

Circumcision

One of the most confusing issues with regard to what statutes one must keep or not keep from the Torah is the matter of fleshly circumcision. Some maintain that men must still have the foreskin of their flesh circumcised in order to be saved. Usually two reasons are given:

- Abraham was circumcised and he was commanded to circumcise all the males of his household.
- Fleshly circumcision is required in the written Torah.

The apostle Saul, on the other hand, argues that fleshly circumcision is no longer applicable since we are no longer under the handwritten Torah but under grace and obligated only to the verbal Torah of Trust. One might also add that the requirement for fleshly circumcision as a means of salvation would place women in a different category, fleshly circumcision not being applicable to them. Since the requirement of fleshly circumcision in the written Torah is for males only, it calls into question the format that there is to be no difference between males and females as heirs to eternal life.¹

The confusion arises from the misinterpretation that fleshly circumcision was somehow part of the Abrahamic Covenants of Promise. Such a view is at odds with Saul's statements that one does not need to be circumcised in the flesh, yet he is obligated to the Torah of Trust and to walk as Abraham walked. These two ideas form an apparent contradiction, for if one has to be circumcised in the flesh to be part of the Abrahamic Covenants why would the apostles at the Council of Jerusalem and the apostle Saul, who reiterates the point a number of times, all deny the importance of fleshly circumcision?

Testimony of the New Testament

The apparent contradiction about the need for

fleshly circumcision begins to be unravelled within the explanations provided by the New Testament. We begin this inquiry with the events that brought this issue to the forefront.

In Acts, 15, we read that certain followers of the messiah were teaching, "Unless you be circumcised after the custom of Moses you cannot be saved."² Those teaching this doctrine were described as "certain (men) from the heresy of the Pharisees who believed (in the messiah)."³ They argued, "It is necessary to circumcise them (the converts) and charge them to keep the Torah of Moses."⁴ This teaching caused a great disturbance among members of the early assembly. It was the cause for convening the Council of Jerusalem in 49 C.E. With all of the apostles in attendance, Jacob (James), the brother of the messiah and first bishop of Jerusalem, issued the unanimous edict:

Wherefore I judge not to trouble those who from the nations turn to Yahweh; but to write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols, and *porneia* (sexual misconduct), and (the eating of) that which is strangled and blood.⁵

In the epistle sent by the apostles to the assemblies we read:

The apostles and the elders and the brethren, to those in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, brethren from out of the nations, greeting. Inasmuch as we have heard that certain ones from among us having gone out troubled you by words, upsetting your lives, saying, Be circumcised and keep the Torah; TO WHOM WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMAND; it seemed good to us having come with one accord, chosen

1 Gal., 3:25–29.
2 Acts, 15:1.
3 Acts, 15:5.
4 Acts, 15:5.
5 Acts, 15:19f.

men to send to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Saul, men who have given up their lives for the name of our sovereign, Yahushua the messiah. Therefore, we have sent Judas and Silas, themselves also by word telling the same things. For it seemed good to the sacred *ruach* and to us, no further burden to lay upon you than these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from (the eating of) blood and that which is strangled, and from *porneia*; from which keeping yourselves you will do well. Farewell.⁶

Accordingly, by the agreement of all the apostles and elders, circumcision of the flesh was not considered a requirement for salvation. Addressing this issue Saul writes the following:

Was anyone called having been circumcised (of the flesh)? Let him not be uncircumcised. Anyone being called in uncircumcision (of the flesh)? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping Yahweh's commandments is (something).⁷

For indeed, circumcision (in the flesh) profits if you do the (written) Torah; but if a transgressor of the Torah you are, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if the uncircumcision keep the justification of the Torah, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? And the uncircumcision by nature, fulfilling the Torah, shall judge you who with

letter and circumcision are a transgressor of the Torah.⁸

For in the messiah Yahushua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any strength, but trust working through love.⁹

The overall resolution to this issue is fully discussed in Part I of our present text. Nevertheless, for clarification, we shall address some of the important issues in this appendix. We begin with James, 2:10:

For whosoever shall keep the whole (written) Torah, and yet offend in one (point), he is guilty of all.

The first problem arises with the fact that no one can keep the entire written Torah, for, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of Yahweh."¹⁰ Also, "If we should say that we have not sinned, we make him (Yahweh) a liar, and his word is not in us."¹¹ Sin is defined as "transgression of the Torah."¹² Only the messiah was without sin.¹³ Therefore, we must conclude that only the messiah has qualified to receive the inheritance under the written Torah. We are not capable of qualifying because all of us, by nature, have transgressed and sinned against this agreement.

Second, we are not justified by the works of the Torah¹⁴—i.e., the sacrifices, cleansing rites, dress codes, and so forth. Circumcision of the flesh is nothing more than a fleshly work of the Torah meant to teach a higher point.¹⁵ For these reasons, Saul writes:

Behold, I Saul say unto you, that if you are circumcised (to be saved), the messiah shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that

⁶ Acts, 15:23–29.

⁷ 1 Cor., 7:18–20.

⁸ Rom., 2:25–27.

⁹ Gal., 5:6. Also see Rom. 4:9–12; Gal. 5:6–11, 6:15; Col. 2:11–14, 3:11.

¹⁰ Rom., 3:23; compare with 1 John, 1:8; Isa., 64:6; Ps., 53:3; 1 Kings, 8:46.

¹¹ 1 John, 1:10.

¹² 1 John, 3:4.

¹³ 1 Pet., 1:19, 2:21f; Heb., 4:15, 7:26; 2 Cor., 5:21; John, 8:46; Isa., 53:9.

¹⁴ Gal., 2:16.

¹⁵ Eph., 2:11–15. Circumcision in the flesh points to circumcision of the innermost self.

is circumcised (in the flesh), that he has become a debtor to do the whole Torah. Messiah has become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the Torah; you have fallen from grace. For we through the *ruach* wait for the hope of justification by trust. For in Yahushua the messiah neither circumcision is of any force, nor uncircumcision; but trust which works by love.¹⁶

Outside of the messiah, no other human is saved or qualifies to receive the inheritance by means of the handwritten Torah of Moses. When you sin you lose all rights. It is for this reason that we do not seek to be justified under the Torah but under grace.¹⁷ We receive the eternal inheritance as an act of grace from the messiah, who qualified under the written Torah, for he is the sole recipient of the promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenants of inheritance to which the Torah was attached.¹⁸ Under grace we by-pass the written Torah, our sins can be forgiven, and we can be accepted into the eternal inheritance as joint-heirs with the messiah.

Those requiring Yahwehists to be circumcised of flesh in order to be justified to receive the eternal inheritance are attempting to be justified by doing the fleshly works of the Torah. They fall under the condemnation and curses attached to these said fleshly works. Saul explains:

You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand. As many as desire to make a fair showing in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the (torture-)stake of messiah.

For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the (written) Torah; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But Yahweh forbid that I should glory, save in the (torture-)stake of our sovereign Yahushua the messiah, by whom the world is killed on a (torture-)stake unto me, and I unto the world. For in messiah Yahushua neither circumcision is of any force, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of Yahweh.¹⁹

We are not under the Torah of works.²⁰ Therefore, we are not obligated to be circumcised of flesh, because Abraham was not under the Torah of works.²¹ Rather, we are under the Torah of Trust,²² and we are justified by this trust,²³ as Abraham was under the Torah of Trust. Abraham, remember, was justified to receive the eternal inheritance of the covenant by “righteousness (justification) apart from works (of the Torah).”²⁴ Saul asked the key question when he wrote:

Is this blessedness then on the circumcision, or also on the uncircumcision? For we say the trust was counted to Abraham for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). How then was it counted? Being in circumcision (of the flesh), or in uncircumcision (of the flesh)? Not in circumcision, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION!”²⁵

Abraham was not in circumcision of the flesh when he received the covenant of the eternal inheritance but was justified by trust. It

¹⁶ Gal., 5:2–6. Compare with Rom., 3:19–24.

¹⁷ Rom., 6:14f; Gal, 4:21–31, 3:22–25, 5:18.

¹⁸ Gal., 3:15–29.

¹⁹ Gal., 6:11–16.

²⁰ Rom., 3:28.

²¹ Rom., 4:1–5.

²² Rom., 3:27.

²³ Gal., 2:15f.

²⁴ Rom., 4:6.

²⁵ Rom., 4:9–10.

is true that fleshly circumcision was later introduced but not as a requirement of the covenant. It was a token (sign) of his trust. Saul writes:

And he received A SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION (as) a seal of the righteousness of trust (while) in uncircumcision, for him to be a father of those believing through uncircumcision, for righteousness to be counted to them also, and a father of circumcision to those not of circumcision only, but also to those WALKING IN THE STEPS OF THE TRUST OF OUR FATHER ABRAHAM DURING UNCIRCUMCISION. For the promise was not through the (written) Torah to Abraham, or to his seed, (for) him to be the heir of the world, but through a righteousness of trust. For if those of the Torah are heirs, trust has been made of no effect, and the promise has been destroyed. For the Torah works out wrath; for where no Torah is, neither is there transgression. On account of this, it is of trust, that it be according to grace, for the promise to be made sure to all the seed, not to that of the Torah only, but also to that of the trust of Abraham, who is father of us all.²⁶

Again Saul writes:

Even as Abraham trusted Yahweh, and it was reckoned to him for justification, know then that they that are out of trust, these are the sons of Abraham; and the scripture foreseeing that out of trust Yahweh justifies the nations, before announcing the good news to Abraham: "In you

shall all nations be blessed (Gen., 12:3)." So that those out of trust are being blessed with trusting Abraham.²⁷

James adds:

Was not our father Abraham justified by works (of trust) offering up his son Isaak on the altar (Gen. 22:9)? You see that trust was working with his works; and out of the works (of trust) trust was perfected. And the scripture was fulfilled, saying, "And Abraham trusted Yahweh, and it was counted for justification to him;" and he was called, a friend of Yahweh.²⁸

In summary, it is clear that we cannot qualify (i.e., be justified) under the written Torah and the works of the Torah attached thereto. Accordingly, it is necessary for us to by-pass the Torah of Moses and come under grace. As Saul reports in the book of Galatians, "for if by the (handwritten) Torah is the inheritance, it is no longer by promise; but to Abraham through promise Yahweh granted it."²⁹ One who is under grace is under the Torah of Trust, as Abraham was. As a result, we must walk as Abraham walked. Abraham kept the commandments, laws, and statutes of Yahweh,³⁰ but he was never under the works of the Torah. The commandments, laws, and statutes that Abraham followed are nevertheless revealed in the handwritten Torah and prophets and are called the righteousness (justification) of the Torah and the justification of *eloah*, which is attained by trust.³¹

Because of the fleshly works found in the written Torah, the written Torah was not made to justify or give life; rather, it was only meant to give the knowledge of what sin is.³² For example, in the written Torah we find the

²⁶ Rom., 4:11–16.

²⁷ Gal., 3:6–9.

²⁸ James, 2:21–23; compare with Gen., 15:6; Isa., 41:8.

²⁹ Gal., 3:18.

³⁰ Gen., 26:1.

³¹ See the Greek text of Rom., 3:21–26, 9:30ff.

³² 1 Tim., 1:9; Rom., 3:20; Gal., 3:21ff.

knowledge of the Ten Commandments, which are part of the justification of the Torah. Meanwhile, under the written Torah you are required to keep both the Ten Commandments and works of the flesh, such as fleshly circumcision and sleeping in tents during the Festival of Tabernacles. Under the Abrahamic Covenants you are required only to keep those things later described as the righteousness (justification) of the Torah (e.g., the Ten Commandments and the Festival of Tabernacles itself). Therefore, we are still required to keep the Ten Commandments,³³ but we no longer need to concern ourselves with sleeping in tents during the Festival of Tabernacles (a work of the Torah) or with being circumcised of flesh.

Testimony from the Old Testament

We will now confirm the words of the New Testament by those of the Old Testament. A close examination of the book of Genesis, for example, reveals that fleshly circumcision was not a legal requirement of the original contract made with Abram (Abraham) in the Covenants of Promise. Let us demonstrate. Before the token of circumcision of the flesh was used by Abraham and his household (which did not come into effect until Genesis, 17), we read in Genesis, 12:

And Yahweh had said to Abram, Go out from your land, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great; and you will be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and curse the one despising you. And in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.³⁴

These things were given to Abraham while he was yet uncircumcised in the flesh. Again,

in Genesis, 12, it reports.

And Abram passed through the land as far as the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And Yahweh appeared to Abram and said. "I will give this land to your seed." And he built an altar there to Yahweh.³⁵

The promise of land, therefore, occurred prior to Abram's being circumcised in the flesh. Genesis, 13, states:

Yahweh said to Abram, Now lift up your eyes and look northward and southward and eastward and westward from the place where you are. For all the land which you see I will give to you, and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then your seed also will be counted.³⁶

Once more, we observe that these things were given to Abraham while he was uncircumcised in the flesh. Then, in Genesis, 15, we read that Yahweh would be a great reward to Abraham because Abraham "trusted Yahweh and it was counted to him for צדקה (tsadoqah; righteousness = justification),"³⁷ i.e., he was justified to receive the eternal inheritance while he was still uncircumcised in the flesh. The events continue with the words of Yahweh:

And he said to him, I am Yahweh who caused you to come out of Ur of the Kasadim (Ur of the Chaldees), to give you this land, to inherit it.³⁸

The covenant of inheritance is at this very time confirmed with Abraham, promising that

³³ Matt., 5:17–19, 19:16–19; 1 John, 5:2f.

³⁴ Gen., 12:1–3.

³⁵ Gen., 12:6f.

³⁶ Gen., 13:14–17.

³⁷ Gen., 15:1–6.

³⁸ Gen., 15:7.

he and his seed (the messiah)³⁹ would receive the inheritance of the land from the Nile to the Euphrates.⁴⁰ This covenant assures to us eternal life (by owning the land eternally) and a resurrection from the dead (for no one can inherit unless he is alive). Importantly, this covenant was confirmed while Abraham was still uncircumcised in the flesh. This passage also confirms that the land was already promised to Abraham as an inheritance and he was justified by trust in that covenant at least 14 years before undergoing fleshly circumcision, Abraham's being circumcised when he was 99 years old.⁴¹

The evidence proves that fleshly circumcision was not a requirement for Abraham in the Covenants of Promise. If fleshly circumcision had been required, Abraham would have been circumcised in the flesh at the age of 75, prior to Yahweh making any Covenants of Promise with him and before he would have been allowed to enter the Promised Land to dwell. Yet Yahweh did make this agreement with Abraham some 24 years prior to commanding his circumcision in the flesh.⁴² The resolution to our problem, therefore, is that there are two separate forms of circumcision listed in Genesis, 17:9–15. The important verse reads:

This is my covenant which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. AND (i.e., besides this) you shall circumcise the foreskin of your flesh, and IT SHALL BE A TOKEN OF THE COVENANT between you and me. And every male among you shall be circumcised the eighth day for your generations born within your house or

bought with money of any stranger, which is not from your seed.⁴³

Two different circumcisions are specifically mentioned: (1) circumcision of the covenant AND (2) circumcision of the foreskin in the flesh, which is only a token of the covenant.

The covenant of circumcision is circumcision of the *lebab* (innermost self), which is promised in the covenant agreement.⁴⁴ Circumcision of the innermost self refers to the removal of sin. The males referenced here are the elect. Remember, as of yet, Abraham has not received even one of the promises. Therefore, this eternal circumcision cannot refer to any fleshly circumcision.⁴⁵ Saul reports:

For it is not he that is outwardly a Judahite, neither that which is outwardly in circumcision of the flesh; but he that is hiddenly a Judahite, and circumcision is of the innermost self, in *ruach*, not in letter (the written Torah); of whom the praise is not of men but of Yahweh.⁴⁶

In Genesis, 17:10–11, the mention of the token of fleshly circumcision follows the word “ו (AND).” It is made a separate item from the covenant of circumcision. This second circumcision was in the flesh and only a token. This token is not a condition of the covenant; it is merely a sign of agreement, as a wedding ring is a token of a marriage. Abraham's fleshly circumcision was a token of his trust in this promised covenant of circumcision.⁴⁷ The act was performed out of obedience. It was never a condition for the original inheritance, for which Abraham was already justified by trust. We are not justified by tokens but by the conditions laid out in the covenant itself. Further, the token of

³⁹ Gal., 3:15f.

⁴⁰ Gen., 15:12–20.

⁴¹ In Gen., 16, Sarai (Sarah) gives Abram (Abraham) her handmaid, the Egyptian woman named Hagar, who subsequently bears him a son, Ishmael. In Gen., 17, Abram becomes 99 years old and his son, Ishmael, is 13 years old. At this time, they are both circumcised in the flesh (Gen., 17:24–26). This data proves that at least 14 years had passed from Abraham being declared justified until the token of fleshly circumcision was first given.

⁴² Gen., 12:1–4.

⁴³ Gen., 17:10f.

⁴⁴ Compare with Deut., 30:6; Jer., 4:4; Rom., 2:28f; Phil., 3:2–11; Col., 2:11.

⁴⁵ Heb., 11:13.

⁴⁶ Rom., 2:28f.

⁴⁷ Compare with Rom., 4:11.

fleshly circumcision for Abraham continued only for “your (Abraham’s) generations born in your house.” The token would not apply to later generations born outside the household of Abraham.

Next, as we have already said, when Abraham was circumcised in the flesh it was not done to abide by any statutes or *torath* (laws); rather it was followed under the guidance to “obey the voice of Yahweh.”⁴⁸ For example, just because the messiah obeyed Yahweh and went out into the wilderness and fasted for 40 days does not mean that it is a requirement that we must all do likewise. Yet, if Yahweh personally commands us to go into the wilderness and fast, we must obey his voice. Therefore, Abraham’s fleshly circumcision was not a condition of the eternal covenant (i.e., a matter of statute or commandment) but rather a matter of Abraham obeying Yahweh’s voice.

Further, the lack of importance of fleshly circumcision is demonstrated by Yahweh delaying the fleshly circumcision of the Israelites for 40 years during the wilderness sojourn after the Exodus⁴⁹—this regardless of the fact that it was already commanded in Leviticus during the first year of their being in the wilderness for all males eight days old to be circumcised.⁵⁰ It was merely a fleshly work attached to their entering the Promised Land, a teaching tool, holding prophetic significance by pointing to the greater circumcision of the *lebab* (innermost self).

Since Abraham was not justified by works and was already found justified prior to the token of fleshly circumcision, Abraham’s justification by trust and his keeping of the commandments, laws, and statutes were not the works of the flesh found in the Torah. Works of the Torah were added to teach the Israelites because of their sin.⁵¹ Abraham was not required to do these added works because he

obeyed Yahweh’s voice, and kept Yahweh’s statutes, laws, and commandments.⁵² Therefore, he was not subject to the penalty of sin by the addition of works and judgments.

The works of the Torah (e.g., sacrifices, cleansing rites, washings, etc.) and the judgments began to be added at Mount Sinai because the Israelites sinned against the covenant agreement. They continually rebelled against Yahweh and would not listen to his voice. After the incident of the Israelites building the golden calf—thereby breaking their marriage agreement with Yahweh⁵³—the angel Yahu Yahweh continued to augment the conditions of the covenant with commandments, statutes, and laws specifying with greater detail what was required. The continuing rebellious acts by the Israelites started a mounting list of augmentations which were against them.⁵⁴ These augmentations were all legal within the Covenants of Promise—listen and obey the voice of Yahweh.⁵⁵ They do not stand against the righteousness of the Torah,⁵⁶ but they do intensify the original covenant for teaching purposes.

Conclusion

To answer those who would demand fleshly circumcision for the followers of the messiah, we refer to Keph’s comment, “Now, then, why do you tempt *eloah*, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”⁵⁷ Keph’s statement was made in response to the Pharisee converts to Christianity who wanted to require the early assembly members coming from among the nations to be circumcised in the flesh and to keep all the laws of Moses, i.e., including the works of the Torah which were against us (the *dogmasin*, such as animal sacrifices, cleansing rites, customs in food and clothing, fleshly circumcision, etc.).⁵⁸ These *dogmasin* (public

⁴⁸ Gen., 26:5.

⁴⁹ Josh., 5:2–8.

⁵⁰ Lev., 12:3.

⁵¹ Gal., 3:6–20.

⁵² Gen., 26:1–5.

⁵³ Exod., 32:1–30; compare with Jer., 31:31f.

⁵⁴ Compare with Ezek., 20:21–26.

⁵⁵ Deut., 27:10.

⁵⁶ Gal., 3:15–20.

⁵⁷ Acts, 15:10.

⁵⁸ Acts, 15:5.

decrees), coming in the form of statutes and laws, were augmentations attached to the original requirements of the Covenants of Promise made with Abraham.⁵⁹ With the manifestation of grace at the death and resurrection of the messiah, the fleshly regulations of the Torah had been nailed to the stake.⁶⁰

On the other hand, the statutes, laws, and commandments observed by Abraham were not classified as works of the Torah.⁶¹ Therefore, they were not annulled with the death of the messiah.⁶² Keph's words and the subsequent council's decree from Jerusalem were simply trying to convey the fact that the nations should not be put under the burdens of fleshly works and were to simply return to the original agreement made with Abraham in the Covenants of Promise WHILE HE WAS IN UNCIRCUMCISION. Abraham only used fleshly circumcision as a token of his trust in the covenant of circumcision. Therefore, we must walk as Abraham walked, continuing in righteousness and obeying Yahweh while either in uncircumcision or in circumcision of the flesh. We must also keep the laws, statutes, and commandments attached to the Abrahamic Covenants of Promise.

In reality, there is no contradiction between the Old and New Testaments. Under grace we by-pass the handwritten Torah, which contains the added works of the flesh, and revert back to the righteousness of the Torah, i.e., obeying

Yahweh and his charge and keeping the statutes, laws, and commandments that Abraham abided by while in uncircumcision. These conditions are revealed in the Torah separately from the works of the Torah. Fleshly circumcision is a work of the Torah and is a yoke which the fathers could not bear.

Finally, the above conclusions do not mean that it is wrong for someone to be circumcised in the flesh, no more than it would be wrong to abstain from eating unclean meats (rats, skunks, snakes, pigs, etc.). If one does such things for the right reasons, such as for health considerations, as a token of the covenant, and as a reminder of their prophetic meanings, they can be beneficial. On the other hand, if you seek to be justified (made righteous) in order to receive the inheritance of eternal life by means of fleshly circumcision, the eating of only clean meat, and so forth, you are obligated to keep the entire handwritten Torah, including all of its works (which fleshly man is incapable of doing). Further, you fall from grace, for you seek justification outside of the messiah and the Torah of Trust.

If we are justified by the handwritten Torah and its fleshly works, then we have no need for the messiah, with whom we are to be joint-heirs in the Abrahamic Covenants of Promise. Nevertheless, Scriptures teach us that we can only come to the eternal inheritance by means of the messiah.

⁵⁹ Gal., 3:15–20.

⁶⁰ Col., 2:11–16.

⁶¹ Gen., 26:5; compare with Rom., 4:1–3.

⁶² Eph., 2:11–17; cf., Rom., 9:30–32; Gal., 2:15–3:14.