



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Circumcision

Young Christian parents are sometimes perplexed as to whether or not to have their baby boy circumcised. We will answer that concern in this study. But there is much more to circumcision than this physical blood ritual of the Old Testament.

### The origin of circumcision

Those critics who delight in attacking the Bible in any way possible sometimes point to Herodotus as their authority that Abraham was merely borrowing the custom from the Egyptians. Indeed, ancient Egyptian wall paintings and evidence from mummies indicate that circumcision was practiced in ancient Egypt. But it is doubtful that Abraham borrowed it from them. It is more likely that the reverse is true: that Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, introduced it in Egypt when he became the prime minister.

Many, but not all, of Israel's neighbor nations practiced the rite of circumcision, so circumcision *per se* was not a distinguishing mark for Israelites. Among those who did not circumcise were the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Philistines. However, the theological significance attached to it in Israel was unique. Among the heathen, it was generally carried out at puberty, and seemed to have been a rite of passage into manhood. In Israel, on the other hand, God commanded it be done on the eighth day of the infant's life.

Interestingly, there have been scientific, medical studies done which show that Vitamin K is one of the key substances to help the blood clot, plus there is second substance called prothrombin which is necessary for the normal clotting of the blood. These studies show that immediately after birth the amount of those sub-

stances in the body drops off drastically, down to around 30-40% of normal. Hence, it is very risky to have surgery during that time. But on the eighth day, both substances shoot up to about 110% of normal, so that the eighth day is the ideal day for this minor surgery. By the ninth day, it levels off at 100%. We relate this not to promote circumcision of the flesh of baby boys, but to demonstrate that once again true science eventually catches up to discover the omniscience of the Creator. Circumcision is first mentioned in Genesis 17:10.

**Genesis 17:10** *This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.*

**11** *And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.* ...

**23** *And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.*

**24** *And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*

**25** *And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*

**26** *In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.*

**27** *And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger,*

were circumcised with him.

It was significant that God's sign of covenant relationship should be upon the male reproductive member because this organ symbolized life and regeneration all across the ancient East. It symbolized human power and productivity. Phallic worship was very common and prominent among the heathen. Obviously, Abraham is not involved in phallic worship. In fact, just the opposite is the case. Whereas the pagans worshiped the phallus as the focus of procreative power, Abraham put no faith in the flesh. (He had learned that lesson by the Hagar-Ishmael experience.) Now, by his act of circumcision, he is yielding his future to Yahweh-God. Abraham is symbolically acknowledging the futility of his being able to bring about the son of promise by his own procreative powers.

He is recognizing that if he is to be a father of many nations, that it will all be due to Yahweh's power and sovereignty, not to his and Sarah's own procreative powers, because those powers apparently had ceased being viable in them. By the act of circumcision, Abraham is demonstrating his complete dependence upon and his complete faith in God. The Scripture tells us that because of Abraham's faith—not because he circumcised himself—it was accounted to him for righteousness. Look at what Paul says about Abraham in connection with circumcision:

**Romans 4:8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.**

When sin is not being imputed to a person, then righteousness is; therefore, this is concerning a person's justification, and Paul goes back to the case of Abraham to demonstrate how justification comes about.

**9 Cometh this blessedness [justification to righteousness] then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.**

**10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.**

That is, righteousness was imputed to Abraham before he was circumcised.

**11 And he received the sign of circumcision,**

**a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet being uncircumcised*: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:**

Here is a clear statement that under the terms of the new covenant (New Testament) physical circumcision is not necessary. Believers are justified (first-stage salvation); righteousness is imputed to them "though they be not circumcised." As we proceed, we will find that Paul is consistent in this doctrinal position throughout all his inspired writings.

**12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had being yet uncircumcised*.**

**13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.**

Abraham's circumcision is not the cause of God's promise to him; rather, it was the other way around. First, God made the promise of a son to Abraham. Then, in order to demonstrate his faith and confidence that God would carry out His promises to him, Abraham performed the circumcision. If Abraham had not believed that God would bring about the miraculous birth of Isaac, then he surely would not have gone to the trouble and pain of circumcising himself and his household. About a year later, Isaac was born and Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day.

### **Blood before battle**

There is a very peculiar incident concerning circumcision related in Exodus 4. This incident occurs when Moses has packed up his wife, Zipporah, and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and he is returning to Egypt to carry out YHWH's deliverance of the Israelites from bondage.

**Exodus 4:24 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that YHWH met him, and sought to kill him.**

**25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me.**

**26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody**

**husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision.**

With all the pronouns in these few verses, it is a bit confusing as to who is who. We won't take the space to go into all that here;<sup>1</sup> it is only necessary to point out that the "him" in v. 24 is not Moses, but rather his son who had not been circumcised. God had told Abraham back in Genesis 17:14 that it was a death penalty offense for a male in the covenant family or household to be uncircumcised.

Moses had evidently had already circumcised one of his sons, but had neglected to do the same to the other. His wife, Zipporah, obviously knew why YHWH had come to their campsite with intent to kill the son. The Bible doesn't give us many details of the incident, and so we are speculating as to how it might have occurred. We do know that the Hebrew word "LORD" in v. 24 is the tetragrammaton (YHWH), and so this may have been another of the several pre-incarnation appearances of Jesus the Christ.

In any event, perhaps YHWH came up to Moses and Zipporah and said: "You know, Moses, here I am, sending you back to Egypt to meet with Pharaoh on My behalf, to tell him to let My people go, to perform some amazing signs and wonders in his sight. I have given you a very important and precious responsibility. You are going to lead several million of My people out of slavery.

"You are going to ask them to put their lives on the line by believing in Me and they are going to believe in Me because I will work some amazing signs through you. They are going to risk the wrath of Pharaoh, they are going to risk their very lives as they put their trust in Me and in the covenant that I made with your father Abraham. And yet you, Moses, apparently take My covenant so lightly that you have not even bothered to carry out the sign and seal of that covenant by circumcising your boy, Eliezer. You know the law, Moses. Eliezer must die."

Perhaps Moses hung his head in shame over his sin. His wife, however, didn't waste any time. Zipporah grabbed the nearest flint knife and immediately — with no anesthetics — circumcised the son. And thus the son was spared.

There is a principle which we can glean from this incident, coupled with the fact that when the Israelites wandered around the wilderness for forty years

that they did not circumcise their sons. Yet God did not immediately enforce the judgment of the death penalty upon them. Those sons are the generation of perhaps a half million men whom Joshua ordered circumcised immediately after they crossed Jordan into Canaanland.

The principle apparent here is that one can get away with ignoring the sign of the covenant for a time. But never try to engage the enemy in warfare without first being sealed by the blood of the covenant. Moses was preparing to take on Pharaoh, and risk the whole Israelite nation without even having sealed his own son with the sign of the blood covenant. But YHWH would not let Moses' irresponsibility alter His plans to deliver His people. So He intervened personally and physically to make sure Moses was in compliance with the covenant before he let him proceed to engage the Egyptian enemy.

In Joshua 5, God commanded that all the Israelite sons of the generation of those who perished in the wilderness now be circumcised. God was not going to allow Joshua and his armies to engage the Canaanite enemy without first being sealed with the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Notice that in both cases, when Moses confronts the Egyptians and when Joshua confronts the Canaanites, the success of the endeavor is not possible unless first they have been sealed in the blood of the covenant. In other words, their victory, or one could say, their salvation in warfare is dependent upon their having been circumcised, sealed with blood.

What about those of us living under the terms of the new covenant? Is our salvation dependent upon being circumcised? Must we as descendants of Abraham keep that sign of the covenant? Dare we engage the enemy without having the seal of the covenant, i.e., the new covenant?

**Spiritual circumcision in the Old Testament**

Before we look more closely at circumcision in the New Testament, however, we shall demonstrate that New Testament concepts about circumcision were not new. They are clearly indicated in the Old Testament. The book of Jeremiah provides examples.

**Jeremiah 9: 25 Behold, the days come, saith YHWH, that I will punish all *them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised*;**

**26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all *that are* in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all *these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.***

We will find this theme developed by Paul in the New Testament; namely, that physical circumcision was merely a symbol to point to something greater — circumcision of the heart, a spiritual circumcision. As we shall see later in this study, from Paul we derive the conclusion that physical circumcision becomes an emblem of the law which can neither save us nor be kept by us. Physical circumcision under the new covenant becomes as pointless as sacrificing a lamb.

In the passage above, God is stating that even though the Israelites of the Judah kingdom have the outward, physical sign that they are in covenant with God, God says He is going to punish them right along with the heathen nations because they are uncircumcised in heart. The Zipporah incident notwithstanding, physical circumcision provided no magic protection against the punishments of God. Heart circumcision points to our heart attitude. It is about whether or not our heart has been yielded to God and His laws, or is rebellious towards God (i.e., uncircumcised). Earlier in Jeremiah, we find the same concept of circumcision of the heart.

**Jeremiah 4: 3 For thus saith YHWH to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.**

**4 Circumcise yourselves to YHWH, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.**

Again, this has nothing to do with physical circumcision. Earlier we pointed out how the physical circumcision symbolized the yielding of the procreative and (re-)productive power of a man to God. When the heart is circumcised, it indicates that one is yielding his entire person, his complete being to YHWH. Consider this in light of the great commandment: “You shall love YHWH with all your mind, and all your heart and all your soul and all your strength.”

“...[W]ith all your mind.” we have shown in other studies<sup>2</sup> that the mind and heart are often synonymous in the Bible. “...with all your soul.”— which

we showed in the same study refers to our intellect, our will and desires, and our emotions: all of which are functions of the mind/heart. “...with all your strength.”— the life is in the blood and it is the heart which circulates the lifeblood throughout the body and brain, thus giving a man his strength. So when God says to circumcise our hearts, he is telling us to yield our entire self to Him: our mind, heart, soul and strength.

Great confusion exists today (and has for millennia, since at least the days of Plato) between the concepts of “soul” and “spirit.” These are two totally different concepts, and yet while the heart and mind are often synonymous in biblical imagery, it is not always so. Biblically, the heart also serves as the center of man’s spirit. Man’s spirit is masculine; his soul is feminine. On this level, therefore, the heart is masculine and the mind is feminine. By circumcision, the heart is likened to the male organ. The heart/spirit is that which gives. The mind/soul is that which receives and incubates. Spiritual marriage (intercourse) results from the union of heart and mind, male and female, spirit and soul. ...But we are straying far too deep for our purposes here in the FMS.<sup>3</sup> We will continue back on course next issue.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. We have done an extensive study on this incident in our pair of tapes (#341 & 342), entitled *The Bridegroom of Blood*, \$10, which is part of our 10-tape album, *The Laver: Baptism and Circumcision*, \$33; all part of our studies on *The Tabernacle in the Wilderness*.
2. *The Truth about Hell, Soul and Spirit*, parts 1-4, tapes #310-313; \$18.
3. These things (“spiritual marriage,” etc.) are pictured in the *Tabernacle in the Wilderness* and are discussed in great depth in our audio album, *The Holy of Holies*, A-108, \$20.

Note: Other recommended and in-depth studies available on audiotape which are related to this FMS include: #207 & 208, *Heart Problems*; and #223 & 224: *War Preparations: Circumcision*; and #231 & 232, *Achan’s Heart Troubles*; \$8 per pair, plus \$2 s + h for up to 6 tapes. (Each pair is one continuous message.)

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