

CIRCUMCISION

1. Circumcision was first required of Abram the first Jew, as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:11). It was a command of such a high degree of importance as to threaten those who did not comply with this with excommunication (Gen. 17:14)
2. This covenant was that God would give Abraham an uncountable number of descendants and the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 17:5–6).
3. Abraham was sexually dead at age 99, when God told him to circumcise himself (Gen. 17:1, 17 Rom. 4:19).
4. Circumcision is the cutting away of some of the foreskin from the male phallus (Gen. 17:14)
5. Why circumcision? One of my source materials, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, reads *Genesis 17 does not furnish any clear rationale for the establishment of this rite [or circumcision] as mandatory for the family and descendants of Abraham*. This tells me immediately that *this* book is going to be a great deal of help to me.
 - a. For decades, God has promised Abraham that he would be a father of a multitude of nations and an uncountable number of people (Gen. 12:2 15:4–5 17:4–6).
 - b. Abraham was sexually dead (Gen. 18:12 Rom. 4:19a).
 - c. Sarai was sexually dead (Gen. 16:2 18:11 Rom. 4:19b).
 - d. God caused the union of two sexually dead people to raise up the Jewish people (with whom God would keep His covenant (Gen. 17:21).
 - e. The cutting away of the old flesh gave new life to Abraham.
 - f. God kept His promise to Abraham (Gen. 21:2–3)
 - g. Abraham circumcised Isaac as God had commanded him (Gen. 21:4)
 - h. Now, every time that Abraham urinates, he will see that God keeps His promises (Gen. 17:11).
 - i. Every time that a Jew urinates, he will see that God kept His promises to Abraham and He will keep His promises to the Jews (Gen. 17:12).
 - j. Furthermore, the sign of circumcision is a seal of the relationship between God and Abraham (and later his descendants) (Rom. 4:11). *Bible Difficulties* makes the analogy of the wedding ring given from a husband to a wife as a seal of their total, exclusive, lifelong commitment. God, in His many promises to Abraham, has certainly made a commitment to him; and being circumcised (and circumcising one's son) has the connotation of a return of commitment (Deut. 10:16 Jer. 4:4).
6. Since circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham (and therefore, with all other Jews), men who joined with the Jews were also circumcised (Gen. 17:23, 27 43:13–24)
7. Circumcision and the Exodus generation:
 - a. Although the rite of circumcision continued for several generations, Moses had not circumcised his own children so God had his wife circumcise them, which ticked off his wife (Ex. 4:25–26).
 - b. Had Moses not done this, he would have been killed under the principle of the sin unto death (Ex. 4:24).
 - c. Under the Law, Israel had been commanded to circumcise their children (Lev. 12:3).
 - d. Because of the unbelief of the Exodus generation, they had not circumcised their own children who had been born in the desert (Josh. 5:5, 7).
 - e. That entire generation did die the sin unto death (Josh. 5:4, 6–7).
 - f. The two notable exceptions were Caleb and Joshua.
8. Circumcision took on other meanings:
 - a. It represented obedience to God, therefore being *circumcised of heart* was obeying God (often unto salvation) (Deut. 10:16 30:6 Acts 7:51 Col. 2:11).
 - b. *Uncircumcised of lips* means that Moses felt he was not articulate enough to speak God's truth to Pharaoh (Ex. 6:12, 30).
 - c. *Uncircumcised of ears* also indicates negative volition toward God (Jer. 6:10).

- d. *Uncircumcised of heart* refers to the unsaved (Jer. 9:26 Ezek. 44:7, 9 Acts 7:51) as does *uncircumcision of the flesh* (Col. 2:13).
 - e. God told Israel to circumcise themselves to the Lord; that is, they were to set themselves apart to God as believers and then as obedient (Jer. 4:4).
 - f. Jeremiah makes it clear that circumcision has a symbolic meaning in Jer. 9:25–26: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”
 - g. Circumcision, since it is tied to the new birth and the new promise of one who is sexually dead, is therefore tied to the idea of a new birth by obedience to the gospel of God (“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”). Abraham believed God and it was credited to his account as righteousness (Rom. 4:3; from Gen. 15:6).
9. Circumcision is mentioned only briefly in the gospels:
- a. Luke mentions the circumcision of John the Baptizer and of Jesus (Luke 1:59 2:21).
 - b. Jesus sets up an analogy concerning circumcision in John 7:21–24. Jesus tells them that healing a man on the Sabbath is no more works than circumcising an infant on the Sabbath.
10. Circumcision and the early church:
- a. In some portions of Acts and the epistles, circumcision and uncircumcision is merely a way to differentiate between Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:45 11:1–3 Gal. 2:7–9 Col. 4:11) or between legalistic Jews and saved Gentiles (Eph. 2:11). Sometimes it is used in a derogatory sense (Titus 1:10).
 - b. The rite of circumcision was an early issue of legalism in the church and it was decided early on that circumcision was not a necessary step in salvation (Acts 15:1–12 I Cor. 7:17–19).
 - c. Paul circumcised Timothy, not in order to obey the Mosaic law, but as a matter of expediency, being all things to all men so that he might save some (Acts 16:1–3). However, when circumcision was an issue and the legalists pressed for Titus to be circumcised, he was not (Gal. 2:1–5).
 - d. When explaining the purpose of the Law and contrasting being born as a Jew or as a Gentile, Paul uses circumcision as a portion of the Law which is a non-issue (Gal. 5:6 6:15 Col. 3:11).
 - i. Being circumcised is an insult when the rest of the Law is not obeyed (Rom. 2:14, 23–27 Gal. 5:1–3).
 - ii. True circumcision is the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:28–29).
 - iii. Abraham was justified by faith decades before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:9–10).
 - iv. Abraham was circumcised after salvation is a step of obedience and a sign (Gen. 4:9–11 Rom. 4:12–14).
 - e. The legalistic Jews were called the *party of the circumcision* (Gal. 2:12).
 - f. When we seek to be justified by law (represented by being circumcised) then we have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:1–4).
 - g. Some of the legalists tried to make it sound as though Paul was teaching circumcision, but Paul debunks that saying that these legalists would not be persecuting him if he did teach circumcision (Gal. 5:11).
 - h. Paul suggests that those who believe the circumcision is full obedience to God's will should go one step further and whack the whole thing off (Gal. 5:12).
 - i. Believers in Jesus Christ are the true circumcision (Phil. 3:3).
 - j. The believers which were primarily sent to the Jews (the writer of Hebrews, James, Peter and John) do not even mention circumcision in their writings (with the exception of John briefly in his gospel).
11. The shedding of blood, the cutting away of the old life are two themes found throughout Scripture; to which circumcision relates.
12. Circumcision is not exclusively Jewish; anthropologists have found tribes in America, Australia and Africa who practice circumcision.