision, does matter.

Galatians 2:3

Another comment from Paul offered by those opposing circumcision of the flesh for gentiles is Gal.2:3 which, in almost all scriptures is rendered as follows,

"But not even Titus who was with me, though a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised."

This is a dreadfully poor translation because it contradicts what is commanded in the Torah (Law) and - described in the Nevi'im (Prophets): Mashiach's words in Matt.5:17-19 come to mind. Scripture is never contradictory, so the above translation must be erroneous. I consider the Aramaic Peshitta provides a far better presentation for this verse,

"Also, Titus who was with me, who Aramaean was not, was compelled to be circumcised."

This translation harmonises with the rest of Scripture. Also, where Aramaean appears in the earlier manuscripts this has, in most translations, been replaced with 'Greek.' The Aramaeans were most likely the Jewish descendants of the exiles to Syria and these Jews would have been circumcised. However, Titus is referred to as not being Aramaean: not being Jewish and therefore being uncircumcised was compelled by Paul to undergo circumcision. If Paul was against physical circumcision, why did he circumcise Timothy?

In the Aramaic New Testament, the author adds the following footnote to this verse highlights are mine:

Unlike the contemporary tradition of Judaism in Paul's day, a soul who follows Mashiach is not immediately forced to be circumcised once they show interest, as this is something that is done according to the intent of a person's heart (**circumcision of the heart**). Paul clearly indicates that the requirement for circumcision has in NO way been negated. Circumcision is a demonstration of Faith and Obedience when a person does so according to the leading of the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) (**leading to circumcision of the heart**). But NOT since social, peer or status quo pressure.

I can personally attest to the truth of this statement. For many years I was against circumcision until one morning when I was getting dressed, I was asked "How can you be part of the covenant if you do not wear the sign of the covenant?" Believe me I was quite stunned; I was completely alone in my bedroom. I do not

know if it was an audible voice or if it was telepathy of some kind, but I was certainly spoken to. Needless to say, I am now circumcised.

Galatians 5:2-6

“Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Messiah, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. For in Mashiach Yahusha neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love” (Galatians 5:2-6).

Is this a blanket statement by Paul? That if a Believer undergoes physical circumcision that he is no longer “saved”? Some believe so. However, Paul’s letter to the Galatians was written to specifically refute the idea that physical circumcision would bring salvation, and to speak against the false doctrines of the Judaizers. In these words, Paul tells the Galatians that if they believe that physical circumcision will save them, then Mashiach is of no value. Paul again is condemning the teaching that physical circumcision would bring salvation; he was not speaking against circumcision as a practice, otherwise he would not have had Timothy circumcised. When we know that Paul was not coming against circumcision as a practice, but rather the improper usage of it, we can understand why he forbade the non-Jews of the Galatian assemblies from being circumcised—because it was being misused.

He writes that those who are trying to be justified by keeping the Torah, rather than being justified by Mashiach Yahusha and allowing Torah obedience to be an outward manifestation of one’s faith in Him, have fallen. He writes of the responsibility that the circumcised person must keep the Torah., but then emphasizes a key element of Torah obedience, is love (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 6:5).

Philippians 3:2-3

Look out for dogs, look out for the evil workers, look out for the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who are serving Elohim in the Spirit, and boasting in Messiah Yahusha, and do not trust in the flesh.

Once again, the apostle is dealing with a misconception of what circumcision of the flesh achieves and is here warning the Philippians, against those whose confidence in YHWH is in their physical circumcision and not in Mashiach. The Judaizers saw circumcision as the mark of Jewishness and only Jews could be saved. They saw it as the mark of redeemed righteousness and spread their philosophy amongst the gentiles. Paul, opposing this philosophy, is teaching that circumcision without Mashiach is merely a mutilation and worthless. Again, Paul is not opposing circumcision but the misrepresentation of it.

Acts.15:19-21

Therefore, my opinion is that we should not put obstacles in the way of the Goyim who are turning to God. Instead, we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood. For from the earliest times, Moshe has had in every city those who proclaim him, with his words being read in the synagogues every Shabbat.

The Jerusalem Council recognized that complete Torah (Law) observance for the new non-Jewish Believers was not an instantaneous process, and that is why it ruled that while they did not have to be circumcised to be saved. The council ruled, rather, for the non-Jews to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, blood, and unkosher meat. These rulings would allow the new non-Jewish Believers to enter the synagogue and where they would hear Moshe (the Law) taught. Over time as they grew and matured in their faith, the non-Jewish Believers would be incorporated into the Commonwealth of Israel and they would become more and more Torah observant including observing the requirement for circumcision of the flesh.

The Anti Circumcision Movement and the Man of Lawlessness

The opposition to circumcision goes beyond some of the religious theological arguments. There is a concentrated, non-religious anti-circumcision movement now present in many countries, whose goal is to prevent the circumcision of infants by parents as is ordained in the Scriptures. One anti-circumcision organization says, *"There is a movement among men who feel that they have been wrongfully circumcised and are fighting to stop the routine circumcisions of infant boys in America and Australia. We feel violated and raped, and do not wish for another generation of males to feel as we do."* Foreskin restoration has become a medical practice in our day, whereby skin can be stretched over the head of the penis and 'regrown.'

Another group is the 'Students for Genital Integrity,' founded by Greg Dervin. This group states that it is not just anti circumcision but is against any forced cutting of a child's genitalia. Ironically Dervin is Jewish but believes that having his foreskin and a "whole sexual experience" is his birthright, as opposed to recognizing himself as part of the Abrahamic covenant and being one of the myriads of physical descendants of the Patriarchs.

In 2003 in North Dakota the issue was taken before the criminal court. It was an attempt by the plaintiffs to abolish the circumcision of new-born males with healthy foreskins and to change public policy, so that only a competent male once he reaches adulthood, and not his parent, should decide on his circumcision. Lev.12:3 stipulates all males shall be circumcised on their eighth day.

What we are experiencing is another attempt by HaSatan to defy what YHWH has decreed. The end time 'false messiah' described in 2Thessalonians and noted as the second beast of Revelation 13, is also labelled the 'Man of Lawlessness' or in some translations, the 'man who separates himself from the Torah (Law). This is the same apostate entity referred to in Daniel 7:25 where we are told,

And it speaks words against the Most High, and it wears out the set-apart ones of the Most High, and it intends to change times and law, and they are given into its hand for a time and times and half a time.

Scripture tells us that the false messiah is going to set up his own set of civil laws that oppose the ordinances of the Most High. Are we not seeing the fulfilment of this prophesy whereby infant circumcision has become illegal in some parts of the world?

Conclusion

It is untrue that Paul spoke against circumcision, he himself was circumcised, and he circumcised Timothy. What Paul does in his epistles is clarify the position of circumcision for new Believers. New Believers who are just coming to faith should not be circumcised immediately. They should be given some time to grow in their faith, then at a later point, when they properly understand the purpose for circumcision, they should undergo circumcision of the flesh. Just as Abraham did when he and his household were committing themselves fully to the covenant that YHWH had set before them.

The command for circumcision of the flesh is in YHWH's Torah (Law) and Torah is the statute - everything is below Torah. No-one Mashiach, prophet or apostle can undo what is written in the Father's Torah. Is there really a necessity to repeat Mashiach's words in Mat.5:17-18?

Do not think that I came to destroy the Torah or the Prophets.¹ I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For truly, I say to you, till the heaven and the earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall by no means pass from the Torah till all is fulfilled.

But he answered and said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of YHWH." (Matt.4:4).

How could Mashiach speak in such a way and subsequently advocate the annulment of the Torah command for circumcision of the flesh. He could not and He did not. Having spoken in this way Mashiach could never have authorised His disciples to annul a Torah command. Thus, to teach circumcision of the flesh is no longer necessary is a false teaching. Remember Mashiach also said He came not to do His own will but the will of the Father (John 6:38) and what is the will of the Father?

“Do not add to the Word (Torah, Law) which I command you, and do not take away from it. (Deut.4:2)

Furthermore, we are commanded to do the will of the Father,

“For whoever does the desire of My Father who is in the heavens is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matt.12:50).

If we are grafted into Israel (Rom.11) then our destiny must be the same as theirs – occupation of the Land in the millennium with Mashiach. Israel was only ever promised life in the Land, they were never promised an eternal/heavenly life and a pre-requisite for entry into the Land is circumcision of both the heart and the flesh.

In conclusion what we have is.

- The only form of relationship with YHWH, described throughout the scriptures, is a ‘covenant relationship.’ There is no other form of relationship (*refer footnote 1*),
- YHWH has only invited one nation to have a ‘covenant relationship’ with Him – A circumcised Israel,
- The ‘covenant relationship’ demands circumcision of both the heart and the flesh, and it is circumcision of the flesh that is the sign of being in a ‘covenant relationship’ – (Gen.17:11),
- Gentile Believers are grafted into Israel. They become a citizen of Israel- seed of Abraham and heirs to the covenant promise (Gal.3:29) i.e., they join Israel in a covenant relationship,
- There is only one set of rules/law for people in ‘covenant relationship’ (Exod.12:49) a law which includes circumcision of the flesh.

Finally, let me repeat, by instructing us all to continue the Pesach (Passover) celebration (Luke 22:19-20) Mashiach is, by default, invoking (Exod.12:48-49) that is, circumcision of the flesh on all who follow Him. - The same can be said of the apostle were, in 1Cor.5:7-8, he commands the gentiles to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread which commences with the Pesach meal. Nowhere does Paul annul the decree in Exodus commanding only circumcised males shall eat of the Pesach. Thus Paul, also by default. is invoking Exodus.12 for all Believers.