

The Idea of Circumcision: A Key to Israel's Survival

Since we began our lives in Israel decades ago, we have participated in many circumcisions of Jewish baby boys, eight days old. It is a solemn, yet joyous event for all the family and friends who have come to witness another child being brought into the Covenant of God that He made with Abraham nearly 4,000 years ago.

Our son had his *brit milah* some 34 years ago; a rabbi *mohel* who quietly believed that the faith of the Messianic Jews of Israel is the true faith performed the circumcision. And a year and a half ago, in Jerusalem, our grandson (son of Kobi and Shani) joined the ranks of the children of Abraham, Isaac and Israel on his eighth day.

Circumcision is the key ordinance identifying Jews as the chosen people of God. Contracts are usually boring but essential documents guiding the lives of the human race—whether it's a nation's constitution, a couple's marriage certificate or a will left to one's descendants.

But God created the most extraordinary contract with the man Abraham. After choosing him from the entire human race, God informed him that this covenant was a promise that through Abraham and his descendants, the world would be blessed, and that He, the Sovereign Lord, would be God forever to his "peculiar people."

What was even more amazing is that this covenant was a one-sided, unconditional contract. Well, it was unconditional except for one single command that had to be kept by Abraham and his descendants. On the eighth day of the birth of a child of Abraham, he must be circumcised!

"This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you

and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised... and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations..." (Gen. 17:10-12)

The Lord then gave him a warning: "And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people [the Jews]; he has broken My covenant" (Gen. 17:14).

If this is not a peculiar, strange arrangement between God and man, then what is? But this Abrahamic covenant was and is an everlasting covenant of boundless blessing, promising that this nation would impact the world. This nation would receive a particular piece of land, with specified borders by God himself. And this covenant would be forever—as long as Israel circumcised their male children. Read it for yourself!

It is important to understand that this covenant did not automatically bring an Israelite eternal life. That depended on whether or not a descendant of Abraham had a heart for God. Four hundred plus years later, God gave to this same nation a second covenant. If ever there was a *conditional* contract, this was it!

The purpose of this covenant was to help God's beloved people know whether or not they were keeping the standards and laws of God. The goal was to bring His chosen ones to understand that they were an unclean people with unclean lips—as Isaiah the prophet so eloquently cried out. Why were they so sinful? Because they are part of the human race, and the human race is fallen. A fallen race is a cursed race in the eyes of the Holy One of Israel.

Here then are the steps the Lord ordained to create a people wholly given to Him:

1. Abraham's Covenant: To remember that God's eternal promise

was to bless Israel, to give her a specific piece of land for her nation, and to always, forever, be her God. This covenant is unconditional as long as the male children of the Jewish people are circumcised.

2. Mosaic Covenant: Given to Israel through Moses to show each and every Israeli that if he committed any of a long list of sins, he would be cut off from God. For example, breaking the Sabbath day or one of the holidays, cursing one's parents, and many other commandments would mean that the offender was cursed.

3. The New Covenant: God's plan of redemption is an immensely important and complex subject, which needs a book to explain. But the essence of what God was saying is: Israel, you are my people, my peculiar people. I will always be your God. As long as you circumcise your children, you have My promise. Nevertheless, I must show you your sin (who likes to be shown their sins?) so that you will understand you need Me to wash away your sins. You need a New Covenant which will take away the curses of the Law of Moses, so that I can freely give you the many blessings of the Law and fulfill the great promises which I swore to Abraham.

Through the prophets, God spoke time and again, saying, "Come Israel, come to Me and I will bring you Salvation which you as a sinner cannot bring yourself."

"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat" (Is. 55:1).

The Old Testament is God's love story to His chosen people—his faithfulness to Israel, and His grief over their sinfulness. In the Old Testament, God explained that there is forgiveness of sins, but only through the spilling of blood. What did that mean? That another life (in the Old Testament, an animal was killed) must die so that the sinner could have life—eternal life.

But the Bible teaches over and over again that eternal salvation comes only from God, not anything mankind can do for himself. So God sent a part of His own Divine Being in Yeshua the Messiah who ratified the New Covenant with his blood. It is He whose death brings life to Israel—and to all peoples everywhere! It is for anyone from any nation who wishes to be grafted into the olive tree—God's symbol of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. (See Rom. 11)

Most Jews have not yet received salvation through the New Covenant. They are still burdened with their sins described in the Mosaic Covenant. But the promise is still theirs. The promise that God would be their God—as long as they circumcised their male children.

Through the ages, Jews have fallen away from the Jewish nation—intermarrying, deciding they no longer believed in any God, integrating into the races of other nations and even forced conversion. But for centuries most Jews, persecuted as they were, stayed in close communities to survive, trying to keep the Law of Moses as best they could.

However, in the last couple of centuries, besides the terrible Holocaust, which destroyed one third of all Jews, the Jewish nation continues to shrink. Many Jews whose parents believed in God and Jewish traditions one generation ago, have simply become secular. First, they stop going regularly to the synagogue. Next, they no longer wear clothes that identify them as Jews. After that, slowly, if not they, then their children no longer fast on Yom Kippur, or no longer observe the holidays such as Passover.

But the last sign that a Jew no longer identifies with his people at all, is that parents decide against circumcising their male children. When that happens, that family ceases to be a part of the Jewish nation.

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