

MORE THAN JUST CIRCUMCISION

Up to this day the question of whether the rite of circumcision is to be kept by (non-Jewish) believers in the Messiah, is one of great controversy and difference of opinion. Some groups feel that physical circumcision was given as an everlasting sign of Yahweh's covenant with his people and should therefore be upheld by all who see themselves as Yisraelites, even in the wider sense of the word. Others object by referring to numerous New Covenant Scriptures which seem to indicate specifically that those from the Gentile nations coming to belief in the Messiah, should not be circumcised, because this would nullify the fact that their salvation was purely a matter of Yahweh's favour bestowed upon them and had nothing to do with performing certain rituals in order to be worthy in Yahweh's sight. The controversy surrounding circumcision is not to be taken lightly. It is more than evident that it has sadly become a major bone of contention and source of disunity - especially among Messianic believers who are all serious about absolute obedience and restoring the complete Word of Yahweh to its rightful place in their lives. Let us take a closer look at some of the more important Scriptural perspectives in this regard.

When Avraham was commanded by Yahweh to circumcise "every male child among you ... every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with silver from any foreigner who is not of your seed" (Bereshit 17: 10-14), he had already received the covenant with its promises of a land as everlasting possession and a posterity, including people from "many nations" (see Bereshit 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-9). Circumcision was only a "sign" of the covenant between Yahweh and Avraham, which had already firmly been established (Bereshit 17:11). Shaul emphasises this fact in Rom 4:10-12 "How then was it (Avraham's righteousness) reckoned? Being in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the belief while in uncircumcision, for him to be a father of all those believing through uncircumcision, for righteousness to be reckoned to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the belief which our father Avraham had in uncircumcision" (see also Gal 3:7,9,18,29).

Taking the above-mentioned truth as point of departure, in the New Covenant Scriptures it is confirmed time and again that (1) circumcision should never be thought of as a condition for salvation, and (2) believers coming out of a gentile (non-Jewish) background should never be urged to be circumcised - see Acts 15:1vv; Rom 2:26 ("So, if an uncircumcised one watches over the righteousness of the Torah, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned as circumcision?"); Rom 2:28 ("For he is not a Yehudite who is so outwardly, neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh"); Rom 3:30-31 ("Since it is one Elohim who shall declare right the circumcised by belief and the uncircumcised through belief. Do we then nullify the Torah through the belief? Let it not be! On the contrary, we establish the Torah"); Rom 4:8-9 ("blessed is the man to whom Yahweh shall by no means reckon sin. Is this blessing then upon the circumcised only, or also upon the uncircumcised?"); Rom 15:8-9; 1 Cor 7:18 ("Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised"); 1 Cor 7:19 ("The circumcision is naught, and the uncircumcision is naught, but the guarding of the commands of Elohim does matter!"); Gal 5:2 ("See, I, Shaul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Messiah shall be of no use to you"); Gal 5:6 ("For in Messiah Y'shua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any strength, but belief working through love"); Gal 6:13; Gal 6:15; Phil 3:3 ("We are the circumcision, who are serving Elohim in the Spirit, and boasting in Messiah Y'shua and do not trust in the flesh"); Col 2:11 ("In Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Messiah"); Col 3:11 ("where there is not Greek and Yehudite, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner, Scythian, slave, free, but Messiah is all, and in all").

The argument that followers of the Messiah should be circumcised because He was circumcised, is not completely valid. Surely, it is not a requirement for the followers of Messiah to go into the wilderness and fast for 40 days, because the Messiah had done so! Some of the things that the

Messiah did while He was on earth, had to do with the fact that He came (uniquely) as the Saviour of this world, to fulfil the purpose which his Father had set apart for Him. In his letters Shaul stated clearly that Messiah "has become a servant of the circumcised for the truth of Elohim, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and for the gentiles to praise Elohim for His compassion" (Rom 15:8-9). Also that by the circumcision of Messiah (not only when He was 8 days old, but more so when He was executed some 30 years later, literally being cut off from the face of this world) those who believe in Him were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (Col 2:11-12).

The argument that Scriptures declare that in the future temple (described in Yechezkel 40 - 48) "no son of a foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh" (44:9) is allowed in Yahweh's set-apart place, should also be put in the proper perspective. It should be noted that it is also stated, in connection with this future temple, that all kinds of offerings are to be brought and sacrificed to the honour of Yahweh in this temple. We know, however, that for the present time, physical offerings have come to an end - at least temporarily - because (1) the people of Yisrael have abused the sacrificial system which had been given for their own benefit - see Amos 8:3,10; Hoshea 2:11; Ekah (Lamentations) 5:15; Yahuel (Joel) 1:13; (2) we do not have a physical temple at this time, and (3) Y'shua has fulfilled those offerings that were previously needed for the atonement of sin. Yechezkel 40 - 48 clearly implies that an offering system of some sorts will be restored in future. This means that the offering system has been temporarily suspended until such time that the temple is restored to its former esteem and Yahweh is once again acknowledged as the King of Kings and Master of all. It seems that the same principle is applied to circumcision. Just as the rite of circumcision had been suspended for 40 years while the Yisraelites wandered through the wilderness and subsequently re-installed by Yahushua, the forerunner of the Messiah in the Old Covenant, upon entrance into the promised land, so it has once again been suspended (at least in the case of believers from a non-Jewish background), until Y'shua the Messiah comes, his followers are resurrected with incorruptible bodies and introduced to the Land promised to their forefather Avraham.

We who have entered into the promised New Covenant have indeed experienced the truth of Devarim 30:6 "And Yahweh your Elohim shall circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your being, so that you might live". This is confirmed in a hidden way in verse 12 of the same chapter, where the question is being asked "Who shall ascend into the heaven for us ...?" In Hebrew this question sounds something like this: "Mi ya'aleh lanu hashamayemah ...?" What is most interesting is that the first letters of each of these four Hebrew words spell the word "milah" which means "circumcision". The last or final letters of each of these four words form the Name of the Almighty "YHWH". So we have a wonderful confirmation that true circumcision really is only from Yahweh and cannot be performed by man's hands!

The root word for circumcision ("mul" or "malal") means to cut off and the sense is clearly that the foreskins of males are being cut off as a symbol of the flesh and sinful nature being cut off or cut out of a believer's life. The message of Scriptures is clear: If the sinful nature is not cut off from a believer's heart, then he or she will be cut off from among Yahweh's people. This can be seen in a passage like YeshaYahu 48:18-19 "If only you had listened to My commands! Then your ... name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me." Sometimes, however, especially in the book of YeshaYahu, this very concept of cutting off is used to emphasise the great favour of Yahweh towards his people. YeshaYahu 48:9 "For My Name's sake I postponed My displeasure, and for My praise I held it back from you, so as not to cut you off"; YeshaYahu 55:13 "Instead of the thorn the cypress comes up, and instead of the nettle the myrtle comes up. And it shall be to Yahweh for a name, for an everlasting sign which is not cut off"; YeshaYahu 56:5 "to them I shall give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters - I give them an everlasting name that is not cut off." Let us not fall into the trap of thinking or talking about circumcision in such a way that its deeper purpose, which centres around Yahweh's abundant favour, is being thrown overboard.