

bb-TBC-55

📅 Due Date	@May 19, 2022
Σ days to go	1
☰ Status	Ready!! Scheduled
☰ Working Title	Branded for Life
➤ Project Home	
☰ Priority	
☰ Context	Bible Study Deliverable NLR Preaching
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Introduction

Not everyone was as excited as Paul about his 'revelation'. For some, from a strong Jewish background, Paul had gone too far. The Nazarenes might be accepted as a sect within Judaism similar to the sects of the Pharisees or Sadducees, but they saw that opening the door to the Gentiles would close it to many of their fellow Jews. If the movement continued in this direction there could be no possibility of it staying within the larger family of Judaism.

There was an alternative and that was to treat the Gentile converts as proselytes to Judaism. In that case as we have seen, any candidates would need to submit to a conscious taking on of the yoke of the law; a water baptism, an offering in the Temple and... circumcision.

We've always done it this way

Circumcision was older than the Sinai Covenant, 430 years older. References to physical circumcision in the covenant established at are surprisingly few, in fact there is just one;

▼ Lev 12:2-3

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman conceive seed, and bear a man-child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of the impurity of her sickness shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. (Leviticus 12:2–3 ASV)

The Latin word 'circumcise' is an exact equivalent of the Greek word peritome and simply means 'to cut around'.

The sign had been part of the covenant that God established with Abraham. Abraham, his male heirs, and all the male members of his household were to carry in their body a secret brand that said they belonged to God. The removal of the foreskin was symbolic of the fact that God's purposes would not be fulfilled by human energies. It was a symbolic statement of trust that God must fulfil his own word in his own way.

Much later Paul was to define true circumcision with the words;

▼ Phil 3:3

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, Phil 3:3 NKJV.

That can serve as a useful pointer to the significance of circumcision; it was a vote of 'no confidence' in the flesh. On consideration, circumcision was a strange sign for

more than one reason. For the most part it was not a public sign but rather a secret one. It was a private sign between a man and God. Often we think of circumcision as the sign of the Sinai Covenant community although in fact it was not; the covenant 'sign' of the Sinai Covenant was the keeping of Sabbaths.

▼ Exodus 31:13–14

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily ye shall keep my sabbaths: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Jehovah who sanctifieth you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: (Exodus 31:13–14 ASV)

Circumcision was not a covenant community sign but a personal sign. It spoke of the kind of personal covenant that God had entered into with Abraham. It was, however, incorporated into the Sinai Covenant and fixed for the eighth day of a male child's life. As the child of a member of the covenant community Jesus himself was circumcised on the eighth day. He thus became, personally, a part of the covenant community.

Modern Jews have a further ceremony in which the individual takes on the yoke of the law, called Bar Mitzvah, but this ceremony was instituted after the time of Christ. In ancient Israel the male child 'bore the yoke' from his eighth day. It was also a very permanent sign and, pretty much, irreversible so it branded the home-born Jew and proselyte forever. It burned the bridges behind them; there was no 'going back'.

Those who held that Gentile 'Nazarenes' should become full proselytes wielded strong influence, particularly in the areas of stronger traditional Judaism, for example in Jerusalem. We have come to know them as Judaizers and on a famine relief visitation to the Nazarenes in Jerusalem Paul discovered their determination to win their battle. Paul had taken a young Greek with him whose name was Titus. Reading between the lines in Galatians Chapter 2 we discover that there was a conspiracy to infiltrate the gatherings of the Christians and to insist upon the circumcision of Gentiles. The conspiracy was uncovered and the consensus of the church in Jerusalem was that Titus did not need to be circumcised. **Round One to Paul.** The church in Jerusalem refused to make circumcision a necessary part of being a member of the New Covenant community. James, Peter and John were happy to commend Paul to the work that God had clearly given him.

Love without pretence

Paul returned to Antioch in Syria and was later joined on a visit by Peter. In the beginning of his visit Peter was happy to mix with the Gentile converts and to share meals with them. He did not insist on them keeping Sinai food laws and all was well... until a party arrived from Jerusalem and ostensibly from James.

It seems that Peter associated the Judaizing party with James and was anxious about how they would report things to the church in Jerusalem. An insidious process began. Peter began to withdraw from gathering with the Gentile converts and his example was followed by others from a Jewish background. Ultimately even Barnabas, who usually ran to champion the underdog, was drawn into what Paul called 'the hypocrisy'. **Round Two to the Judaizers.**

The defection of Barnabas was too much for Paul to bear and seeing clearly the implications of their behaviour he decided he must take a public stand. This is one of the great crisis moments of the early New Covenant community, a genuine watershed. From this point the whole history of the movement would be determined.

Paul's protest was on the basis of 'the truth of the gospel'. This was not a matter of small or private importance and Peter was roundly rebuked by the man who would become known as the apostle of the Gentiles. If this movement had gone unchecked it would have resulted in two separate communities, two separate churches, two 'new men'. Paul saw the implications and tore into the thinking behind the hypocrisy.

He protested that Peter had been happy to live in a Gentile way until the visitors from Jerusalem arrived. Why then should Peter compel Gentiles to live as Jews? He then explained the implications of justification by faith, the teaching that God declares a man or woman to be right with him, not on the basis of their own life or achievement, but solely because they are relying on Christ alone for salvation. It was customary for Jews to divide the world, in their thinking, into two parts, the 'holy' nation and the Gentile 'sinners'. Paul takes up this theme. If Peter, as a member of the 'holy' nation needed to be justified by faith and not by his own achievements in keeping the law, it is plain that being declared right with God could never be on the basis of keeping the law. There are, according to Paul, no exceptions to this truth;

▼ Gal 2:16

by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. Gal 2:16
NKJV.

This has other implications. If believing this truth has caused Peter to neglect the keeping of the law then this truth has directly led Peter into acts of sin. His faith in Christ's provision alone has taken him over the line into clear transgression of the law. Christ, and Peter's faith, in him has now become associated with transgression and sin. This would make Christ 'a minister of sin', unthinkable! Paul piled on the pressure;

▼ Gal 2:18

For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Gal 2:18 NKJV.

To re-erect the need to keep the Sinai law, which Paul's and Peter's faith had pulled down, could only result in the re-establishing of the system that had inevitably branded them as transgressors.

And then the famous verses...

▼ Gal 2:19-21

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Gal 2:19-21 NKJV.

The law had pursued Paul to the place where it executed its judgment upon him in the death sentence and now it no longer had authority over him. When was this death sentence executed on Paul? When he was united with Christ. Only the man who has been united with Christ in the death of the cross can give this testimony.

We get the full sense of the words if we combine the old and the new King James versions; "I have been"- the New KJV, and still "am" - the Old KJV. This is the Greek Perfect Tense; beginning in the past and continuing through to the present. As a result of his union with Christ Paul now shares Christ's testimony, "I have been and still am co-crucified" and his current life is the expression of the Christ who 'lives in

me'. This is neither jargon nor theory; this is Paul's personal experience of the New Covenant in action.

Wrestling with the Truth

What was Peter's reaction to all this? We can gather evidence from a subsequent event. Some time later Peter addressed an inter-church conference in Jerusalem. The Judaizers had not given up their attempts and were now claiming boldly that;

▼ Acts 15:1

"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Acts 15:1 NKJV.

Peter's uncertainties are long gone and we can see this from his contribution to the conference in which he reminded them of his visit to the home of Cornelius;

▼ Acts 15:8-11

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." Acts 15:8-11 NKJV.

That is a wonderful summing up of Paul who was himself present at the same meeting! Perhaps it's just my imagination but I think I see a twinkle in Paul's eye!

Round Three to Paul AND Peter.

We might have thought that the matter was now completely resolved but it rumbled on for some decades and we find references to the issue in many of the New Testament's epistles.

...as we shall discover, God willing, next time when we meet together on Biblebase's Broken Bread Bible studies to remind ourselves of Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia.

Summary

In this chapter we followed the events that threatened the nature of the early New Covenant community; was this just another branch of Judaism or something quite different? If it was part of Judaism then entrance into Judaism must include circumcision but if not...

Bailey, Ron. The Better Covenant (p. 191-202). Kindle Edition.

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