

Christian Israelites and Circumcision

Why do we practice circumcision when Paul in Galatians 5:2 states, “If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing”?

God first gave the law of circumcision to Abraham, to be kept by him and his descendants.

“And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. 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. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.” Genesis 17: 9--14.

This was God’s first covenant with Israel and was an important instruction to follow:

“Thus saith the Lord God; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.” Ezekiel 44: 9.

In the New Testament, Paul was a Jew with a true belief in the Israelite faith:

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Romans 10:1.

Paul was chosen of God to be an apostle to the Christian church (Acts 9:1-29) and he preached to the Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews) as well as the Israelites. Paul knew that the Gentiles could not be held accountable for the Israelite law of circumcision, as the Gentiles were never under the law.

In Romans 3, the question is asked:

“What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” Romans 3:1-2.

Israelites, for whom the laws (in the books of Moses) were written, are justified (made right with God) by following these laws. The Gentiles or non-Jews are justified through faith in Jesus Christ alone. God wishes to be reconciled to both:

“Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Romans 3:29-31.

When God commanded Abraham to circumcise himself and his house, it was that the shedding of blood might be an atonement for sins:

“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” Hebrews 9:22.

Christian Israelites believe that their souls are saved through the sacrifice of Jesus, but we are also seeking to be made wholly free of evil which, we believe, includes following the Israelite laws. Circumcision and the shedding of the blood is important to our faith as it is symbolic of the purging of the evil from the body. In the same way, Jesus’ blood was shed on the cross as a remittance of sin for all souls:

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” Ephesians 1:7.

Circumcision does not give us soul salvation, but it is an outward sign of faith in God’s laws and commandments, and honors God’s original covenant with Abraham and his descendants.