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Frequently Asked Questions

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	JBK: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Koren</i> (2000)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
Ara: Aramaic	KJV: King James Version
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	LES: <i>Lexham English Septuagint</i> (2019)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	LS: <i>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	LSJM: <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	LXX: Septuagint
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	m. Mishnah
CGL: <i>Cambridge Greek Lexicon</i> (2021)	MT: Masoretic Text
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Holladay)	NASB: <i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1977)
CJB: <i>Complete Jewish Bible</i> (1998)	NASU: <i>New American Standard Update</i> (1995)
CJSB: <i>Complete Jewish Study Bible</i> (2016)	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NEB: <i>New English Bible</i> (1970)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NETS: <i>New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> (2007)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
ESV: <i>English Standard Version</i> (2001)	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ger: German	NIV: <i>New International Version</i> (1984)
GNT: <i>Greek New Testament</i>	NJB: <i>New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic</i> (1985)
Grk: Greek	NJPS: <i>Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> (1999)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	NKJV: <i>New King James Version</i> (1982)
HCSB: <i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> (2004)	NRSV: <i>New Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
Heb: Hebrew	NLT: <i>New Living Translation</i> (1996)
HNV: <i>Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible</i>	NT: <i>New Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	

OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)

TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Circumcision

How is the issue of circumcision approached within today's Messianic community?

The following material has been adapted and expanded from J.K. McKee, *The Messianic Walk: The End-Time Move of God* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2020), pp 87-89.

In the early years of the 2020s, the Messianic faith community as a whole, does not have much of a coherent theology of circumcision, even though its physical and spiritual components do make up a critical part of the Biblical narrative. The Ancient Israelites were admonished in Deuteronomy 10:16, “circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer” (NASU; cf. Colossians 2:11), speaking to the important lesson of circumcision which all can be agreed upon: removing an outer barrier placed between a human being and God. Yet, the physical rite of male circumcision, is something Messianic people seldom address, mainly because it is a *sexual issue*. However, anyone knowing about the standard basics of the Jewish life cycle, should be familiar enough with how by ancient convention, male Jewish infants are circumcised on the eighth day. Furthermore, anyone with a cursory understanding of some of the controversies which arose in the First Century *ekklēsia*, should be aware of how circumcision was a huge debate involving the inclusion of Greek and Roman Believers into the Body of Messiah.

When looking across the Holy Scriptures, it should be fair enough for students to deduce that there are three main aspects of the issue of circumcision which they should weigh:

1. **Circumcision for Ancient Israel** as the memorial sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17:9-13), and specified to be practiced by infant male descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on the eighth day after birth (Leviticus 12:3).
2. **Circumcision in Second Temple Judaism** as a practice which had been prohibited during the Maccabean crisis on threat of death (1 Maccabees 1:48-49, 60-61; 2 Maccabees 6:10), and which was employed as the main rite of a non-Jew becoming a formal convert or proselyte to Judaism (b.*Keritot* 9a). Various hyper-conservative Jewish Believers of the First Century were seen to require circumcision, i.e., the formal ritual of a proselyte, for the new Greek and Roman Believers to be truly included in the people of God and/or granted salvation.

3. **Circumcision in modern times** is a widespread medical practice, particularly seen throughout North America, and is often believed to have significant health benefits. Past controversies witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures, such as circumcision being necessary for true inclusion in the people of God and/or salvation, are not witnessed in today's Messianic community.

Circumcision for Ancient Israel

Male circumcision, as some sort of cultural tradition, or even medical practice, was something which pre-dated the Patriarch Abraham, and was observed in societies contemporary to Ancient Israel—even being pre-historic to some degree. Frequently, male circumcision was observed as a rite observed prior to a male entering puberty or marriage.¹ Bible readers, however, most frequently associate circumcision as first and mainly involving the memorial sign of the Abrahamic Covenant:

“God also said to Abraham, ‘As for you, My covenant you must keep, you and your seed after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant that you must keep between Me and you and your seed after you: all your males must be circumcised. You must be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and this will become a sign of the covenant between Me and you. Also your eight-day-olds must be circumcised, every male, throughout your generations, including a house-born slave or a slave bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your seed. Your house-born slave and your purchased slave must surely be circumcised. So My covenant will be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant’” (Genesis 17:9-13, TLV).

So severe was male circumcision, that it was said, “But the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin—that person will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (Genesis 17:14, TLV). It is easy to see how male circumcision is associated in the Torah with being regarded as a fully incorporated member of God's own, per the scene of Jacob's sons deceiving the sons of Hamor the Hivite (Genesis 34). Circumcision status did undeniably grant outsiders who entered into the community of Ancient Israel, certain privileges which the uncircumcised sojourner in the community did not have.² This is especially seen in how all males eating of the Passover sacrifice had to be circumcised. Yet, sojourners or *gerim* who would go through circumcision to eat of the Passover, would consequently be regarded as natives:

¹ Editorial Staff, “Circumcision,” in Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), 5:567; T. Lewis and C.E. Armerding, “Circumcision,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:700; P.R. Williamson, “Circumcision,” in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 122.

² Williamson, “Circumcision,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, pp 123-124.

“Then ADONAI said to Moses and Aaron, ‘This is the ordinance of the Passover. No foreigner may eat it, but every man’s servant that is bought for money, after you have circumcised him, may eat it...But if an outsider dwells with you, who would keep the Passover for ADONAI, all his males must be circumcised. Then let him draw near and keep it. He will be like one who is native to the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat from it” (Exodus 12:43-44, 48, TLV).

Further in the Torah, Leviticus 12:3 would codify how for native born males, born into Ancient Israel, “In the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin is to be circumcised” (TLV). There is surely an expectation present within Moses’ Teaching that ethnic male Israelites are to be circumcised—especially in view of how Abraham was told, “But the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin—that person will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (Genesis 17:14, TLV). Ancient Israel’s enemies in the Tanach, in particular the Philistines, were often taunted for being “uncircumcised” (i.e., 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; 2 Samuel 1:20). Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom, prohibited circumcision as a part of forsaking God’s covenant (1 Kings 19:14). In the Prophets of the Tanach, it is witnessed how being “uncircumcised” is tantamount to being in a condition of faithlessness and rebellion toward God (Jeremiah 6:10; 9:25; Ezekiel 44:7, 9).

Circumcision in Second Temple Judaism

During the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., the Seleucid Greeks made it illegal for Jewish parents to circumcise their infant sons, on the threat of death:

“...and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they should forget the law and change all the ordinances...According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers’ necks” (1 Maccabees 1:48-49, 60-61, RSV).

“For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. These women they publicly paraded about the city, with their babies hung at their breasts, then hurled them down headlong from the wall” (2 Maccabees 6:10, RSV).

It is also witnessed how many Jewish men practiced epispasm, a term derived from the Greek verb *epispaō*, “to draw or drag after one” (LS),³ regarding how Jewish apostates would stretch the remaining skin on their penis and grow a new foreskin:

³ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 301.

“and they fashioned foreskins [epispaō; made a foreskin, LES] for themselves and apostatized from the holy covenant and joined themselves to the nations and sold themselves to do evil” (1 Maccabees 1:15, NETS).

The right for the Jewish people to fight for the Torah, covenant, and to practice matters such as circumcision, was something which the Maccabees properly fought and gave their lives for. Resultant of the Maccabean crisis, though, practices such as circumcision did take on a nationalistic significance for much of the Jewish community—which may have exceeded some of its Biblical importance. And, it affected how outsiders, particularly Greeks and Romans recognizing the One God of Israel, would be integrated into the Synagogue and religious apparatus.

God-fearers were a class of Synagogue attendees, who were often Greeks and Romans who recognized the One God of Israel, were monotheistic, and voluntarily took on various aspects of a Torah life such as the Sabbath or dietary laws, but stopped short of circumcision for various reasons.⁴ Circumcision was the main ritual expected of a non-Jew, becoming a formal Jewish convert or proselyte. This is detailed in a variety of sources, Biblical and historical—with some instances of circumcision-proselytization notably being compelled by outside forces or a significant level of fear:

“in every city and country wherever the ordinance was posted, wherever the proclamation was made, there was gladness and joy among the Judeans, a feast and mirth. And many of the nations were circumcised and became Judeans out of fear of the Judeans” (Esther 8:17, NETS).

“And when Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day” (Judith 14:10, RSV).

“Hyrcanus took also Dora and Marissa, cities of Idumea, and subdued all the Idumeans; and permitted them to stay in that country, if they would circumcise their genitals, and make use of the laws of the Jews; and they were so desirous of living in the country of their forefathers, that they submitted to the use of circumcision, and the rest of the Jewish ways of living; at which time therefore this befell them, that they were hereafter no other than Jews” (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.257-258).⁵

⁴ Robert G. Hall, “Circumcision,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1029; T.R. Schreiner, “Circumcision,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 138; “circumcision,” in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 121.

⁵ Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 352.

“He [Aristobolus] was called a lover of the Grecians; and had conferred many benefits on his own country, and made war against Iturea, and added a great part of it to Judea, and compelled the inhabitants, if they would continue in that country, to be circumcised, and to live according to the Jewish laws. He was naturally a man of candor, and of great modesty, as Strabo bears witness in the name of Timagenes: who says thus:—‘This man was a person of candor, and very serviceable to the Jews, for he added a country to them, and obtained a part of the nation of the Itureans for them and bound them to them by the bond of the circumcision of their genitals’” (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 13.318-319).⁶

“And thus were all these men barbarously murdered, excepting Metilius; for when he entreated for mercy, and promised that he would turn Jew, and be circumcised, they saved him alive, but none else. This loss to the Romans was but light, there being no more than a few slain out of an immense army; but still it appeared to be a prelude to the Jews’ own destruction” (Josephus *Wars of the Jews* 2.454).⁷

“Just as your forefathers entered the covenant only with circumcision and immersion and sprinkling of blood through the sacrifices, so they will enter the covenant only through circumcision, immersion, and sprinkling of blood on the altar” (b.*Keritot* 9a).⁸

It should hardly be surprising that by the First Century C.E., as the good news or gospel was going out into the Mediterranean, and many scores of new Greek and Roman Believers were entering into the *ekklēsia*—in close contact with Jewish Believers—that the issue of whether or not they needed to be circumcised as Jewish proselytes arose. If they remained uncircumcised, would these new Greek and Roman Believers in Israel’s Messiah, perhaps influence Jewish Believers in the ways of pagan polytheism? Would their presence result in the Jewish Believers being assimilated into Hellenism, as was fought against during the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E.?

Debates are witnessed throughout Paul’s letter to the Galatians, over whether circumcision was necessary of Greek and Roman Believers for them to be fully received into the Body of Messiah. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 met to decisively address the issue: “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5, ESV). Circumcision was not deemed necessary for non-Jewish Believers to be fully welcomed in as equal brothers and sisters of the Jewish Believers (Galatians 3:28). Non-Jewish Believers in Israel’s Messiah were to be reckoned as members of God’s own via the faith that they had placed in Him (Acts 15:7-9; Galatians 3:8-9), not by going through ritual proselyte conversion.

While circumcision was not required or expected of the new, non-Jewish Believers for inclusion within the Body of Messiah, this did not all at all mean that male circumcision was

⁶ Ibid., 357.

⁷ Ibid., 626.

⁸ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*. MS Windows XP. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005. CD-ROM.

Circumcision

to be rendered inoperative for Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah. For a Jewish Believer to go through epispasm, was likely to invite assimilation into Greco-Roman paganism.

Yeshua the Messiah Himself was circumcised (Luke 1:57-66). The Apostle Paul was circumcised (Philippians 3:5), and he definitely said, "Then what is the advantage of being Jewish? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? Much in every way. First of all, they were entrusted with the sayings of God" (Romans 3:1-2, TLV). Paul had his disciple Timothy, who was born of a Jewish mother but had a Greek father, circumcised (Acts 16:1-3). Yet, it is also seen—likely in response to how circumcision had a hyper-nationalistic significance for many Jewish people, subsequent to the Maccabean crisis—how Paul warned against any over-inflated self-opinions about circumcision which various First Century Jews might have had:

"Circumcision is indeed worthwhile if you keep the Torah; but if you break the Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if the uncircumcised keeps the righteous decrees of the Torah, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?" (Romans 2:25-26, TLV).

Here it is witnessed how Paul said that circumcision status can be rendered as uncircumcision status, if a Jewish person is circumcised but breaks the high moral and ethical expectations of the Torah.

That the "circumcision" addressed in a wide degree of the Apostolic Scriptures has less to do with a medical procedure, and more to do with the ritual conversion of a proselyte to Judaism—can be recognized in how the Greek Titus was not compelled to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3), but Paul had the half-Jew Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:1-3):

"Yet not even Titus who was with me, a Greek, was forced to be circumcised" (Galatians 2:3, TLV).

"Now Paul came to Derbe and Lystra. There was a disciple there named Timothy, son of a woman who was a Jewish believer and a Greek father, who was well-spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him for the sake of the Jewish people in those places—for they all knew that his father was Greek" (Acts 16:1-3, TLV).

Why was Titus not circumcised as a proselyte to Judaism? Because Titus was a Greek, and it was clear enough at the Jerusalem meeting in Galatians 2:1-10 that Paul wanted to see the Jerusalem Jewish Believers accept him as a fellow brother in Israel's Messiah without being circumcised as a proselyte. Titus *was a Greek* person transformed by the good news, and by the trust that he had placed in Israel's Messiah. Titus was not "compelled to be circumcised [note: the passive *ēnagkasthē peritēthēnai*]" (Galatians 2:3, NASU) by the Messianic Jewish leadership in Jerusalem.

Why was Timothy circumcised by Paul? Because Timothy was already half-Jewish, having a Jewish mother but a Greek father. For Timothy as someone with known Jewish

heritage not to be circumcised, would create unnecessary complications for the Jewish Apostle Paul taking him to Diaspora synagogues, and in his interactions with the Jewish community. In Acts 21:21, readers do encounter how a rumor had been circulated by a number of Paul's opponents. Apparently because Paul did not teach that non-Jewish Believers had to be circumcised as proselytes (Galatians 5:11) to be fully incorporated into the people of God—the rumor spread that Paul also taught against Jewish parents circumcising their infant males. As James the Just reported,

“They have been told about you—that you teach all the Jewish people among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or to walk according to the customs” (Acts 21:21, TLV).

As it is noted in *ABD*,

“...Paul circumcises Timothy, who has Jewish blood, and...Jerusalem Jews are suspicious of Paul not because he teaches Gentiles not to circumcise but because they erroneously suppose he teaches Jews not to circumcise their sons (Acts 21:21)...[T]he newly revealed plan of God includes Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles.”⁹

Timothy, if left uncircumcised as a half-Jew, could have presented some problems for Paul's ministry work if his national status was left ambiguous. So, various examiners are seen to conclude that by Paul circumcising Timothy, Paul was favorable toward Messianic Jewish Believers continuing to circumcise their sons.¹⁰ For a non-Jewish Greek such as Titus, however, he was to be accepted into the community of Messiah followers on the basis of the faith or trust he placed in the Messiah, and not by going through the rite of circumcision as a proselyte.

It is seen in the Apostolic Writings that circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29; Colossians 2:11) is given the highest priority for all Believers, Jewish or non-Jewish. Severe warnings are issued against ritual proselyte circumcision, in association with First Century non-Jewish Believers probably falling from grace (Galatians 5:1-4). What has been labeled Paul's “rule in all the assemblies” prohibited non-Jewish circumcision as a proselyte, as a condition of being called into Messiah faith (1 Corinthians 7:17-24).¹¹ It is also seen throughout Paul's letters that the issue of circumcision, and its importance for Jewish Believers, hardly dissipated after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15—as there would doubtlessly be those Jewish Believers who would continue to insist, to various degrees, that Greek and Roman Believers should be circumcised as formal Jewish proselytes for true inclusion in the people of God.

⁹ Hall, “Circumcision,” in *ABD*, 1:1030.

¹⁰ Schreiner, “Circumcision,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 139.

¹¹ Both Galatians 5:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 are complicated passages, involving translation, ancient background, and perspective issues, which are not often considered a great deal of present Messianic analysis. For a further discussion, consult the Messianic Apologetics FAQs, “Galatians 5:1-4,” “1 Corinthians 7:17-24.”

Within Paul's letters, readers see how various sectors, at least, of Jewish people, are referred to as "(the) circumcision," being neutral (Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:8, 9; Colossians 3:11; 4:11) to negative (Galatians 2:12; Ephesians 2:11; Philippians 3:2; Titus 1:10).

Circumcision in Modern Times

It is safe to say that male circumcision in modern times, certainly among Believers living in the West, does not have the same controversy with it, which it did for much of the First Century *ekklēsia*. Part of this is due to post-resurrection era realities, which place a much higher emphasis on water immersion or baptism (Galatians 3:27), something which can be practiced by both males and females. Yet, it is witnessed that circumcision of males is still essential for a non-Jew converting to one of the modern branches of Judaism.¹² Today's Messianic Judaism, however, is widely seen (although with some exceptions) to oppose any sort of modern conversion or proselyte ritual for non-Jewish people into its apparatus, if for any other reason, as any non-Jewish "converts to Messianic Judaism" would never be regarded as Jewish by the wider Jewish community.¹³

Within a great deal of contemporary, traditional Judaism, various customs and rites have emerged regarding the *b'rit milah* (covenant of circumcision), frequently and colloquially known via the Ashkenazic *bris*. These involve not only the actual procedure of medically circumcising a male child on the eighth day, but also traditional blessings invoking the Abrahamic Covenant, and the naming of the child (cf. Luke 1:59).¹⁴

Many, if not most of the people, in the contemporary Messianic movement, are not fully informed as to all of the specific details regarding the circumcision of infant males in our various congregations and assemblies. At most, we are probably aware of how a Messianic Jewish couple or intermarried couple, will make sure that a newborn male is circumcised on the eighth day. Sometimes, a Jewish *mohel*, who has been specially trained in circumcision, will circumcise a Messianic Jewish male infant. Involved with this will be various traditions and customs involving the naming of the male child, and the blessings issued upon him. When a Jewish *mohel* is not available, then if there is a medical doctor in one's local congregation, he or she will usually be consulted for the options which are available, which may then result in the infant male being circumcised in a hospital or clinical setting. At a later time, some kind of infant dedication, perhaps involving traditional Jewish circumcision blessings, will take

¹² "Circumcision," in R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Widoger, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161.

¹³ Michael Wolf, "Conversion of the Gentiles—'No Way!'", in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Voices of Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer Books, 2001), pp 133-139.

¹⁴ For a summary of some these main rituals, consult "Circumcision," in *EJ*, 5:570-572; George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), pp 145-149; Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), pp 7-13; also Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Customs: A Messianic Jewish Guide to the Biblical Lifecycle and Lifestyle* (Baltimore: Lederer: 1996), pp 23-26.

place. These are matters which may only be limited to the immediate family circumcising an infant son, or they may include wider parts of the congregational community—all dependent on the family's wishes and preferences.

There is no question in today's Messianic community that the infant sons of Messianic Jewish couples and intermarried couples should be circumcised. It is also most fortunate that the controversy of much of the First Century *ekklēsia*—formal proselyte circumcision to be fully reckoned as a member of God's people and/or granted salvation—is not present in the contemporary Messianic movement. **All agree that physical circumcision is not required for true inclusion as a member of God's own and/or salvation.**¹⁵ Yet, male circumcision has been a widescale medical practice in much of the West, for well over a century, and a majority of non-Jewish people in many countries have been medically circumcised as infants. Does this at all affect what non-Jewish couples, in Messianic congregations, should do with their infant sons?

In discussing the issue of circumcision in the contemporary Messianic community, the authors of the workbook *Messianic Judaism Class* (Teacher Book), provide the following answer. They assert, "For Gentiles, circumcision is not required or encouraged." But then in asking the question, "Should non-Jewish baby boys be circumcised?", they answer with, "It's not required, not encouraged, but also not forbidden."¹⁶ Another perspective is offered by Barney Kasdan in *God's Appointed Customs*:

"For Messianic Jews who represent the remnant of Israel, it is logical that they would desire to follow the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, as did the first-century Jewish believers in Yeshua. While non-Jews may also wish to have their sons circumcised, the eighth-day *b'rit milah* remains a distinctive sign between the Jewish people and the God of Israel."¹⁷

Although the medical benefits of male circumcision have been debated in recent times, the authors of *Messianic Judaism Class* address the question, "Are there any physical benefits to circumcision?", with, "There might be. They have discovered in Africa that the tribes that circumcise their males have a lower rate of HIV/AIDS infection."¹⁸ So what should non-Jewish couples, in today's Messianic movement, do regarding the issue of circumcision and a male infant?

Non-Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, who are not ethnic descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, do not have an expectation from the Torah to circumcise their infant males on the eighth day (Genesis 17:9-13; Leviticus 12:3) as *b'rit milah*. Yet, such non-

¹⁵ It does have to be recognized that there may be some in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement who may indeed teach that circumcision is required for full inclusion in the people of God and/or salvation.

¹⁶ James Appel, Jonathan Bernis, and David Levine, *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book (Copenhagen, NY: Olive Press, 2011), 59.

¹⁷ Kasdan, 23.

¹⁸ *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book, 58.

Circumcision

Jewish Believers in today's Messianic movement, particularly in a place such as North America, should hardly be discouraged to circumcise their infant males as a worthwhile medical practice with hygienic benefits. Such a hospital or clinical circumcision may, but frequently may not, be scheduled on the eighth day after birth. Non-Jewish couples who have a male infant child medically circumcised, may be seen to honor the spirit of the Torah commandment, even though it has not been specifically enjoined upon them in the Torah.

Various Messianic Jewish leaders today are seen to recognize that non-Jewish infant males undergoing circumcision as a medical practice, is hardly prohibited. In fact, a medical circumcision should likely be expected of non-Jewish couples in their congregations who have a male child. Yet, it is widely believed that the traditional Jewish ceremonies and blessings of the *b'rit milah*, involving the naming of a male child, should be reserved for infant males of Messianic Jewish and intermarried couples only—allowing there to be at least this distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish people in the assembly, when in various other areas it may not be so obvious. In the absence of a traditional Jewish *bris*, then another sort of ceremony or child dedication should be practiced to bless a non-Jewish infant male, who is born into the community of a Messianic congregation.

Beyond this brief analysis, looking at the issue of circumcision for the future, it can easily be recognized that an evaluation of relevant Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures passages, in detail, is probably going to be necessary,¹⁹ and with it some appreciated refinement and fine-tuning of this matter. (And, this should also be enjoined with a recognition of how more discussions on Biblical sexuality in general are needed in today's Messianic movement.) Thankfully, the circumcision controversy which divided many of the First Century Believers—formal proselyte circumcision for full inclusion within the people of God and/or salvation—**is not present** within today's Messianic community. Most of us properly recognize that salvation and being fully reckoned as a member of God's own, come via the faith and trust which each of us place in Israel's Messiah, and not any sort of circumcision status.

Still, as we await the return of Israel's Messiah to Planet Earth, questions, and perhaps even some new controversies, are doubtlessly going to be raised as to whether or not some of the future status of circumcision, has already started to break into our present time. Recognize how only those circumcised in heart and in flesh, will be permitted to enter into the Millennial Temple:

“You shall say to the rebellious ones, to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Enough of all your abominations, O house of Israel, when you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to profane it,

¹⁹ Perhaps similar to what has been provided regarding the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat* and dietary laws in Messianic Apologetics' *Messianic Sabbath Helper* (2015) and *Messianic Kosher Helper* (2014) publications.

even My house, when you offered My food, the fat and the blood; for they made My covenant void—*this* in addition to all your abominations. And you have not kept charge of My holy things yourselves, but you have set *foreigners* to keep charge of My sanctuary.” Thus says the Lord GOD, “No foreigner uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the sons of Israel, shall enter My sanctuary””” (Ezekiel 44:6-9, NASU).

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