

THE SCRIPTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CIRCUMCISION

Should Messianic Believers of this 21st Century be circumcised?

Graeme Purdie

Talmidei Yeshua Messianic Ministry of New Zealand

August 2026

Introduction

The central focus of this paper is to show that Scripture presents b'rit-milah (circumcision) as an enduring covenantal sign for Jewish males within Isra'el, while Gentile believers in Yeshua are not required to receive circumcision because their inclusion rests on faith and trust, through the New Covenant, which brings with it circumcision of the heart.

The argument proceeds in three movements: first, the Tanakh establishes circumcision as the sign of the Avrahamic covenant and its relationship to Isra'el and the Land; second, the B'rit Hadashah shows that Gentile believers were not commanded to convert through circumcision; and third, the New Covenant explains how Jew and Gentile are joined in Yeshua through circumcision of the heart without erasing Isra'el's continuing covenantal identity.

Few questions have generated more debate in Messianic and Christian communities than whether or not believers in Yeshua should be circumcised. The issue reaches back to the first century, when Gentiles began joining Jewish talmidim of Yeshua and the early Messianic community had to decide whether Gentile inclusion required b'rit-milah.

As the first-century talmidim of Yeshua passed from the scene, Gentile leaders increasingly shaped the emerging Christian community. After Rome destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, Jewish identity became dangerous in the post-Temple world, and many Gentile leaders distanced the new religious community from visible Jewish practices and associations.

Those anti-Jewish attitudes discouraged Gentile believers from receiving circumcision, since the mark of circumcision would identify Christianity with Judaism. Over time, anti-circumcision doctrine was strengthened by the belief that Christianity had replaced Isra'el as God's chosen and set-apart community.

The question this paper tests is whether those later doctrines measure up to Scripture.

To answer that question, the paper examines the Tanakh, the teaching of the emissaries of Yeshua, and Sha'ul's witness as emissary to the Gentiles.

The central issue is whether Scripture treats Jews and Gentiles differently once Gentiles are called into the Messianic community, and whether either group is required to receive circumcision as part of that calling.

Because this paper works directly from Scripture, substantial biblical passages are quoted. After each passage, the discussion draws out its relevance to the central question: why circumcision was given to Isra'el, why it was not imposed on Gentiles, and how circumcision

of the heart fulfils the deeper covenantal purpose.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible (CJB), translated by Dr David Stern. I use the CJB because its Hebrew names, place names, and phrases help preserve the Hebraic setting of Scripture and guard against later assumptions that can obscure its covenantal framework.

Part One examines the Tanakh and the purpose of circumcision in relation to Isra'el, the Avrahamic covenant, and the Land of Promise.

Part Two examines how the emissaries of Yeshua and the leaders of the first-century Messianic community understood circumcision for Jews and for Gentiles called to know and trust Yeshua.

Part Three considers the relationship between those called to know and trust Yeshua and the wider people of Isra'el, explaining how the New Covenant clarifies the difference between circumcision in the flesh and circumcision of the heart.

The paper therefore seeks to let Scripture define the matter on its own covenantal terms: circumcision remains significant for Isra'el, Gentile believers are not required to receive it, and the Body of Messiah is marked above all by circumcision of the heart.

Part One

The Land Of Promise

Circumcision as the Sign of the Avrahamic Covenant

The first reference to circumcision appears in B'resheet (Genesis) Chapter seventeen as the seal of a covenant made between YHVH and Avraham (previously known as Avram).

"I will make my covenant between me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly." (B'resheet 17:2)

When did this occur?

When Avram was 99 years old YHVH appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. (God Almighty) Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted." (B'resheet 17:1)

What was the purpose of the covenant?

"I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for

your descendants after you. I will give you and your descendants after you the land in which you are now foreigners, all the land of Kena'an, as a permanent possession; and I will be their God." (B'resheet 17:7 & 8)

What is "all the land of Kena'an" that was being discussed here?

That day YHVH made a covenant with Avram: "I have given this land to your descendants— from the Vadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River— the territory of the Keni, the K'nizi, the Kadmoni, the Hitti, the P'rizi, the Refa'im, the Emori, the Kena'ani, the Girgashi and the Y'vusi." (B'resheet 15:18 – 20)

What we are seeing here is that circumcision functions as the embodied reminder of the Avrahamic covenant: each generation receives in the flesh a sign that the promise of descendants and Land comes from YHVH and requires covenantal trust.

Here is my covenant, which you are to keep, between me and you, along with your descendants after you: every male among you is to be circumcised. You are to be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; this will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. Generation after generation, every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised, including slaves born within your household and those bought from a foreigner not descended from you. The slave born in your house and the person bought with your money must be circumcised; thus, my covenant will be in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who will not let himself be circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin— that person will be cut off from his people, because he has broken my covenant." (B'resheet 17:10 –14)

Avraham trusted in all that YHVH had promised, so at 99 years old he circumcised himself and all his household as YHVH commanded:-

Avraham took Yishma'el his son, all the slaves born in his house and all who had been bought with his money, every male among the people in Avraham's household, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin that very day, just as God had said to him. Avraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, and Yishma'el his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Avraham and Yishma'el his son were circumcised on the same day; and all the men in his household, both slaves born in his house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. (B'resheet 17:23–27)

Did this mean that the descendants of Yishma'el would inherit the Land of Promise? After all, at the time Avraham circumcised himself and his family, he had only one son. No, that was not the way God intended the line of inheritance to go, as we read in verses 15-22 of the same chapter.

God said to Avraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are not to call her Sarai (mockery) ; her name is to be Sarah. (princess) I will bless her; moreover, I will give you a son by

her. Truly I will bless her: she will be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her." At this Avraham fell on his face and laughed— he thought to himself, "Will a child be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah give birth at ninety?" Avraham said to God, "If only Yishma'el could live in your presence!" God answered, "No, but Sarah your wife will bear you a son, and you are to call him Yitz'chak. (laughter) I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. But as for Yishma'el, I have heard you. I have blessed him. I will make him fruitful and give him many descendants. He will father twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Yitz'chak, whom Sarah will bear to you at this time next year." With that, God finished speaking with Avraham and went up from him.

YHVH therefore establishes a definite line of descent for inheriting the Land of Promise. Circumcision alone does not entitle a man to inherit the Land YHVH calls his own; the descendants of Yishma'el were circumcised, as were many men for later cultural or medical reasons, but the covenantal line of inheritance runs through Yitz'chak and Ya'akov.

Yitz'chak therefore becomes the next covenantal reference point.

Avraham circumcised his son Yitz'chak when he was eight days old, as God had ordered him to do. (B'resheet 21:4)

From Avraham to Moshe

There is no further reference to circumcision in B'resheet. The next reference comes when Moshe is returning to Egypt after his encounter with YHVH at the burning bush. On the road, YHVH confronts Moshe because his son has not been circumcised.

Moshe left, returned to Yitro his father-in-law and said to him, "I beg you to let me go and return to my kinsmen in Egypt, to see if they are still alive." Yitro said to Moshe, "Go in peace. YHVH said to Moshe in Midyan, "Go on back to Egypt, because all the men who wanted to kill you are dead. So, Moshe took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and started out for Egypt. At a lodging-place on the way, YHVH met Moshe and would have killed him, had not Tzipporah taken a flintstone and cut off the foreskin of her son. She threw it at his feet, saying, "What a bloody bridegroom you are for me! But then, God let Moshe be. She added, "A bloody bridegroom because of the circumcision! (Sh'mot (Exodus) 4:18-20 & 24-26))

Moshe had been separated from his people since infancy, raised in Pharaoh's palace, and then exiled in Midyan for forty years. Whether he had forgotten or never fully understood the covenantal obligation, Tzipporah acted decisively and circumcised his son.

After Moshe returned to Egypt, YHVH prepared Israel for the exodus through Pesach. Exodus chapter 12 makes clear that Pesach belonged to the circumcised household of Isra'el: foreigners, slaves, and their households could participate only if the males were circumcised

and thereby joined to Israel.

What we are seeing here is that Pesach reinforces the same covenantal boundary: those joined to Isra'el through circumcision may participate, while the uncircumcised remain outside that household sign.

YHVH said to Moshe and Aharon, "This is the regulation for the Pesach lamb: no foreigner is to eat it. But if anyone has a slave he bought for money, when you have circumcised him, he may eat it. Neither a traveller nor a hired servant may eat it. It is to be eaten in one house. You are not to take any of the meat outside the house, and you are not to break any of its bones. The whole community of Isra'el is to keep it. If a foreigner staying with you wants to observe YHVH's Pesach, all his males must be circumcised. Then he may take part and observe it; he will be like a citizen of the land. But no uncircumcised person is to eat it. (Sh'mot 12:43-48)

At Mt. Horev (Sinai) fifty days later, YHVH gave Moshe the Torah (instructions) for the relationship between YHVH and his Holy (set apart) people Israel. Among the many Mitzvot (commands) given was the mitzvot regarding the circumcision of all male babies.

YHVH said to Moshe, "On the eighth day, the baby's foreskin is to be circumcised." (Vayikra (Leviticus) 12:1 & 3)

While at Mt. Horev YHVH also gave Moshe a list of blessings that would go with Israel when they entered and took possession of the Land Promised to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov. So long as Israel kept the Torah commands and trusted in YHVH as their God, all the blessings would be bestowed upon them as we read:-

'You are not to make yourselves any idols, erect a carved statue or a standing stone, or place any carved stone anywhere in your land in order to bow down to it. I am YHVH your God. "'Keep my Shabbats and revere my sanctuary; I am YHVH. "'If you live by my regulations, observe my mitzvot and obey them; then I will provide the rain you need in its season, the land will yield its produce, and the trees in the field will yield their fruit. Your threshing time will extend until the grape harvest, and your grape harvesting will extend until the time for sowing seed. You will eat as much food as you want and live securely in your land. "'I will give shalom in the land—you will lie down to sleep unafraid of anyone. I will rid the land of wild animals. The sword will not go through your land. You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall before your sword. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand—your enemies will fall before your sword. "'I will turn toward you, make you productive, increase your numbers and uphold my covenant with you. You will eat all you want from last year's harvest and throw out what remains of the old to make room for the new. I will put my tabernacle among you, and I will not reject you, but I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. I am YHVH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

so that you would not be their slaves. I have broken the bars of your yoke, so that you can walk upright. (Vayikra 26:1-13)

The covenant also carried consequences. If Israel trusted YHVH and kept Torah, they would be blessed in the Land; if they rejected him, the blessings would give way to increasingly severe curses, ending in exile from the Land of Promise.

“But if you will not listen to me and obey all these mitzvot, if you loathe my regulations and reject my rulings, in order not to obey all my mitzvot but cancel my covenant; then I, for my part, will do this to you: I will bring terror upon you—wasting disease and chronic fever to dim your sight and sap your strength. You will sow your seed for nothing, because your enemies will eat the crops. I will set my face against you—your enemies will defeat you, those who hate you will hound you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.

If these things don't make you listen to me, then I will discipline you seven times over for your sins. I will break the pride you have in your own power. I will make your sky like iron, your soil like bronze—you will spend your strength in vain, because the land will not yield its produce or the trees in the field their fruit. “Yes, if you go against me and don't listen to me, I will increase your calamities sevenfold, according to your sins. I will send wild animals among you; they will rob you of your children, destroy your livestock and reduce your numbers, until your roads are deserted.

“If, in spite of all this, you refuse my correction and still go against me; then I too will go against you; and I, yes I, will strike you seven times over for your sins. I will bring a sword against you which will execute the vengeance of the covenant. You will be huddled inside your cities, I will send sickness among you, and you will be handed over to the power of the enemy. I will cut off your supply of bread, so that ten women will bake your bread in one oven and dole out your bread by weight, and you will eat but not be satisfied.

“And if, for all this, you still will not listen to me but go against me; then I will go against you furiously, and I also will chastise you yet seven times more for your sins. You will eat the flesh of your own sons; you will eat the flesh of your own daughters. I will destroy your high places, cut down your pillars for sun worship, and throw your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols; and I will detest you. I will lay waste to your cities and make your sanctuaries desolate, so as not to smell your fragrant aromas. I will desolate the land, so that your enemies living in it will be astounded by it. You I will disperse among the nations, and I will draw out the sword in pursuit after you; your land will be a desolation and your cities a wasteland. Then, at last, the land will be paid its Shabbats. As long as it lies desolate and you are in the lands of your enemies, the land will rest and be repaid its Shabbats. Yes, as long as it lies desolate it will have rest, the rest it did not have during your Shabbats, when you lived there. As for those of you who are left, I will fill their hearts with anxiety in the lands of their enemies. The sound of a driven leaf will frighten them, so that they will flee as one flees from the sword and

fall when no one is pursuing. Yes, with no one pursuing they will stumble over each other as if fleeing the sword—you will have no power to stand before your enemies. And among the nations you will perish; the land of your enemies will devour you.

Those of you who remain will pine away in the lands of your enemies from guilt over your misdeeds and those of your ancestors. Then they will confess their misdeeds and those of their ancestors which they committed against me in their rebellion; they will admit that they went against me. At that time, I will be going against them, bringing them into the lands of their enemies. But if their uncircumcised hearts will grow humble, and they are paid the punishment for their misdeeds; then I will remember my covenant with Ya'akov, also my covenant with Yitz'chak and my covenant with Avraham; and I will remember the land. For the land will lie abandoned without them, and it will be paid its Shabbats while it lies desolate without them; and they will be paid the punishment for their misdeeds, because they rejected my rulings and loathed my regulations. Yet, in spite of all that, I will not reject them when they are in the lands of their enemies, nor will I loathe them to the point of utterly destroying them and thus break my covenant with them, because I am YHVH their God. Rather, for their sakes, I will remember the covenant of their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt— with the nations watching— so that I might be their God; I am YHVH.”

These are the laws, rulings and teachings that YHVH himself gave to the people of Isra'el on Mount Horev through Moshe. (Vayikra 26:14–55).

After receiving the blessings and curses at Horev, Israel moved toward the Land. Yet the first generation failed to trust YHVH after the spies' report, and YHVH declared that they would die in the wilderness while the next generation would enter and conquer the Land.

Circumcision of the Heart in the Tanakh

D'varim (Deuteronomy) moves the discussion from the outward covenant sign to the inward condition YHVH requires. As Moshe prepares the second generation to enter the Land, he calls them not only to covenant obedience but to “circumcision of the heart.”

“So now, Isra'el, all that YHVH your God asks from you is to fear YHVH your God, follow all his ways, love him and serve YHVH your God with all your heart and all your being; to obey, for your own good, the mitzvot and regulations of YHVH which I am giving you today. See, the sky, the heaven beyond the sky, the earth and everything on it all belong to YHVH your God. Only YHVH took enough pleasure in your ancestors to love them and choose their descendants after them— yourselves— above all peoples, as he still does today. Therefore, circumcise the foreskin of your heart; and don't be stiffnecked any longer! For YHVH your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty and awesome God, who has no favourites and accepts no bribes. He secures justice for the orphan and the widow; he loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, you are to love the foreigner, since you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. You are to

fear YHVH your God, serve him, cling to him and swear by his name. He is your praise, and he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things, which you have seen with your own eyes. Your ancestors went down into Egypt with only seventy people, but now YHVH your God has made your numbers as many as the stars in the sky! (D'varim 10:12-22)

What we are seeing here is that the Tanakh itself joins physical circumcision to an inward requirement: Israel bears the covenant sign in the flesh, yet YHVH also requires a heart made responsive to him.

D'varim 29 then sets before Israel the blessings and curses of covenant life in the Land. Moshe warns that future rebellion will bring national judgment and exile among the nations, just as Vayikra (Leviticus) chapter 26 had already declared.

D'varim 30 then looks beyond exile to restoration. Moshe prophesies that YHVH will gather Israel from the nations, return them to the Land, and circumcise their hearts so they can love him and live.

"When the time arrives that all these things have come upon you, both the blessing and the curse which I have presented to you; and you are there among the nations to which YHVH your God has driven you; then, at last, you will start thinking about what has happened to you; and you will return to YHVH your God and pay attention to what he has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today—you and your children, with all your heart and all your being. At that point, YHVH your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; he will return and gather you from all the peoples to which YHVH your God scattered you. If one of yours was scattered to the far end of the sky, YHVH your God will gather you even from there; he will go there and get you. YHVH your God will bring you back into the land your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you prosper there, and you will become even more numerous than your ancestors.

Then YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children, so that you will love YHVH your God with all your heart and all your being, and thus you will live.

YHVH your God will put all these curses on your enemies, on those who hated and persecuted you; but you will return and pay attention to what YHVH says and obey all his mitzvot which I am giving you today. Then YHVH your God will give you more than enough in everything you set out to do—the fruit of your body, the fruit of your livestock, and the fruit of your land will all do well; for YHVH will once again rejoice to see you do well, just as he rejoiced in your ancestors.

"However, all this will happen only if you pay attention to what YHVH your God says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah, if you turn to YHVH your God with all your heart and all your being. (D'varim 30:1-10)

Yirmeyahu develops the same theme. After exposing Israel's idolatry, he calls the people to return and again links restoration with the need for circumcised hearts.

"Isra'el, if you will return, "says YHVH, "yes, return to me; and if you will banish your abominations from my presence without wandering astray again; and if you will swear, 'As YHVH lives, 'in truth, justice and righteousness; then the nations will bless themselves by him, and in him will they glory." For here is what YHVH says to the people of Y'hudah and Yerushalayim: "Break up your ground that hasn't been ploughed, and do not sow among thorns." "People of Y'hudah and inhabitants of Yerushalayim, circumcise yourselves for YHVH, remove the foreskins of your heart! Otherwise, my fury will lash out like fire, burning so hot that no one can quench it, because of how evil your actions are. (Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah) 4:1-4))

Exile, Return, and the Land

The Tanakh therefore presents circumcision as necessary for Israel's covenantal life in the Land, while also insisting that outward circumcision must be joined to a responsive heart. Because Israel repeatedly rejected YHVH, the ten northern tribes were exiled by Assyria in 721 BCE, and Y'hudah was later taken into exile in Babylon.

Seventy years later, a remnant of Y'hudah returned, rebuilt the city wall and the Second Temple and remained in the Land until after the coming of Messiah. Following Yeshua's death, the Temple stood for forty more years before Rome destroyed it in 70 CE, after which the Land remained under Gentile domination until the State of Israel was established on 14 May 1948.

- Did Israel upon returning to the Land also return to the Torah of YHVH?
- Did all twelve tribes return in 1948?
- Were they circumcised in the heart at the time of the return in 1948, in accordance with D'varim 30:6?

These questions show that the 1948 return did not itself fulfil D'varim 30:6, because Israel has not yet returned fully to Torah, the twelve tribes have not yet been reunited, and the promised circumcision of the heart has not yet taken place.

The question, then, is how does Scripture explain that return and what it does—or does not—fulfil.

To answer that, the question we must trace the link between the promise to Avraham and the two returns of the remnant of Y'hudah: first from Babylon, and later from exile among the Goyim. This also explains why only a remnant returned, and why the fullness of D'varim 30 still awaits a future fulfilment.

- Going back to the original promise to Avraham the covenant YHVH made was for a people who would be separated from Avraham's descendants, as set-apart people to inherit the Land of Promise.
- The line of the set-apart ones would be through Yitz'chak and Ya'akov (Israel).
- The people of Israel were brought out of Egypt and forty years later the second generation were given possession of the Land of Promise.
- The blessings and curses given by YHVH were part of the covenant given at Mt. Horev. A covenant that transformed Israel from slaves to a fighting nation, with the Torah as their national constitution.
- Israel under the covering of YHVH took possession of the Land and received the promised blessings for a period of 480 years between the time of entering the Land under the lead of Y'hoshua until the end of the reign of King Solomon.
- Following the reign of Solomon, the kingdom divided: ten tribes in the north and two in the south. The division accelerated the drift from the mitzvot of YHVH, a drift which had started soon after Israel conquered the Land. This increased drift from the mitzvot brought about fewer blessings and more of the curses, as prophesied by Moshe in D'varim Chapter 29.
- Finally, the ten northern tribes were removed from the Land as prophesied and 114 years later Y'hudah also went into exile in Babylon for seventy years.
- However, at the end of seventy years YHVH returned a remnant of Y'hudah to the Land for another 607 years until the destruction of the second Temple.
- Why were they not sent off into permanent exile like the ten northern tribes? Because their role in the Land was not yet complete.

We see in B'resheet Chapter 49 that Ya'akov when he was about to die he called his twelve sons together and said:-

"Gather yourselves together, and I will tell you what will happen to you in the acharit-hayamim [the end of days]. Assemble yourselves and listen, sons of Ya'akov; pay attention to Isra'el your father." (B'resheet 49:1-2)

During the blessing upon his sons Ya'akov said of Y'hudah:-

"The sceptre will not pass from Y'hudah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs, until he comes to whom (obedience) belongs; (or: until Shiloh comes) and it is he whom the peoples will obey." (B'resheet 49:10)

The one called "Shiloh" turned out to be none other than Yeshua HaMashiach. Hence, Y'hudah was returned to the Land after the 70-year exile so that the one to be born through the line of Y'hudah would take the ruler's staff from between the legs of Y'hudah. By his sacrificial death, Yeshua took the mantle of rulership from the kingly line of Y'hudah. He, as the son of David, was prophesied to take the mantle of kingship.

After his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God, there was no reason for the errant tribe of Y'hudah to remain in the Land. The prophecy of Ya'akov had been fulfilled. Hence, the Temple was destroyed 40 years later, and most of Y'hudah were either killed or dispersed into the Roman Empire. The blessings had completely given way to the curses, just as it says in Luke Chapter 21, where we read:

"However, when you see Yerushalayim surrounded by armies, then you are to understand that she is about to be destroyed. Those in Y'hudah must escape to the hills, those inside the city must get out, and those in the country must not enter it. For these are the days of vengeance, when everything that has been written in the Tanakh will come true. What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers! For there will be great distress in the Land and judgment on the people. Some will fall by the edge of the sword, others will be carried into all the countries of the Goyim, and Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim until the age of the Goyim has run its course. (Luke 21:20-24)

Yeshua's words require the trampling down of Yerushalayim to end. For that to happen, a remnant of Y'hudah had to be present again in the Land and in the city. Thus, after 1878 years among the Goyim, the State of Israel was established on 14 May 1948; and in June 1967, after the Six-Day War, Yerushalayim again came under Jewish sovereignty. The argument here is that this restored sovereignty marks a major prophetic turning point, even though the Land still remains short of the complete territory promised to Avraham and the promised circumcision of the hearts of all Isra'el has not yet occurred.

The remaining difficulty is that successive Israeli governments have surrendered parts of the Land gained in 1967 in pursuit of peace with the Goyim. This raises the question whether their distance from Torah still shapes Israel's national choices.

As Yeshua left the Temple and was going away, his talmidim came and called his attention to its buildings. But he answered them, "You see all these? Yes! I tell you, they will be totally destroyed – not a single stone will be left standing!" When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the talmidim came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that you are coming, and that the 'olam haze' (this age) is ending?"

Yeshua replied: "Watch out! Don't let anyone fool you! For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will lead many astray. You will hear the noise of

wars nearby and the news of wars far off; see to it that you don't become frightened. Such things must happen, but the end is yet to come. For peoples will fight each other, nations will fight each other, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various parts of the world; all this is but the beginning of the 'birth pains.' At that time, you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death, and all peoples will hate you because of me. At that time many will be trapped into betraying and hating each other, many false prophets will appear and fool many people; and many people's love will grow cold because of increased distance from Torah. But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered. And this Good News about the Kingdom will be announced throughout the whole world as a witness to all the Goyim. It is then that the end will come. (Mattityahu (Matthew) 24:1-14))

Many from Y'hudah now living in the Land still show little love for YHVH or Torah and instead seek security through Gentile political and financial support. Yechezk'el addresses this continuing condition by speaking both of the Land's restoration and of Israel's future inner renewal.

"Now you, human being, prophesy to the mountains of Isra'el. Say: 'Mountains of Isra'el, hear the message from YHVH. YHVH ELOHIM says: "The enemy is boasting over you, 'Ha! Even the ancient high places are ours now!'" Therefore prophesy, and say that YHVH ELOHIM says, 'Because they desolated you and swallowed you up from every side, so that the other nations could take possession of you; and now people are gossiping about you and slandering you; therefore, mountains of Isra'el, hear the message of YHVH ELOHIM — this is what YHVH ELOHIM says to the mountains and hills, the streams and valleys, the desolate wastes and the abandoned cities, now preyed on and derided by the other surrounding nations — therefore this is what YHVH ELOHIM says: "In the heat of my jealousy I speak against the other nations and all of Edom, since, rejoicing with all their heart, they have arrogated my land to themselves as a possession and, with utter contempt, seized it as prey."

"Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Isra'el, and say to the mountains, the hills, the streams and the valleys that YHVH ELOHIM says this: 'I speak in my jealousy and fury, because you have endured being shamed by the nations. Therefore, thus says YHVH ELOHIM: "I have raised my hand and sworn that the nations surrounding you will bear their shame. But you, mountains of Isra'el, you will sprout your branches and bear your fruit for my people Isra'el, who will soon return. I am here for you, and I will turn toward you; then you will be tilled and sown; and I will multiply your population, all the house of Isra'el, all of it. The cities will be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt. I will multiply both the human and animal populations, they will increase and be productive; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were before — indeed, I will do you more good than before; and you will know that I am YHVH. I will cause people to walk on you, my people Isra'el; they will possess you, and you will be their inheritance; never again will you make them childless." YHVH ELOHIM says, "Because they say to you, 'Land, you devour people and make your nations childless, ' therefore you will no longer devour people, and you will not make your nations childless anymore," says YHVH ELOHIM. "I will not permit

the nations to shame you, or the peoples to reproach you any longer; and you will no more cause your nations to stumble, "says YHVH ELOHIM." (Yechezk'el 36:1-15)

The Land of Promise is still being given away in exchange for supposed peace, because Torah is not yet in the hearts of most Israeli citizens. But, at the return of Yeshua, all that will change just as Yechezk'el says following on in the same chapter:-

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the countries, and return you to your own soil.

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you; I will take the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit inside you and cause you to live by my laws, respect my rulings and obey them. You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors. You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will summon the grain and increase it and not send famine against you. I will multiply the yield of fruit from the trees and increase production in the fields, so that you never again suffer the reproach of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your actions that were not good; as you look at yourselves, you will loathe yourselves for your guilt and disgusting practices. Understand, 'says YHVH ELOHIM, 'that I am not doing this for your sake. Instead, be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, house of Isra'el.' "YHVH ELOHIM says, 'When the day comes for me to cleanse you from all your guilt, I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the ruins to be rebuilt. The land that was desolate will be tilled, whereas formerly it lay desolate for all passing by to see. Then they will say, "The land that used to be desolate has become like Gan-'Eden, and the cities formerly ruined, abandoned and wasted have been fortified and are inhabited!" Then the nations around you that remain will know that I, YHVH, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was abandoned. I, YHVH, have spoken; and I will do it.' "YHVH ELOHIM says, 'In addition, I will let the house of Isra'el pray to me to do this for them: to increase their numbers like sheep — like flocks of sheep for sacrifices, like the flocks of sheep in Yerushalayim at its designated times, in this degree will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am YHVH.'" (Yechezk'el 36:24-38)

Finally, we come to the time when YHVH will circumcise the hearts of his people Israel. He will remove the oppression of the Goyim and reunite both Y'hudah and Efrayim as one kingdom in the Land of Promise. Only then will the covenant made with Avraham be truly fulfilled as Yechezk'el says:-

The word of YHVH came to me: "You, human being, take one stick and write on it, 'For Y'hudah and those joined with him (among) the people of Isra'el.' Next, take another stick and write on it, 'For Yosef, the stick of Efrayim, and all the house of Isra'el who are joined with him.' Finally, bring them together into a single stick, so that they become

one in your hand. When your people ask you what all this means, tell them that YHVH ELOHIM says this: 'I will take the stick of Yosef, which is in the hand of Efrayim, together with the tribes of Isra'el who are joined with him, and put them together with the stick of Y'hudah and make them a single stick, so that they become one in my hand.' The sticks on which you write are to be in your hand as they watch. Then say to them that YHVH ELOHIM says: 'I will take the people of Isra'el from among the nations where they have gone and gather them from every side and bring them back to their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Isra'el; and one king will be king for all of them. They will no longer be two nations, and they will never again be divided into two kingdoms. "They will never again defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, or any of their transgressions; but I will save them from all the places where they have been living and sinning; and I will cleanse them, so that they will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and all of them will have one shepherd; they will live by my rulings and keep and observe my regulations. They will live in the land I gave to Ya'akov my servant, where your ancestors lived; they will live there — they, their children, and their grandchildren, forever; and David my servant will be their leader forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give to them, increase their numbers, and set my sanctuary among them forever. My home will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. The nations will know that I am YHVH, who sets Isra'el apart as holy, when my sanctuary is with them forever.'" (Yechezk'el 37:15-28)

Only then will all Israel finally live in peace with the Son of David –Yeshua on the throne and then the prophetic words of Moshe in D'varim Chapter 30, which were given in the wilderness over 3500 years ago, finally be fulfilled as YHVH originally intended.

YHVH your God will bring you back into the land your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you prosper there, and you will become even more numerous than your ancestors. Then YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children, so that you will love YHVH your God with all your heart and all your being, and thus you will live. (D'varim 30:5-6) **Amein!**

Part Two

Should The Gentiles Be Circumcised?

Jewish Circumcision in the B'rit Hadashah

In the first chapter of Luke, we see that Yochanan underwent b'rit-milah (circumcision) on the eight day.

The time arrived for Elisheva to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbours and relatives heard how good YHVH had been to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day, they came to do the child's b'rit-milah. They were about to name him Z'kharyah, after his father, when his mother spoke up and said, "No, he is to be called Yochanan. (Luke 1:57-60)

Later in chapter two of Luke, we see Yeshua also undergoes b'rit-milah on the eight day.

On the eighth day, when it was time for his b'rit-milah, he was given the name Yeshua, which is what the angel had called him before his conception. (Luke 2:21)

In accordance with Jewish custom both boys were named at the time of their b'rit-milah, but beyond this point until the circumcision of Timothy, all intervening b'rit Hadashah references are reflecting the words in the Tanakh.

The only remaining reference to b'rit-milah in the Gospels is in Yochanan chapter seven where it is a side issue in a discourse between Yeshua and the Judeans who are accusing him of violating Shabbat by healing sick people on that day. Here, Yeshua is saying that the Torah command about b'rit-milah must be carried out even on Shabbat if that is the boy's eight day of life. However, his real focus is that it is good to heal someone on the Shabbat. These verses still give us no clue about whether or not Yeshua considered b'rit-milah to be a requirement for acceptance into what, after his death and resurrection, would become the Messianic community. After all his twelve emissaries and others who followed him were already circumcised on the eight day, as at that stage all his followers were Jewish by birth.

"Moshe gave you b'rit-milah —not that it came from Moshe but from the Patriarchs—and you do a boy's b'rit-milah on Shabbat. If a boy is circumcised on Shabbat so that the Torah of Moshe will not be broken, why are you angry with me because I made a man's whole body well on Shabbat? Stop judging by surface appearances and judge the right way!" (Yochanan 7:22-24)

Acts Chapter seven is the next reference to b'rit-milah, where we see Stephen, when questioned by the cohen hagadol, gives a testimony for his trust in Yeshua. Like Yeshua before him he attests to the fact that b'rit-milah was given to Avraham and his descendants as an everlasting covenant through the line of Yitz'chak, Ya'akov and the sons of Ya'akov.

The cohen hagadol asked, "Are these accusations true?" and Stephen said: "Brothers

and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to Avraham avinu in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran and said to him, 'Leave your land and your family, and go into the land that I will show you.' So, he left the land of the Kasdim and lived in Haran. After his father died, God made him move to this land where you are living now. He gave him no inheritance in it, not even space for one foot; yet he promised to give it to him as a possession and to his descendants after him, even though at the time he was childless. What God said to him was, 'Your descendants will be aliens in a foreign land, where they will be in slavery and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will judge the nation that enslaves them,' God said, 'and afterwards they will leave and worship me in this place.' And he gave him b'rit-milah. So, he became the father of Yitz'chak and did his b'rit-milah on the eighth day, and Yitz'chak became the father of Ya'akov, and Ya'akov became the father of the Twelve Patriarchs. (Acts 7:1-8)

Gentiles and the Yerushalayim Decision

The decisive New Covenant question emerges in Antioch, where some from Yerushalayim insisted that Gentile believers must undergo b'rit-milah before being recognised as members of the Messianic community.

This amounted to requiring Gentile believers to convert to Judaism through circumcision. Because that contradicted what Sha'ul and Bar-Nabba had taught, the Antioch community sent them and others to Yerushalayim to seek a ruling from the emissaries and Zakanim.

The issue before them was whether the Goyim had to receive b'rit-milah in order to observe the Torah of Moshe.

Passing through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. After speaking the message in Perga, they came down to Attalia; and from there, they sailed back to Antioch, the place where they had been handed over to the care of God for the work which they had now completed. When they arrived, they gathered the Messianic community together and reported what God had done through them, that he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed for some time there with the talmidim. But some men came down from Y'hudah to Antioch and began teaching the brothers, "You can't be saved unless you undergo b'rit-milah in the manner prescribed by Moshe." This brought them into no small measure of discord and dispute with Sha'ul and Bar-Nabba. So, the congregation assigned Sha'ul, Bar-Nabba and some of themselves to go and put this sh'eilah (question about Jewish Law) before the emissaries and the Zakanim up in Yerushalayim. After being sent off by the congregation, they made their way through Phoenicia and Shomron, recounting in detail how the Gentiles had turned to God; and this news brought great joy to all the brothers. On arrival in Yerushalayim, they were welcomed by the Messianic community, including the emissaries and the Zakanim; and they reported what God had done through them. But some of those who had come to trust were from the party of the P'rushim; and they stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the Torah of Moshe." (Acts 14:24 – 15:5)

Acts 15 shows that the Zakanim in Yerushalayim agreed not to impose circumcision upon the Goyim. Instead, they sent a letter of encouragement requiring only the basic prohibitions associated here with the Noachide Laws.

"Therefore, my opinion is that we should not put obstacles in the way of the Goyim who are turning to God. Instead, we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:19-20)

What we are seeing here is that the Yerushalayim decision separates Gentile inclusion from conversion through circumcision: Gentiles are welcomed through trust in Yeshua and instructed in basic holiness without being required to become Jewish proselytes.

These requirements reject practices YHVH has always treated as detestable:

- *things polluted by idols,*
- *from fornication,*
- *from what is strangled and*
- *from blood.*

These prohibitions were common practices among the nations but forbidden to Israel. Gentile believers were therefore called away from pagan practice without being required to convert to Judaism. Acts 15:21 then binds them to Israel's Scriptures by placing them within communities where Moshe was read every Shabbat.

"For from the earliest times, Moshe has had in every city those who proclaim him, with his words being read in the synagogues every Shabbat." (Acts 15:21)

In practical terms, Gentile believers were to keep these basic requirements and then grow in understanding as they gathered with Jewish brothers, heard Torah and the Prophets read, and learned more fully of YHVH's redemptive work through Yeshua.

The unresolved issue is why Sha'ul, Bar-Nabba, Ya'akov and the Zakanim refused to impose b'rit-milah on believing Goyim.

The answer to this vital question reveals the true relationship between the Messianic community and the rest of Israel, in both the first and twenty-first centuries.

Acts, Timothy, and Romans

The next step is to examine Sha'ul's circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16.

"Sha'ul came down to Derbe and went on to Lystra, where there lived a talmid named Timothy. He was the son of a Jewish woman who had come to trust, and a Greek father. All the brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of Timothy. Sha'ul wanted Timothy to

accompany him; so, he took him and did a b'rit-milah, because of the Jews living in those areas; for they all knew that his father had been a Greek. As they went on through the towns, they delivered to the people the decisions reached by the emissaries and the Zakanim in Yerushalayim for them to observe. Accordingly, the congregations were strengthened in the faith and increased in number day by day." (Acts 16:1 – 5)

At first glance, Timothy's circumcision appears to conflict with the Yerushalayim decision. Since Timothy's father was Greek, the question is whether Sha'ul circumcised him as a conversion to Judaism or for a different practical reason.

Luke gives only one reason: "because of the Jews living in those areas." Since Sha'ul regularly taught in synagogues, Timothy's uncircumcised state would likely have created an obstacle among Jewish communities who knew his father was Greek.

"So, at the end of our stay, we packed and went up to Yerushalayim; and with us went some of the talmidim from Caesarea. They brought us to the home of the man with whom we were to stay, Manson from Cyprus, who had been a talmid since the early days. In Yerushalayim, the brothers received us warmly. The next day Sha'ul and the rest of us went in to Ya'akov, and all the Zakanim were present. After greeting them, Sha'ul described in detail each of the things God had done among the Gentiles through his efforts. On hearing it, they praised God; but they also said to him, "You see, brother, how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans, and they are all zealots for the Torah. Now what they have been told about you is that you are teaching all the Jews living among the Goyim to apostatize from Moshe, telling them not to have a b'rit-milah for their sons and not to follow the traditions. "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. So do what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Take them with you, be purified with them, and pay the expenses connected with having their heads shaved. Then everyone will know that there is nothing to these rumours which they have heard about you; but that, on the contrary, you yourself stay in line and keep the Torah. "However, in regard to the Goyim who have come to trust in Yeshua, we all joined in writing them a letter with our decision that they should abstain from what had been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what is strangled and from fornication." The next day Sha'ul took the men, purified himself along with them and entered the Temple to give notice of when the period of purification would be finished and the offering would have to be made for each of them. The seven days were almost up when some unbelieving Jews from the province of Asia saw him in the Temple, stirred up all the crowd and grabbed him. "Men of Isra'el, help!" they shouted. "This is the man who goes everywhere teaching everyone things against the people, against the Torah and against this place! And now he has even brought some Goyim into the Temple and defiled this holy place!" (They had previously seen Trophimus from Ephesus in the city with him and assumed that Sha'ul had brought him into the Temple.) The whole city was aroused, and people came running from all over. They seized Sha'ul and dragged him out of the Temple, and at once the gates were shut. But while they were attempting to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman

battalion that all Yerushalayim was in turmoil. Immediately he took officers and soldiers and charged down upon them. As soon as they saw the commander, they quit beating Sha'ul. Then the commander came up, arrested him and ordered him to be tied up with two chains. He asked who he was and what he had done. Everyone in the crowd shouted something different; so, since he couldn't find out what had happened because of the uproar, he ordered him brought to the barracks. When Sha'ul got to the steps, he actually had to be carried by the soldiers, because the mob was so wild—the crowd kept following and screaming, "Kill him!" As Sha'ul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "Is it all right if I say something to you?" The commander said, "You know Greek! Say, aren't you that Egyptian who tried to start a revolution a while back, and led four-thousand-armed terrorists out into the desert?" Sha'ul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city; and I ask your permission to let me speak to the people." Having received permission, Sha'ul stood on the steps and motioned with his hand to the people. When they finally became still, he addressed them in Hebrew: (Acts 15:15 – 40)

Acts 21 supports this practical reading. The uproar in Yerushalayim centred on the suspicion that Sha'ul had brought Gentiles into the Temple. If even that suspicion provoked violence, Timothy's uncircumcised status would likely have completely hindered Sha'ul's work among Jews. Even so, the episode does not itself settle whether Gentiles should be circumcised.

So Sha'ul, having been arrested and sent to Rome, faced trial after being accused in connection with a riot among his fellow Jews. While under house arrest, he wrote his letter to the Messianic community in Rome. In the first half of Romans Chapter two, Sha'ul contrasts Torah observance by Gentiles who had never known Torah with Jews who considered themselves well versed in its requirements. Through that contrast, he shows how worthless b'rit-milah becomes for a Jew who does not obey Torah, while also distinguishing between outward circumcision and inward faithfulness.

"You call yourself a Jew and rest on Torah and boast about God and know his will and give your approval to what is right, because you have been instructed from the Torah; and if you have persuaded yourself that you are a guide to the blind, a light in the darkness, an instructor for the spiritually unaware and a teacher of children, since in the Torah you have the embodiment of knowledge and truth; then, you who teach others, don't you teach yourself? Preaching, "You shall not steal," do you steal? Saying, "You shall not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? Detesting idols, do you commit idolatrous acts? You who take such pride in Torah, do you, by disobeying the Torah, dishonour God? – as it says in the Tanakh, "For it is because of you that God's name is blasphemed by the Goyim." but he who obeys the Torah will stand as a judgment on you who have had a b'rit-milah and have Torah written out but violate it! For circumcision is indeed of value if you do what Torah says. But if you are a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision! Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the Torah, won't his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? Indeed, the man who is physically

uncircumcised but obeys the Torah will stand as a judgment on you who have had a b'rit-milah and have Torah written out but violate it! For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God." (Romans 2:17 – 29)

What we are seeing here is that Sha'ul does not discard circumcision for Jews; rather, he shows that its covenantal value is emptied when Torah is violated and fulfilled only when the heart is turned toward YHVH.

Sha'ul's point in Romans is that circumcision has value for the Jew only when joined to Torah faithfulness. When Torah is violated, outward circumcision is emptied of its covenantal meaning and exposes the need for true circumcision of the heart.

Romans 3 then clarifies that circumcision still has value for the Jew, because the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God.

"Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God. If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness? Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God on the ground of trusting, which has nothing to do with legalistic observance of Torah commands. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is indeed the God of the Gentiles; because, as you will admit, God is one. Therefore, he will consider righteous the circumcised on the ground of trusting and the uncircumcised through that same trusting. Does it follow that we abolish Torah by this trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah." (Romans 2:1-9 & 28-31)

Sha'ul is not saying that Jews no longer have a place before YHVH. Instead, he is rejecting legalistic observance as the ground of righteousness and insisting that both Jew and Gentile are made righteous only through trusting in Yeshua.

"...although the Torah and the Prophets give their witness to it as well, it is a righteousness that comes from God, through the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah, to all who continue trusting. For it makes no difference whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, since all have sinned and come short of earning God's praise. By God's grace, without earning it, all are granted the status of being considered righteous before him, through the act redeeming us from our enslavement to sin that was accomplished by the Messiah Yeshua. God put Yeshua forward as the kapparah for sin through his faithfulness in respect to his bloody sacrificial death. This vindicated God's righteousness; because, in his forbearance, he had passed over (with neither punishment nor remission) the sins people had committed in the past; and it vindicates his righteousness in the present age by showing that he [YHVH] is righteous himself and is

also the one who makes people righteous on the ground of Yeshua's faithfulness."
(Romans 3:21b -26)

If righteousness comes through trusting in Yeshua rather than legalistic observance, is Torah not abolished? As Sha'ul says, "Heaven forbid! On the contrary, Torah is confirmed."

By trusting in Yeshua, just as Philip did when he met Yeshua –

"Philip found Natan'el and told him, "We've found the one that Moshe wrote about in the Torah, also the Prophets—it's Yeshua Ben-Yosef from Natzeret!" (Yochanan 1:45)

It was because of this same trust in Yeshua that Sha'ul was able to say in Romans 2:29,

"For the real Jew is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. On the contrary, the real Jew is one inwardly; and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual not literal; so that his praise comes not from other people but from God."

Only through trusting in Yeshua can a Jewish person share in true circumcision of the heart; and through that same trust, Gentiles also become one with the faithful remnant while remaining uncircumcised in the flesh.

Because of the "circumcision of the heart" – for both Jews and Gentiles, Sha'ul was able to say in his letter to the Ephesians:-

The One New Man

"... you Gentiles by birth—called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised—at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood. For he himself is our shalom—he has made us both one and has broken down the m'chitzah (wall of partition) which divided us by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity (one new man) and thus make shalom, and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus in himself killing that enmity." (Ephesians 2:11-16)

What we are seeing here is that Yeshua does not erase Jewish identity or require Gentile conversion; he forms one new humanity in which both are reconciled to God through Yeshua's blood.

This "one new humanity" does not mean that Jews must give up being Jews or that Gentiles must become Jews. It means that both are reconciled in Yeshua without erasing their

covenantal distinction.

The Tanakh has already shown that circumcision remains a continual reminder to natural Israel that YHVH chose them for the Land of Promise (Eretz-Yisra'el). Though Israel has been dispersed for disobedience, YHVH has not abandoned them or cancelled the covenant made through Avraham.

The Jews who become part of the "one new man" therefore do not become Christians, but rather become part of the Messianic community, which began to develop at Shavuot 30 CE.

Ever since the second-century CE, most churches of Christendom have taught that all Jews must become Christians by being baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. This pressure to convert was based on the assumption that Israel had been rejected by God. It has caused much Jewish blood to be shed at the hands of zealous Christian Crusaders. If that was what YHVH wanted, then over the last two thousand years, since Sha'ul wrote to the Ephesians, most, if not all, Jewish people would have been assimilated into churches, thus preventing the future fulfilment of YHVH's ancient promise to Avraham. But, as a covenant made by YHVH cannot be voided or cancelled. Therefore, what the institutions of Christendom have been teaching on this matter has been a complete lie.

Nor do Gentiles have to convert to Judaism to become part of the "one new man."

As Sha'ul, Bar-Nabba, Ya'akov and others agreed, Gentiles who come to know and trust Yeshua should not be circumcised. The "one new man" is therefore a set-apart body that stands between Judaism and Christianity while trusting Yeshua as Messiah. The reality is that it is a – set apart, part of the set apart people Isra'el and therefore, part of the national life of Isra'el. (see *Ephesians 2:12*)

"When he [Yeshua] came, he announced as Good News shalom to you far off and shalom to those nearby, news that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family. You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah himself. In union with him the whole building is held together, and it is growing into a holy temple in union with the Lord (Master). Yes, in union with him, you yourselves are being built together into a spiritual dwelling-place for God!

(Ephesians 2:17-22)

Sha'ul is saying that the "one new man," together with Yeshua, becomes a spiritual dwelling place for God. Unlike the Tent of Meeting and the Temple, where YHVH dwelt among Israel, this body becomes a dwelling place in which God is present by his Spirit.

That brings the argument back to circumcision. Sha'ul answers directly in 1 Corinthians 7.

"Let each person live the life the [Master] has assigned him and live it in the condition he was in when God called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the congregations. Was someone already circumcised when he was called? Then he should not try to remove the marks of his circumcision. Was someone uncircumcised when he was called? He shouldn't undergo b'rit-milah. Being circumcised means nothing and being uncircumcised means nothing; what does mean something is keeping God's mitzvot. Each person should remain in the condition he was in when he was called."

(1 Corinthians 7:17 -20)

Sha'ul's conclusion is that, within the "one new man," neither circumcision nor uncircumcision defines ones standing before God. Those called by YHVH are set apart through trust in Yeshua and circumcised in the heart by the Ruach HaKodesh.

Therefore, let Sha'ul have the last words on this matter as he says:-

In conclusion, my brothers: rejoice in union with the Master..... For it is we who are the Circumcised, we who worship by the Spirit of God and make our boast in the Messiah Yeshua! We do not put confidence in human qualifications. (Philippians 3:1(a) and 3)

*I say this so that no one will fool you with plausible but specious arguments. For although I am away from you physically, I am with you in spirit, rejoicing as I see the disciplined and resolute firmness of your trust in the Messiah. Therefore, just as you received the Messiah Yeshua as Master, keep living your life united with him. Remain deeply rooted in him; continue being built up in him and confirmed in your trust, the way you were taught, so that you overflow in thanksgiving. Watch out, so that no one will take you captive by means of philosophy and empty deceit, following human tradition which accords with the elemental spirits of the world but does not accord with the Messiah. For in him, bodily, lives the fullness of all that God is. And it is in union with him that you have been made full—he is the head of every rule and authority. Also it was in union with him that you were circumcised with a circumcision not done by human hands but accomplished by stripping away the old nature's control over the body. In this circumcision done by the Messiah, you were buried along with him by being immersed; and in union with him, you were also raised up along with him by God's faithfulness that worked when he raised Yeshua from the dead – **Amein!***

(Colossians 2:4-12)

Part Three

Circumcision in the New Covenant

The Covenant Tension

In Part One, it is apparent from the words of Tanakh, that YHVH has never altered his commandment regarding the circumcision of Isra'el. Circumcision remains the unchanging seal of his covenant with Avraham and a constant reminder to each generation that they will possess the Land of Promise as an eternal inheritance when Yeshua returns as king.

By contrast, Part Two shows us through the words of the B'rit Hadashah that the Gentiles who have been called by YHVH to be part of the One New Man are not required to be circumcised. Instead, the only obligation upon them is to observe the Noachide Laws, as defined in Acts 15:19-20 and then continue to learn the requirements of life in Torah through circumcised hearts.

Then, in 1 Corinthians 7:17-20 Sha'ul states that a Jewish man who comes to know Yeshua as his Messiah is not to try to remove the marks of circumcision, because being circumcised or uncircumcised means nothing in the One New Man. Instead, each person is to remain in the condition he was in when called by YHVH.

The tension is sharpened by Sha'ul's statement that *"what does matter is keeping God's mitzvot."* In the Tanakh, covenantal obedience includes circumcision for Israel; yet Sha'ul says those called in Yeshua should remain as they were when called. The following summary captures the tension:

- All males in Isra'el must be circumcised when they are eight days old,
- And those of Isra'el who come to know Yeshua are to remain circumcised,
- But, the Gentiles that are called by God need not undergo circumcision,
- For called out ones being circumcised or uncircumcised means nothing,
- The One New Man (Jew and Gentile) keep God's mitzvot through circumcised hearts.

The apparent tension is therefore this: physical circumcision remains covenantally significant for Isra'el, yet Sha'ul says that circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing for the One New Man when compared with keeping God's mitzvot.

The answer begins with the prophet Yirmeyahu, who speaks of a New Covenant in which YHVH writes Torah not merely on stone or scroll, but upon the heart of his people:

The New Covenant and Circumcision of the Heart

"The days are coming," says YHVH, "when I will make a new covenant with the house

of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says YHVH. "For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says YHVH: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know YHVH'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more." (Yirmeyahu 31:31-33)

What we are seeing here is that the New Covenant explains how Torah can be kept from the heart: it is not the abolition of covenant obligation, but its inward fulfilment by YHVH.

The "old" covenant in view is not the Avrahamic covenant for the Land, sealed by circumcision, but the covenant made at Horev. That covenant established Israel as a nation of priests, yet Israel violated it and was eventually removed from the Land (Eretz-Yisra'el).

This does not mean YHVH changed his mind about Israel or set aside the Avrahamic covenant. What is being replaced is the priestly system established under the covenant at Horev.

The priests were drawn from the tribe of Levi and separated from the other twelve tribes. They were effectively part of a thirteenth tribe, set apart from the rest of Isra'el by YHVH himself, as we read in B'midbar Chapter One -

Moshe, Aharon and the twelve leaders of Isra'el, each from a clan, counted the people of Isra'el by their clans, those twenty years old and over, eligible for military service in Isra'el; and the grand total came to 603,550. But those who were L'vi'im, according to the clan of their fathers, were not counted in this census; because YHVH had told Moshe, "Do not include the clan of Levi when you take the census of the people of Isra'el. Instead, give the L'vi'im charge over the tabernacle of the testimony, its equipment and everything else connected with it. They are to carry the tabernacle and all its equipment, serve in it and set up their camp around it. (B'midbar (Numbers) 1:44-50))

Having set apart the whole tribe of Levi, YHVH then separated out from within Levi the family of Aharon to be the cohanim (priests), to intercede on behalf of the twelve tribes and the remainder of the Levites. No one took part in the priestly duties other than Aharon and his direct descendants, as we see in B'midbar Chapter 18.

YHVH said to Aharon, "You, your sons and your father's family line will be responsible for anything that goes wrong in the sanctuary. You and your sons with you will be responsible for anything wrong in your service as cohanim. But you are to bring your kinsmen, the tribe of Levi, along with yourselves, to work together with you and help you—you and your sons with you—when you are there before the tent of meeting. They

are to be at your disposal and perform all kinds of tasks related to the tent; only they are not to come near the holy furnishings or the altar, so that neither they nor you will die. They will work together with you in your duties related to the tent of meeting, whatever the service in the tent may be; but an unauthorized person is not to come near you. You will take charge of all the holy things and the altar, so that there will no longer be anger against the people of Isra'el. I myself have taken your kinsmen the L'vi'im from among the people of Isra'el; they have been given as a gift to YHVH for you, so that you can perform the service in the tent of meeting. You and your sons with you will exercise your prerogatives and duties as cohanim in regard to everything having to do with the altar and within the curtain. I entrust the service required of cohanim to you; the unauthorized person who tries to perform it is to be put to death."
(B'midbar 18:1-7)

Hence, both Aharon's family and the rest of the tribe of Levi were set apart, or made holy, and received no inheritance in the Land of Promise, as verses 20 and 24 indicate:

YHVH said to Aharon, "You are not to have any inheritance or portion in their land; I am your portion and inheritance among the people of Isra'el..... because I have given to the L'vi'im as their inheritance the tenths of the produce which the people of Isra'el set aside as a gift for YHVH. This is why I have said to them that they are to have no inheritance among the people of Isra'el."

Their inheritance was YHVH's service and the portion assigned to them from Israel's produce.

As Yirmeyahu says in 31:33, *"For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days, says YHVH - "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

The key issue is when and how Torah is written upon the heart.

Yirmeyahu names both the house of Isra'el and the house of Y'hudah, then speaks of the reunited "house of Isra'el." This suggests that the national fulfilment of the New Covenant awaits the reunification of the two houses under Yeshua, as described in Yechezk'el 37.

YHVH your God will bring you back into the land your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you prosper there, and you will become even more numerous than your ancestors. Then YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children, so that you will love YHVH your God with all your heart and all your being, and thus you will live. (D'varim 30:5-6)

If the reunited house of Isra'el receives the New Covenant in its national fullness after Yeshua returns, the remaining question is how does the "One New Man" receive that covenant now.

That question has long been inadequately explained by both Judaism and Christianity.

The Book of Hebrews and the Priesthood of the New Covenant

The Book of Hebrews in Chapter Nine develops Yirmeyahu's argument by explaining how the old priestly system gives way to the New Covenant through Yeshua's once-for-all priestly offering.

By using the term, "new" he (YHVH) has made the first covenant "old"; and something being made old, something in the process of aging, is on its way to vanishing altogether.

Now the first covenant had both regulations for worship and a Holy Place here on earth. A tent was set up, the outer one, which was called the Holy Place; in it were the menorah, the table and the Bread of the Presence. Behind the second parokhet was a tent called the Holiest Place, which had the golden altar for burning incense and the Ark of the Covenant, entirely covered with gold. In the Ark were the gold jar containing the man, Aharon's rod that sprouted and the stone Tablets of the Covenant; and above it were the k'ruvim representing the Sh'khinah, casting their shadow on the lid of the Ark – but now is not the time to discuss these things in detail. With things so arranged, the cohanim go into the outer tent all the time to discharge their duties; but only the cohen hagadol enters the inner one; and he goes in only once a year, and he must always bring blood, which he offers both for himself and for the sins committed in ignorance by the people.

By this arrangement, the Ruach HaKodesh showed that so long as the first Tent had standing, the way into the Holiest Place was still closed. This symbolizes the present age and indicates that the conscience of the person performing the service cannot be brought to the goal by the gifts and sacrifices he offers. For they involve only food and drink and various ceremonial washings – regulations concerning the outward life, imposed until the time for God to reshape the whole structure. But when the Messiah appeared as cohen Gadol of the good things that are happening already, then, through the greater and more perfect Tent which is not man-made (that is, it is not of this created world), he entered the Holiest Place once and for all. And he entered not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus setting people free forever. For if sprinkling ceremonially unclean persons with the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer restores their outward purity; then how much more the blood of the Messiah, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself to God as a sacrifice without blemish, will purify our conscience from works that lead to death, so that we can serve the living God!

It is because of this death that he is mediator of a new covenant (or will). Because a death has occurred which sets people free from the transgressions committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. For where there is a will, there must necessarily be produced evidence of its maker's death, since a will goes into effect only upon death; it never has force while its maker is still alive. This is why the first covenant too was inaugurated with blood. After Moshe had proclaimed every command of the Torah to all the people, he took the blood of the calves

with some water and used scarlet wool and hyssop to sprinkle both the scroll itself and all the people; and he said, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has ordained for you." Likewise, he sprinkled with the blood both the Tent and all the things used in its ceremonies. In fact, according to the Torah, almost everything is purified with blood; indeed, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Now this is how the copies of the heavenly things had to be purified, but the heavenly things themselves require better sacrifices than these. For the Messiah has entered a Holiest Place which is not man-made and merely a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, in order to appear now on our behalf in the very presence of God. Further, he did not enter heaven to offer himself over and over again, like the cohen hagadol who enters the Holiest Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer death many times – from the founding of the universe on. But as it is, he has appeared once at the end of the ages in order to do away with sin through the sacrifice of himself. Just as human beings have to die once, but after this comes judgment, so also the Messiah, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to deliver those who are eagerly waiting for him.

What we are seeing here is that Hebrews connects the New Covenant with Yeshua's once-for-all priestly offering, which purifies the conscience and creates the basis for circumcision of the heart among those called into the Body of Messiah.

Hebrews therefore contrasts two blood-sealed covenants. The old covenant was served by earthly priests from Aharon's line; the New Covenant is established through Yeshua's once-for-all sacrifice. At present, this New Covenant reality is experienced by those called into the Body of Messiah, while the national Israel awaits its full fulfilment after Yeshua returns.

In Summary

- The Avrahamic Covenant, sealed by circumcision, remains significant for Isra'el in the twenty-first century because YHVH has not revoked the promise made to Avraham nearly four thousand years ago.
- When the house of Isra'el is reunited under the rulership of Yeshua HaMashiach, Isra'el will receive the Land of Promise in fulfilment of that covenant.
- The New Covenant, established through the death and resurrection of Yeshua, promises circumcision of the heart and will reach its national fulfilment when the house of Isra'el is reunited in the Land and acknowledges Yeshua as King and Cohen Hagadol.
- Jews and Gentiles called by YHVH to be Talmidei Yeshua—the One New Man—are set apart now under the New Covenant as a priestly people, receiving circumcision of the heart through trust in Yeshua rather than circumcision in the flesh.

In conclusion

Circumcision remains important for Jewish men because the promises of the Avrahamic covenant have not been reversed. When all Isra'el is reunited under Yeshua's rulership, they will inherit the Land of Promise; and those called into the New Covenant in Yeshua can be equally confident that its promises will be fulfilled.

Unlike the Avrahamic Covenant, which assures Isra'el an inheritance in the Land of Promise, the New Covenant forms a priesthood after the order of Malki-Tzedek for those who receive an inheritance as sons of YHVH.

This distinction explains why circumcision in the flesh remains covenantally significant for Isra'el, while those called into the One New Man receive circumcision of the heart through the work of Messiah.

A separate paper will examine more closely what Scripture says about being called and set apart in the New Covenant.

Shalom

July 2026

Summary of all Scriptural Verses Cited in this Paper

B'resheet / Genesis

15:18–20 "I have given this land to your descendants—Vadi of Egypt to the great river..."
17:1 "I am El Shaddai. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted."
17:2 "I will make my covenant between me and you; I will increase your numbers greatly."
17:7–8 "I will give you and your descendants... all the land of Kena'an..."
17:10–14 "Every male among you is to be circumcised"
17:15–22 Promise of Yitz'chak; covenant established through him.
17:23–27 Avraham circumcises himself, Yishma'el, and all males of his household.
21:4 "Avraham circumcised his son Yitz'chak when he was eight days old..."
49:1–2 "Gather together, I will tell you what will happen... in the acharit-hayamim."
49:10 "The sceptre will not pass from Y'hudah... until Shiloh comes..."

Sh'mot / Exodus

4:18–20, 24–26 Tzipporah circumcises Moshe's son.
12:43–48 Pesach regulations requiring circumcision.

B'midbar / Numbers

1:44–50 Levi set apart; not counted among Israel's inheritance.
18:1–7 Duties of Aharon and the Levites.
18:20, 24 Levi has no land inheritance.

Vayikra / Leviticus

12:1, 3 "On the eighth day, the baby's foreskin is to be circumcised."
26:1–13 Blessings for obedience.
26:14–55 Curses for disobedience, exile, and promise of eventual restoration.

D'varim / Deuteronomy

10:12–22 "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart..."

30:1–10 Promise of heart-circumcision after exile.

30:5–6 "YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts..."

Yirmeyahu / Jeremiah

4:1–4 "Circumcise yourselves for YHVH; remove the foreskins of your heart..."

31:31–33 The New Covenant: Torah written on the heart.

Yechezk'el / Ezekiel

36:1–15 Prophecy to the mountains of Israel.

36:24–38 Promise of cleansing, new heart, new spirit.

37:15–28 Two sticks reunited: Y'hudah and Efrayim.

Mattityahu / Matthew

24:1–14 Signs of the end; "love will grow cold because of increased distance from Torah."

Luke

1:57–60 Yochanan's circumcision.

2:21 Yeshua's circumcision.

21:20–24 "Yerushalayim will be trampled down by the Goyim..."

Yochanan / John

1:45 "We've found the one Moshe wrote about..."

7:22–24 "Moshe gave you b'rit-milah... judge the right way."

Acts

7:1–8 Stephen recounts Avraham's covenant and circumcision.

14:24 – 15:5 Debate over Gentile circumcision.

15:19–20 "We should not put obstacles in the way of the Goyim..."

15:21 "Moshe... read in the synagogues every Shabbat."

16:1–5 Timothy circumcised "because of the Jews living in those areas."

21:15–40 Sha'ul accused of bringing Gentiles into the Temple.

Romans

2:17–29 "True circumcision is of the heart..."

3:1–9, 28–31 "Much in every way! The Jews were entrusted with the very words of God."

3:21–26 Righteousness through Yeshua's faithfulness.

1 Corinthians

7:17–20 "Was someone uncircumcised when called? He shouldn't undergo b'rit-milah."

Ephesians

2:11–22 "He has made us both one... creating one new humanity."

Philippians

3:1, 3 "We are the Circumcised... who worship by the Spirit of God..."

Colossians

2:4–12 "You were circumcised... not by human hands... but by the Messiah."

Hebrews

9:1–28 Full exposition of the New Covenant priesthood.