

# Kings Norton Baptist Church

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2023 10 am

'The sign you belong' - Covenant and its sign: circumcision

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Welcome to all.

Opening Scripture and prayer

Hymn MP 991 I will worship (I will worship)

Scripture Ezekiel 36:16-29 (page 867)

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Children's talk A the crossroads Jeremiah 6:16

Chorus MP 69 Change my heart O God

Notices House-group, BCM Sleepout feedback.  
Members meeting next Sunday

*Prayer and share time*

Communion

Reading Genesis 17:1-14 (page 17),  
Romans 2:25-29, 4:1-12 (page 1130)

Hymn MP 632 Thank you for the cross

Sermon 'The sign that you belong'

Hymn MP 586 Saviour thy dying love

Closing Prayer

Close

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## *Prayer & Exordium*

'The sign that you belong' is the sermon title this morning. Repeat.

As we walk through the key events of the Bible we come to Genesis 17. Here God's covenant agreement with Abraham is restated v1-8, and the sign of that covenant, circumcision is instituted v9-14.

We've already considered God's promises to Abram so just a brief look now. We will spend more time on the sign of the covenant that is circumcision.

Now when I mention 'circumcision' you might immediately think:

1. This doesn't interest me,
2. It is confusing,
3. This is distasteful,
4. This is irrelevant to me,
5. That doesn't apply as I'm a woman,
6. It is unnecessary, its OT and no longer applies, we are NT / New covenant people. Quite.

But it is there in the Bible. Have you heard a sermon before on it?

Should I, for those reasons mentioned, just skip over it? Should I only select certain passages to preach on - and out leave others?

Presumably you are in church because you recognise the truth of the bible, glance up at the one on the pulpit. Don't we think "if it is in here it's important? Presumably if it is in here you want to understand why.

Surely if I failed to preach from the word of God in its entirety you would rightly show me the door / and send me packing.

Isn't all of God's word inspired and useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in Righteousness**? Didn't Jesus say not the least stroke of a pen, the 'Jot or tittle' will disappear until all is accomplished.

Do you not learn about the temple, the priests, the altar, the crossing of the red sea and the Jordan, the piling up of stones etc, so why not circumcision? So this morning will look to see what circumcision is all about. After all the word appears 89 times in the bible, (in 69 verses) with the majority; 57, being in the NT! So what does it mean to me - today? Is there a NT equivalent?

*Don't worry - there's no age rating here, or parental guidance needed.*

But first briefly.....

## 1-8 Covenant

“1 **When Abram was ninety-nine years old**, that is 13 years after the birth of Ishmael and recorded in the last chapter: **the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. 2 I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."**

– and all his descendant and if we are people of faith that that is you and I **the Lord appeared** that's YAHWEY *Jehovah* the usual title, But here and for the first time and rarely used He announces: **"I am God Almighty; El Shaddai**– the almighty power of God. Here His splendour is revealed, it is to him the *shechinah*, a visible display of God's immediate glorious presence.

Abram, overcome by the brightness of the divine glory **fell face down** in awe. He's unable to bear the sight of it. Daniel and John did likewise Da 8:17; 10:9,15; Re 1:17.

✚ **God first makes himself known to us, and gives us a sight of him by faith, and then takes us into his covenant.**

God calls Abram saying **walk before me and be blameless.**

✚ **You can only share in God's Glory - if you are willing to share in God's holiness. x2**

**and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you:**

**You will be the father of many nations.**

**5 No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.**

See here is a 'chiasm' – A way of accentuating, drawing attention to a central truth. Also in verse 8 see the bulletin. To confirm the promise of land which is the OT way of saying you will be with me in Heaven.

Did you see **You will be the father of many nations** became **'I have made you'** past tense, the prophetic past tense, spoken of as if already completed.

**7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come**, Abraham and all who come after him – and if you are a man or woman, boy or girl of faith then that means you – It's an **everlasting covenant**. Gen 17:13. Jesus intercedes.

## Now we come to verses 9-14 'Circumcision'

**9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant .... keep repeated. Every male among you shall be circumcised.**

2a

The first mention of circumcision in the Bible is here in this chapter = x10.

Stephen in Acts 7:8 calls it **the covenant of circumcision**.

✚ **But circumcision, is not the covenant – it is the sign of the covenant.**

**11 circumcision, .... will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.**

So let's ask ...

Was circumcision used before or elsewhere? It was practiced in some form among the Abyssinians, some South African tribes, and ancient Egyptians.

What about other religions? There is no proof that it was practiced on infants, or became a general, national, or religious custom before Abraham. It has since been adopted by other nations that sprung from Abraham such as the Arabians, and the followers of Islam although not enjoined in the Koran.

Circumcision was commanded by God to Abraham and his male descendants. While peculiar to the males, the women were also included in the covenant, for the man is the head of the woman and the household.

There's no hint of the abhorrent practice of FGM seen today in N & E Africa

✚ **It was a rite that marked out a Jew - as a Jew. (Jud 14:3 Eze 31:18 Ac 11:3)**

It was a description for a Jews, the word circumcised in the Bible was interchangeable with 'Jew'. The Apostle Paul says he took **the gospel to the Gentiles, {Greek *uncircumcised* } just as Peter had to the Jews. {Greek *circumcised*; also in verses 8 and 9 } Gal 2:7**

✚ **So the way you belonged to God, 'a Jew' was to be circumcised**

Only the Jews were circumcised, not the pagan nations surrounding them who were described as the 'uncircumcised' Ezek 31:18 and to be judged.

uncircumcision = impurity. ∴ A great offence to be called "uncircumcised."

8<sup>th</sup> Day

**12 For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised**, and so that became the practice - **When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.** Gen 21:4

God commanded Moses, **On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised**. Lev 12:3 and without which no-one could partake of the paschal sacrifice.

So in Luke 1 with Zechariah - **On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah,** Luke 1:59

2b

So also with Jesus **On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, angel had given him before he had been conceived.** Lu 2:21

Did you notice this was the time the child was named. To be God's child is to be given a new name. This 'one' belongs to me he is saying.

Paul had once boasted in this sign: **circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews**; Philippians 3:5 It was a big deal for a Jew, "this is how I belong"

They continued the rite of circumcision while in Egypt, see Jos 5:1-9. **All the people that came out had been circumcised, says Joshua but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not.** Joshua 5:5

Why did they stop during the 40 years in the wilderness? – it was the penalty of their unbelief. God had 'dis-covenanted' them, they were excluded from the sign of the covenant. It was "*The reproach of Egypt*" the taunt of the Egyptians that God brought them into the wilderness to slay them; Nu 14:13-16 De 9:23-28.

So later with Joshua we read **the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again."** Joshua 5:2,3. So at Gilgal by the Jordan as they entered the promised Land, there '*the reproach of Egypt*' was, through circumcision, *rolled away*. Jos 5:2-9.

While it was exclusive to the Jews, God welcomed into the fold those who joined with the people of faith that they might share in its blessings. Just as with Ruth the Moabitess. Now God calls all to come and follow Jesus. **include those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. 13 Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised.**

**Circumcision committed you to Holy living - that you would share in Holy blessings**

In the synagogue Jewish proselytes were those who had become Jews by being circumcised. Others, the 'God fearers' were those who came to the synagogue but wouldn't go that 'far'. **they were the fence sitters**

v23 **"On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him."** Genesis 17:23 **On that very day**

✚ **Abraham was obedient – immediately obedient – that is the only kind!**

That then is how they showed they 'belonged to God'. through circumcision, the **sign**. In Ro 4:11 it is called '**a sign and seal**'

3a

■ Just as when you sign up for something, or sign on the dotted line, you are then committed to the contract. – Both ways

**But why have 'circumcision' as the sign? X2**

1. God is Holy. So you too must be Holy if you are to walk with God. That means I must 'put away', kill off the corruption of the flesh. Hence the cutting of the flesh signified by circumcision.
2. Circumcision caused the shedding of blood. The law required all things to be purged with blood, Heb 9:22 / Ex 24:8. Pointing forward to Jesus shedding his blood. Now completed all the previous pointers are done away with.
3. One of the main ways that Christians have stood out as different to those around is in sexual morality. Chastity before marriage, and fidelity in marriage. They go together – How opposite to the world - So circumcising was to indicate the cutting, or removing, of this major area of sin.

So how does this translate to us today in NT times?

Is it the bread and the cup? Didn't Jesus say this is the New Covenant in my blood and used the wine as a symbol, a sign?

Or is it baptism? Is the painfulness of OT circumcision to be contrasted with the ease of NT baptism, showing the contrast between the stern covenant of the law with the power and love of the gospel?

Why are some Bible people still circumcised today? Do they think God wants it? Maybe? But equally likely it is for health / cleanliness reasons.

How do you today show that 'you belong to God'?

OK your answer wouldn't be circumcision. So what would you say if asked?

Would you say, as I have heard people say it was my Christening? My confirmation? maybe baptism? first communion, wearing a cross, what is your 'sign' that you belong?

■ Display of HBC history and one sheet spoke of the church income some of which came from pew rents. Yes you paid for your seat, it was yours as long as you had paid up!

I wonder if some thought they had their seat to heaven! Today is it coming the church on a Sunday that is your 'sign'. Or is it that you do something, or pay something, or ... what is it for you?

Is it trying to keep the commandments – like that rich young ruler, all these I have done he said: Jesus looked at him in love: "**You still lack one thing. Sell**

3b

**everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."** Luke 18:22

What he needed was a changed heart, a circumcised heart. We don't practice the physical operation, instead, it is a circumcision of the heart that is needed. This is the true circumcision. The real circumcision that is of the heart.

Jeremiah says **Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, ... "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh**— Jeremiah 9:24,25

That religious young man did not know himself, he was deluded, he was a hypocrite. Jesus had to constantly confront those who had the sign only, a mere formal act. **Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.** Romans 2:25

**Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.** 1 Corinthians 7:19 the foremost being to love God.

Right early on Moses had to remind people **Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.** Deut 10:16

Circumcision with its cutting of the flesh was a sign of repentance, the corruption of the flesh might be put to death, cut, killed off. True change is a work of Christ by His spirit. Has Jesus changed your heart?

When Peter spoke to the crowds following Jesus death they were '**cut to the heart**' Why because Jesus, the Holy one of God, author of life itself, had been cruelly put to death. They were ashamed and convicted in their hearts.

**"You",** Peter says **"you with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."** Acts 2:23. Most of them had not been directly involved but they were party to it. Anyone who shuns Christ and his way is as one hammering in the nails. We are all guilty of it. What should we do they cried and as the answer came to them - so it comes to you and I **"Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** Acts 2:38

Yes Christ suffered to forgive, heal & change you, are you willing to let him?

- A local man with huge problems came to me and asked if I had a crucifix he could put up in his home – he wanted the blessings but what he did not want was to change and live a holy God honouring life.

- A lady walked past said she wanted help, she is living an immoral life and doesn't like the consequences – one help she doesn't want is the cutting knife of Jesus at work in her heart.

✚ You cannot have a change of life - without a change of heart.

Has the Lord done His work in you? If not then seek the Lord for it. *MP 69 Change my heart O God* x2 He is the great physician, he is the great surgeon, his knife cuts well and will produce the right result.

✚ Circumcision means 'a cutting around' surgery on the heart is necessary

Just as circumcision is a painful cutting - so the cutting of the heart is painful You cannot share in the benefits of the cross without a change of heart. It will mean cutting out selfishness, pride, lust, greed, anger, Let Him x2 **The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts ... so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.** Deuteronomy 30:6

That then is the sign you belong. You will be able to say **In him I was circumcised, - the putting off of my sinful nature, Or the flesh not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ !** Col 2:11 If you have it will show in that you live to love God and show true **kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.**" Col 3:12 In your life. You will then be able to live that Holy separated life.

Yes **circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.** Romans 2:29 The law – and Law keeping changes nothing in you!

It is interesting that circumcision which is a sign is invisible, what is the point of that? Why have a sign you can't see? That is because the changed heart is invisible – you have to look to the changed life to see it.

**A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.** Rom 2:28 A man or woman is not a Christian if only one outwardly. Not **It has to be a new heart and a new spirit in you;**

Do you have the real sign – a changed heart?

Here is the sign, the obvious sign a changed heart that loves God and desires to **walk blamelessly** before the Lord. **Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.**" Psalms 119:1

To be in God's covenant by faith means you can be sure that what God had promised would be theirs, in those days the land of Canaan: and for us the reality - the promise of eternal life in Jesus. Heb 4:8. **Read MP 586 v3**