

THE ISSUE OF CIRCUMCISION

Introduction

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.

Abraham's Life

Insofar as this study is concerned there are a couple of salient points in the life of Abraham; first is the name change from Abram to Abraham. Second is the fact that this man had two sons – Yishmael (Ishmael) and Yitzchak (Isaac), yet in Gen.22 speaking to Abraham, YHWH says,

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)

Here YHWH refers to Yitzchak as being the only son, yet Yishmael was Abram's first born! What is being revealed here is the importance of covenant and who is in covenant with YHWH and who isn't. Remember Yishmael was born to Abram not Abraham and in the above verse YHWH is talking with Abraham. For YHWH to speak the way He has He must consider Abram and Abraham two different persons. Of course it was the same human being but from YHWH's perspective Abraham was a 'renewed man.'

Although YHWH first made His covenant with Abram (Gen.12), He subsequently ratified the covenant with Abraham making circumcision a condition thereof (Gen.17). At the same time YHWH specified that it would be the descendants of Abraham, not Abram, through whom the covenant would be fulfilled. So the question to be answered is what is the difference between the descendants of Abraham and the descendants of Abram? The answer lies in circumcision.

Abram was never circumcised, Abraham was circumcised. From YHWH's perspective it was the mark of circumcision that separated Abram from Abraham. It was the mark of circumcision that made them two different people – insofar as YHWH was concerned. But Abraham's circumcision had a far greater effect; it severed the genealogical relationship between Yishmael and Yitzchak. Now before you jump up and down exclaiming "Yishmael was circumcised!" let me repeat what I said earlier, that we must consider this issue from YHWH's perspective. In YHWH's perspective not only were these two born of different mothers but also of different fathers; hence YHWH's comment in Gen.22.

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)

Yishmael was not the product of a circumcised seed, that is, the seed did not pass through a circumcised organ. Whereas Yitzchak was born from a circumcised seed as were all of his descendants. This is the crux of the whole issue. YHWH commanded that circumcision of the flesh was to be the 'mark of the covenant' – (Gen.17:11). With this statement YHWH is defining whom His covenant is with. YHWH only meant for His covenant to be with the product of a circumcised seed. The covenant position was subsequently further defined and confined only to the descendants of Yitzchak (Isaac) and Ya'akov (Jacob), Abraham's grandsons. These and their descendants were the only people YHWH chose to be in covenant with Him and they were to 'carry the mark' of this covenant relationship.'

Clearly it was YHWH's decision for those under the covenant to carry the mark of the covenant. Circumcision of the flesh was the signature, required by YHWH that a person was in a covenant relationship with Him. Formal arrangements always require a signature and a covenant is one of the most serious forms of agreement. This being the case, one can only be in covenant with YHWH if he has the 'mark/signature of the covenant.'

When we consider the record of Abram and Abraham: Yishmael (Ishmael) and Yitzchak (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.

I have one further comment: the circumcised organ, through penetration, took a virgin into circumcision. It is in reality a circumcised sperm that fertilises the female, in a sense, creating a fertilised circumcised egg (the two flesh becoming one). The cycle of circumcision is completed with each fertilisation and ultimately the new birth. Eight days after the new birth a new cycle of circumcision is commenced.

Circumcision of the Flesh and Circumcision of the Heart – Torah Requires Both

There is 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;

Pay attention to what I say 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>



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 pagan nations.

Circumcision of the flesh could never be superseded with circumcision of the heart because they serve two very different purposes with very different effects. Circumcision of the flesh is the mark that one is in a covenant relationship with YHWH, 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. As just said to be in a proper covenant relationship with YHWH a person has to be circumcised in both the flesh AND of the heart.

Circumcision for the Foreigner

Considering that YHWH only covenanted with Israel, 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 (*those not of the circumcised seed*) to become one with them and enjoy the same covenant relationship with YHWH as confirmed in Ezekiel,

“And it shall be that you divide it 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 choosing to live amongst the Israelites will be considered as native born Israelites. This means that Gen.17:14 must apply equally to the foreigner, where it says to remain uncircumcised is to break the covenant,

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.

The premise is simple: you cannot remain different if you want to be the same and YHWH requires His covenant people to wear the sign of His covenant. Today we talk of being grafted in – being as the native born Israelite, we cannot be grafted in and remain different. But it goes further, just as the native Israelite the foreigner must also undergo the same circumcision,

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

For complete equality the foreigner must live in obedience to Torah. Whilst today's Israel prohibits any integration with foreigners, YHWH's concept for integration will never change. However, today Mashiach is included in the formula, as confirmed by the apostle Paul,

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

What this verse tells us is that primarily we must be of Mashiach to be considered circumcised seed and thus enjoy the benefits of a covenant relationship. This makes perfect sense when we consider Mashiach's words,

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto 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)

You cannot be in a proper relationship with anyone if you are unable to approach them or have a dialogue with them. According to these verses we cannot approach YHWH unless we have accepted Mashiach. Indeed, in another verse 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).

According to the apostle, if we are without Mashiach we are without all hope and in this the apostle is absolutely correct. Today, Mashiach is the key that unlocks entry into the covenant seed community and therefore into a covenant relationship with YHWH. This makes perfect sense when we remember the law of kinsman redeemer and understand how Mashiach, by His sacrifice, fulfilled the kinsman redeemer role for all Israel.¹ Let us return to the time of Mashiach's last Pesach (Passover) and examine the words He spoke to His Talmidim (disciples) as recorded in Luke 22:19-20,

*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."**

*Many translations erroneously refer to the covenant as a renewed covenant but this is incorrect and is explained in a separate article (Refer to footnote).

These words of Mashiach go all the way back to Gen.15:17 but for this study our emphasis is on the phrase 'do this is in remembrance of Me.'

By these words Mashiach couldn't have been referring to the bread alone because by default this would exclude the wine. Also, if He was specifically referring to only the bread and wine, He would have said these words after the wine. But Mashiach was referring to the meal 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 Egypt².

¹ Mashiach's role as kinsman redeemer is dealt with in a separate article 'Under Covenant or Under Law Part 2' which can be found at WWW.undertorah.com

² Mashiach's influence on the Pesach celebration is dealt in a separate article 'The changing Face of Pesach' which can be found at WWW.undertorah.com

By instructing us to continue celebrating this feast 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).

Circumcision Of The Flesh Is A Requisite For Entering The Land

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).

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 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 of the residence of the land to be the product of a circumcised seed, including those today who are desirous of being grafted into Israel and entering 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 Avraham 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 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 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 Avraham, 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).

It is YHWH's Malaki that is speaking to Moshe in the above abstract from Jubilees.

Galatians 2:3

We cannot leave this subject without examining one of the main thrusts offered by those opposing circumcision of the flesh for Gentiles – Gal.2:3. In almost all scriptures this verse 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 and described in the Nevi'im (Prophets). Scripture is never contradictory so the above translation has to 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.

In summary 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, this is the actual sign of being in a 'covenant relationship' – (Gen.17:11),
- The foreigner (Gentile) who wishes to join Israel will be grafted in to a tribe of Israel – Ezek.47:22-23,
- The followers of Mashiach are meant to be grafted into Israel and enter into the 'covenant relationship,' – (Gal.3:29),
- There is only one set of rules for people in 'covenant relationship' – Exod.12:49,

By instructing us all to continue the Pesach celebration (Luke 22:19-20) Mashiach is, by default, invoking (Exod.12:48) that is, circumcision of the flesh on all who follow Him.

Conclusion

The command for circumcision of the flesh is in YHWH's Torah 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 complete. “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 couldn't and He didn't. 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 has to be incorrect.

Clifford Fearnley 2015