

Doctrine of Circumcision

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary

1. Circumcision refers to the surgical removal of the foreskin of the male sex organ.
2. This action served as a sign of God's COVENANT relation with His people.
3. Circumcision was widely practiced in the ancient world, including the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures.
4. Among these people the rite was performed at the beginning of puberty, or about 12 years of age, as a sort of initiation ceremony into manhood.
5. In contrast, the Hebrew people performed circumcision on infants. This rite had an important ethical meaning to them. It signified their responsibility to serve as the holy people whom God had called as His special servants in the midst of a pagan world.
6. In the Bible's first mention of circumcision, God instructed Abraham to circumcise every male child in his household, including servants, "in the flesh of your foreskins".
 - *Genesis 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*
7. The custom was performed on the eighth day after birth.
 - *Genesis 17:12 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.*
8. At this time a name was given to the son.
 - *Luke 1:59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.*
 - *Luke 2:21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*
9. In the early history of the Jewish people circumcision was performed by the father. But the surgical task was eventually taken over by a specialist.
10. Circumcision of the Jewish male was required as a visible, physical sign of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Any male not circumcised was to be "cut off from his people" and regarded as a covenant-breaker.

- *Genesis 17:14 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.*
- *Exodus 12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.*

11. Although circumcision was required by the Mosaic Law, the rite was neglected during the days when the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness.
12. Perhaps this was a sign that the nation had broken their covenant with God through their disobedience.
13. The rite was resumed when they entered the land of Canaan, with Joshua performing the ritual on the generation born in the wilderness.
14. The Hebrew people came to take great pride in circumcision; in fact, it became a badge of their spiritual and national superiority.
15. This practice fostered a spirit of exclusivism instead of a missionary zeal to reach out to other nations as God intended. A daily prayer of strict Jewish males was to thank God that he was neither a woman, a Samaritan, nor a Gentile.
16. Gentiles came to be regarded by the Jews as the "uncircumcision," a term of disrespect implying that non-Jewish peoples were outside the circle of God's love.
17. The terms circumcised and uncircumcised became emotionally charged symbols to Israel and their Gentile neighbors. This issue later brought discord into the fellowship of the New Testament church.