

Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing¹

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Introduction

Circumcision, both inside and outside the Bible, has raised no small discussion in the literature.² This study seeks to contribute to this discussion in two ways: (1) the meaning of the biblical rite of circumcision will be explained against the background of the ancient Near East. Although a complete discussion of circumcision in ancient Near Eastern cultures is outside of the purview of this paper, the results of a previous study on this topic can be summarized.³ (2) Once the significance of circumcision has been understood, then how the theme of circumcision of the foreskin is developed in Leviticus and Deuteronomy with respect to heart (un)circumcision will be set forth. In the Torah, heart circumcision is predicted to be the resolution to Israel's covenant infidelity (and accompanying curse) and to bring blessing accompanying the return from exile.

Summary of the History and Significance of Circumcision

Circumcision is first mentioned in the Bible at Genesis 17 at the confirming/upholding of the Abrahamic covenant, previously initiated in Genesis 15.⁴ After rehearsing the promises for seed (v. 6; cf. 15:4) and land (v. 7; cf. 15:18), verse 9 introduces further information about the already existing covenant relationship. Yahweh commands Abram to keep (שמר) “my covenant.” Verse 10 clarifies that the covenant Abraham shall keep is the circumcision of every male of his. The text includes several details concerning the rite: (1) the act of circumcising the flesh of the foreskin (v. 11a), (2) circumcision will be a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham and his descendants (v. 11b), (3) every male (including offspring and anyone bought with money from a foreigner) shall be circumcised on the eighth day (v. 12a), (4) Yahweh’s covenant in Abraham’s flesh will be an eternal covenant (v. 13b), and (5) lastly, the one who has not undergone circumcision shall be cut off from the people; he has broken Yahweh’s covenant (v. 14). Although much information can be gleaned about the Abrahamic covenant sign of circumcision from this text, one omission remains clear: the significance of circumcision is nowhere delineated in this text or any other in the OT. For an answer to this question, one must appeal to a wider knowledge of the use of circumcision in other ancient cultures contemporary with the time of Abraham and Israel. The following is an abbreviated survey and assessment of this data.

Concise Survey of Circumcision in the Ancient Near East

Based on the biblical text, where exactly does one locate the religious-cultural milieu of a sojourner such as Abraham? From the biblical account of Abraham’s sojourning, there are only three possible places where one could locate Abraham’s background for understanding circumcision: “Ur of the Chaldeans,”⁵ his sojourning in the land of Canaan, and Egypt.⁶ Of these three possibilities, the land of Canaan can be safely set aside since its evidence of circumcision is quite late (13th century B.C.). Although the North Syrian evidence of three circumcised warriors from 2800 B.C. is the earliest evidence for circumcision, it is probably not the proper background for understanding Abraham’s and Israel’s circumcision.

The evidence from North Syria requires further investigation. Since one does not know the significance of circumcision in North Syria, it is impossible to draw comparisons between it and Abraham’s circumcision. The technique of full removal of the prepuce exhibited by the

North Syrian evidence indicates a true comparison with the later Hebrew technique. However, there are three reasons to reject an exclusively North Syrian background for Israel's circumcision. First, the temporal proximity of the Egyptian evidence of circumcision to the time of Abraham favors Egypt rather than the temporal remoteness of the evidence of circumcision from North Syria. The evidence from North Syria is too isolated to know certainly whether the rite was actually practiced during the time of Abraham, since there is no evidence of the rite in this location within a millennium of Abraham's life. Lack of evidence is not evidence of absence, but there are serious obstacles to overcome for the one who would argue that Israel's circumcision is best interpreted in light of North Syrian evidence.

Second, if the rite travels from north to south (as is probable given the evidence), there is no way of knowing whether the meaning and significance of the rite changed from culture to culture, *if it even changed at all*. If the rite of circumcision signified an initiation into the devoted service of the king and cult (as I will suggest) then the significance of the rite would not necessarily change in its journey from north to south. Nevertheless, many scholars maintain that circumcision was primitively a fertility rite or a puberty rite related to marriage, even in the absence of any clear *ancient* evidence for this position.⁷ One does not know whether the Egyptians altered the significance of circumcision or preserved the same significance as North Syria. The formal operation differed (see Egyptian operation below), but this does not necessarily indicate a change in significance.

Third, and most important, an Egyptian background logically accounts for both Abraham and Israel, since Israel comes exclusively from Egypt. The other alternative milieu for Abraham cannot account for Israel's Egyptian milieu. Given these factors, God revealed the sign of circumcision most probably to Abraham and Israel against the background of circumcision in Egypt.

Egyptian Circumcision

Evidence of circumcision in Egypt exists from various periods of Egypt's history from the 4th millennium B.C. to the Roman period. Specialists have examined this evidence seeking answers to the following questions: circumcision technique, age of the subject, the subject of the rite, and the meaning of the rite. These aspects will be compared and contrasted with Israel's circumcision.

In Egypt, circumcision technique was not the complete removal of the prepuce as was the case in Israel, but concerning Egypt Franz Jonckheere says, "Thus we conclude that everything converges to establish that, in Ancient Egypt, the surgical rite of circumcision consisted of an elementary maneuver: the liberation of the glans, obtained by making a facile dorsal splitting of the prepuce."⁸

In Egypt, the age of the subject of circumcision is difficult to reconstruct with certainty. The evidence from mummies is irrelevant for this question. Textual evidence for circumcision in Egypt indicates that circumcision was performed on males sometime during adolescence but is not specific. Therefore one can only make generalizations based on pictorial and textual evidence. The plastic representations do advance our knowledge at this point, even though this evidence may not be as conclusive as one might presume.⁹ The evidence from Egypt points to an age range of 6-14,¹⁰ leading scholars such as Jonckheere and Sasson to conclude that the rite may have two possible meanings: 1) a prenuptial or marriage rite, or 2) puberty rite or rite of passage into manhood.¹¹ Both of these scholars favor the second option, but further evidence of circumcision in Egypt leads one to a different conclusion.

In Egypt, the subject of circumcision is a matter of debate. Space constraints permit only room for a broad outline of the discussion. The question of the subject of circumcision concerns whether the rite was specifically reserved for the priestly and royal classes or whether it was a general rite for every Egyptian male between the ages of 6-14.¹² The clearest textual evidence adduced in the articles by Maurice Stracmans indicates that circumcision was reserved and obligatory for the king and those serving in his court (i.e., priests and royal family members). Mummy evidence is conflicting, but one fact remains: there is evidence of uncircumcised lower-class Egyptians from the early period, a discovery that one would not expect to find if circumcision was a general rite imposed on all Egyptian males entering puberty and adulthood.¹³ Certainly, the later Greco-Roman period prescribes circumcision for the priestly class.¹⁴ Therefore, the probable conclusion is that circumcision in Egypt was not a general rite for all males entering puberty and adulthood, but rather it was a rite reserved for the royal and priestly classes.

In Egypt, if circumcision did not indicate passage into adulthood, then what did it signify for the one who underwent it?¹⁵ In light of the previous point, circumcision is best described as an initiation rite for royalty and clergy. The one who underwent circumcision was inducted into and was

marked out for the service of the king and his cult.¹⁶ The king-priest was also circumcised and there is also a text which describes the circumcision of Rā himself.¹⁷ Foucart says:

Being thus led by a process of elimination to see in circumcision the idea of a mark of submission to a god, a sign of *initiation* into a god, or *alliance* with a god, we may now state that the obscure passage, already quoted, in which mention is made of 'Rā mutilating himself,' may have a value far beyond thought. Circumcision would then be an imitation of the action of Rā ... *It would be a sign of admission into the company of those who belonged to the family and household of the god*" (emphasis added).¹⁸

Foucart states that circumcision is not a mark of slavery, since the king and priests were considered sons and relatives of the god. In this way the physical sign of circumcision would be an *identification mark*, similar to tattooing or other cuttings that a particular family or tribe might do (676b). Therefore, in Egypt circumcision was an initiation sign for those who belonged and were devoted to service of the deity. It marked out or identified the royalty and clergy as ones who belonged to and were devoted to the deity and served him.

Summary Conclusions

Many aspects of Egyptian circumcision can be compared and contrasted with Israel's practice of circumcision.

Comparisons. The technique of circumcision is applied to the male prepuce in both cultures. Since mutilations of the body could occur in a number of different places, it is significant that both cultures circumcised the same part of the body.

Contrasts. First, each culture used a different technique for circumcision. Second, while in Egypt circumcision was applied to males between the ages of 6-14, in Israel the rite of circumcision was applied to males at eight days old. Third and most significant, the rite was specifically reserved for royalty and clergy in Egypt, while it was applied *generally* to every male in Israel.

Conclusions. The similarities and differences between the cultures provide grounds for understanding the theology of circumcision in Israel. First, from her origins Israel was called to be a kingdom of *priests* and a *holy* nation (Exod 19:6), that is, Israel was specially called to be devoted to Yahweh and his rule and reign.¹⁹ Therefore, given the Egyptian background of circumcision of royalty and clergy, it was fitting for

every Israelite male to undergo the general rite of circumcision, which now identified them as devoted priests to the service of Yahweh (cf. Gen 17:12). The sign of circumcision matched and reinforced the identity they subsumed at Sinai. Second, *every* Israelite male underwent circumcision at eight days old indicating that from birth each son of Abraham was devoted to the service of Yahweh.

In the OT, there are also important references to the “uncircumcised ear” (Jer 6:10), “uncircumcised lips” (Exod 6:12, 30), and “uncircumcised fruit trees” (Lev 19:23). These three uses of “uncircumcised” imply that the foreskin is an impediment or obstacle to hearing, speaking, and producing good fruit. That is, the state of being uncircumcised impedes something, which, if it did not have the foreskin, would otherwise be prepared for true function and vitality. But since it has the foreskin, it is impeded and will die. Therefore, circumcision also has a negative aspect—the one who is uncircumcised will be cut off from his people (cf. Gen 17:14)—and a positive aspect of signifying that one is devoted to God.²⁰ I now turn to an examination of what both the positive and negative aspects of circumcision mean for circumcision of the heart in the three texts employing the metaphor in the Torah.

Circumcision of the Heart in the Torah

Heart (un)circumcision occurs three times in the Torah: Leviticus 26:41 and Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6. I treat these texts in order.

Heart Circumcision in Leviticus

The reference to heart uncircumcision in Leviticus 26:41 occurs near the end of the book in a section typically designated as part of the epilogue (Lev 26-27) to the Holiness Code (Lev 17-27). Before considering the meaning of “uncircumcised heart” in Lev 26:41, it is first necessary to consider the broad outline of the book and the structure of chapter 26 specifically.

Outline of Leviticus

Most commentators see four sections in the book of Leviticus:²¹

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Description of Sacrifices | 1-7 |
| 2. The Priesthood | 8-10 |
| 3. Impurity and its Resolution | 11-16 |
| 4. The Holiness Code | 17-27 |

The Holiness Code, the Holiness Source,²² or Prescriptions for Practical Holiness²³ refer to the part of Leviticus in which there is a concentration

of prescriptions for governing human relationships according to the justice and righteousness in the Torah.

Milgrom holds that the Holiness Code/Source (H; 17-27) is distinct from Leviticus 1-16 (P) in structure, vocabulary, style, and theology.²⁴ These differences do not necessarily indicate different sources representing diachronic development in the history of Israel's religion as Milgrom and others suppose. There is a progression in Leviticus from "outward" holiness to "inward" holiness or better, from the holiness symbolized in sacrifice, cult, and purity laws to holiness exhibited in the obedience of a prepared and consecrated people which Leviticus 17-27 envisions.²⁵ Therefore, the holiness described in Leviticus 1-16 consecrates the people and the holiness in 17-27 emphasizes just and righteous living on the basis of that holy and devoted status. The command and motive clause, "Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2) harks back to God's holiness in 1-16 (cp. 11:44-45) and now forward to this necessary consecration to justice which should characterize all human relationships flowing from a devotion to God.²⁶ Kiuchi states, "Therefore the shift in emphasis in P and H need not be explained by the alleged different concepts of holiness in P and H; it is just that ch. 18 onwards stresses the demand for holiness on the basis of the holiness in chs. 1-16."²⁷ Therefore, the uncircumcised heart in Leviticus appears in the context of the Holiness Code, which is emphasizing a demand for an inward holiness out of an already outwardly consecrated relationship to Yahweh.

The Context and Structure of Leviticus 26

According to Kiuchi, Leviticus 17-27 contains two sections: 17-22 and 23-27. Kiuchi presents the structure of 17-22 as follows:²⁸

1. Introduction	17
2. A Prohibition of Canaanite Practices	18
3. B Be Holy	19
4. A' Punishments for Violations	20
5. B' Holiness of Priests and Offerings	21-22

The A sections pertain to Canaanite practices and the punishments for engaging in them, while the B sections pertain to holiness, first to all Israelites in chapter 19 and then outwardly to all consecrated priests and the holy offerings they bring in 21-22. For chapters 23-26, Kiuchi proposes the following structure:

1. A Holy Time	23
2. B Eternal Blessing and Divine Punishment	24
3. A' Sabbatical Year and Jubilee	25
4. B' Blessing and Curse	26

Chapters 23 and 25 correspond to one another. The Sabbath and appointed feasts in Leviticus 23 are expanded in 25 to include the sabbatical year and year of jubilee. The connection between chapters 24 and 26 hinges on the symbolic rituals for eternal blessing and the laws for divine punishment in 24 and their historical outworking in the blessing and the curse in chapter 26.

Drawing on the imagery of the lampstand and cherubim, Kiuchi suggests that the work of the priests in the Holy Place in chapter 24 presents a picture of the original situation in the garden though with some difference.²⁹ The “eternal statute” of the lampstand (v. 3), its perpetual burning (v. 3, 4), the perpetual shewbread ritual (v. 8), “the eternal covenant,” (v. 8), and the “eternal statute” (v. 9) together with the reimaging of the garden’s Tree of Life from which mankind would live forever (Gen 3:22) indicate that the rituals symbolized eternal blessing in the presence of God. The blessings in Leviticus 26:3-13 indicate that had the people kept the covenant with Yahweh, they would have partaken of the Edenic experience forever.

In Leviticus 24:10-23, the text portrays the reality concerning the lack of holiness in the camp. The reader is led to believe that a mixed marriage between an Israelite wife and an Egyptian husband probably led to a son who blasphemed the name of Yahweh (vv. 10-12). The punishment and *talionis* laws ensue from such an action (vv. 13-23). This scene illustrates that although the people were outwardly holy, they still had stubborn hearts which led to their punishment.³⁰ The people’s heart problem led to their blasphemy of the Name which results in their punishment. The presence of blasphemy in the camp and the *talionis* laws in 24:10-23 show that the institutional rituals of the Holy Place in 24:1-9 were unable to devote the heart to the service of Yahweh. Their inability to be inwardly holy led to their cursing the name of Yahweh and the historical outworking of the covenantal curses in 26:14-46. The divine punishment for cursing the name (24:11, 14, 15, 23) results in being cursed by God—the *lex talionis* or the punishment fits the crime. It is in the context of the covenant curses that our reference to heart circumcision occurs in Leviticus 26:41, revealing that Israel had an internal heart problem which led them to curse God and therefore undergo his covenant curses.

The general structure of Leviticus 26 is straightforward:

1. Introduction: Fear Yahweh and Reject Idols	1-2
2. Blessings	3-13
3. Curses and Restoration	14-45
a. Curses	14-38
b. Restoration	39-45
(1) Confession of Guilt	39-40
(2) God's Remembrance of Covenant	41-45

The opening verses of the chapter make clear that this section is a call for total allegiance to Yahweh and rejection of idols. If Israel walks in these commands, then Yahweh will bless them (vv. 3-13). If Israel does not obey Yahweh, then they will experience curses (vv. 14-38). The curses may be grouped into five sections, each marked with וְאִם “and/but if” (cf. 14, 18, 21, 23, 27).³¹ The last section is the longest and contains the most devastating curses. Verses 27-33 comprise the protasis (“if”), while verses 34-45 contain the apodosis. However, the apodosis contains a mixed message. It predicts destructive curses in verses 34-38 upon disobedience. However, verses 39-45 contain an almost sudden turn in the unfolding of events. Destruction gives way to even a glimmer of hope in verses 39-45.

The syntax (*x yiqtol*) and tenor of the unit changes at verse 39-40. The Hebrew verb קָרַח Niphal means “to rot” or “to decay” when describing wounds (Ps 38:6) or eyes and tongue (Zech 14:12). In some texts, it is used metaphorically with the meaning “to dissolve” or “to melt” referring to the hills in Isaiah 34:4 or to a penalty for people in Ezekiel 4:17; 24:23; 33:10. In the context of covenant curses, the verb has this meaning in Leviticus 26:39. This verse summarizes the punishments that have come upon them in the lands of their enemies because of their guilt and the guilt of their fathers. The waw-consecutive perfect in v. 40 (וַיִּתְּנֶהוּ) continues the possibility that the people will confess their guilt and the guilt of their fathers. There is no new conditional clause in verse 40 as in the ESV and NIV. Rather this verse is part of the same apodosis, which began in v. 39. These verses highlight the people’s improbable repentance if they break the covenant.

Verses 41-45 are introduced by a non-sequential verbal clause (*x yiqtol*) in verse 41, which marks a distinct unit of discourse within the apodosis. The focus is on Yahweh (אֲנִי , “even I”) and his remembrance of the covenant with the patriarchs (vv. 42, 44-45). Verse 41a rehearses Yahweh’s resisting of the people and his bringing them into exile (cf.

need of inward holiness—heart circumcision. As one continues through the canon, the next occurrences of heart circumcision are in Deuteronomy, significantly a loyalty covenant.

Heart Circumcision in Deuteronomy

In this section I first analyze the genre of Deuteronomy in order to understand its message properly. Second, I describe the deuteronomic vision of a loyal people who are covenantally faithful to Yahweh from a devoted heart. Third, I place heart circumcision in the context of a loyalty covenant expecting faithfulness from a devoted heart.

The Literary Form of Deuteronomy

The book of Deuteronomy shares the literary form of a covenant or treaty, particularly, the form employed by the Hittites from the 15th-13th centuries B.C.³³ The covenant form of Deuteronomy is as follows:

1. Preamble	1:1-5
2. Historical Prologue	1:6-4:44
3. Stipulations	
a. General	4:45-11:32
b. Specific	12:1-26:19
4. Document Clause	27:1-10
5. Appeal to Witness	27:11-26
6. Blessings and Curses	
a. Blessings	28:1-14
b. Curses	28:15-68
7. Solemn Oath Ceremony	28:69 (EV 29:1)-30:20

This form has clear comparisons with the Hittite suzerain-vassal treaty as many recognize.³⁴ Discerning Deuteronomy as a vassal treaty is crucial because literary form and poetics contributes to the overall meaning of the text.³⁵ The actual form of the book reveals that Yahweh is the Great King and Israel is the vassal, who is swearing loyalty and allegiance to Yahweh alone.³⁶ Therefore, Deuteronomy is fundamentally about Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness to Israel and Israel’s faithfulness or loving loyalty to Yahweh. The book details a loving, loyal covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The book of Deuteronomy envisions a relationship in which the people are devoted to Yahweh from the inside out, that is, from the heart.³⁷

The Deuteronomic Vision for Covenant Loyalty from the Heart

The word “heart” (לֵב/לִבָּ) is used 858 times in the OT according to the study by Hans Walter Wolff.³⁸ His study concluded that the word is used in six different ways: (1) placement of the organ of the heart (e.g., Jer 23:9), (2) feelings (e.g., Prov 15:13, 17:22), (3) wish as desire or longing (e.g., Ps 21:2 (EV 21:3)), (4) reason (e.g., Deut 29:3 (EV 29:4)), (5) decisions of the will (e.g., Prov 16:9), and (6) heart of God (e.g., 1 Sam 2:35). Of these usages, it is interesting to note that Wolff analyzes that 400 of these occurrences refer to the reason and intellect of man, that is, what one would call the mind. The heart is the control center of the human being according to the OT. It is not simply the place where one feels but more often it is the place where one understands and wills. If one’s heart was devoted to Yahweh, the whole person—intellect, dreams, and emotions—would then be devoted to him.

1. *Devotion from the Heart.* As a covenantal text, Deuteronomy exhorts and commands its readers to be loyal to Yahweh from the heart because of the grace shown to them in the past and the future blessing of life in the land.³⁹ In Deuteronomy, the texts which contain לֵב as an object of the preposition בְּ “in, with,” when describing the verbs “to love” (6:5; 13:4; 30:6), “to serve” (10:12; 11:13), “to do” (26:16), “to obey” (30:2), and “to seek” (4:29) demonstrate the goal for a people to be devoted to Yahweh with all their heart.⁴⁰

In addition to these verbs modified by בְּ, Moses also calls the people “to set” “my words” (11:18) or “all the words” (32:46) on (עַל) their heart. The Qal *waw* consecutive perfect 2mp of שִׁים functions as a command in 11:18 and the Qal imperative 2mp of שִׁים in 32:46 communicate that it is desirable for the people to place or set Moses’ instructions on their heart and soul, that is, for them to internalize the *torah* or instruction of Moses. In 6:6, the Qal *waw* consecutive perfect 3cp of הָיָה “to be” indicates that the words which Moses commanded the people shall be upon (עַל) their heart.⁴¹ These exhortations to have Moses’ words on the heart call the people to internalize the *torah*. They are to place the *torah* on the part of them, which controls their feelings, reason, desires, and will. Moses envisions nothing less than a people fully constrained and controlled by the *torah* from the heart. The vision is a good one. But how does Deuteronomy expect the vision to be realized in the day to day lives of the people?

2. *Heart Circumcision Attains the Deuteronomic Vision.* Deuteronomy presents circumcision of the heart as important means for attaining the Deu-

teronomic vision of loyalty from a devoted heart.⁴² The root מוּל to circumcise” occurs only twice in Deuteronomy and both instances relate to circumcision of the heart (10:16; 30:6). עָרְלָה “foreskin” occurs only once as the object of מוּל in 10:16. We will treat the matter systematically as follows: (1) interpret the metaphor in 10:16, (2) interpret the metaphor in 30:6, and (3) synthesize the inner deuteronomic development and draw preliminary conclusions.

Deuteronomy 10:16

Deuteronomy 10:12-22 is a unit of discourse contained in the General Stipulation section of Deuteronomy (4:45-11:32; see the covenant structure above). This whole section is unified by the central theme of loyalty to Yahweh in covenant relationship. The basic outline of the General Stipulation is as follows:

<i>General Stipulation: Deuteronomy 4:45-11:32</i> ⁴³	
A. Basic Principle of Covenant Relationship	4:45-1-6:3
B. Measures for Maintaining Covenant Relationship	6:4-25
C. Implications of Covenant Relationship	7:1-26
D. Warnings against Forgetting Covenant Relationship	8:1-20
E. Failures in Covenant Relationship	9:1-10:11
F. Restoration to Covenant Relationship	10:12-22
G. Choices required by Covenant Relationship	11:1-32

The dissertation by Steven Guest analyzed 10:12-22 as an independent unit and he applied the heading “Restoration to Covenant Relationship.”⁴⁴ Immediately before this unit, Moses rehearsed many of the failures of covenant relationship in 9:1-10:11, including the provocation of Yahweh in the wilderness (9:7), the incident of the golden calf (9:8-21), and the stations of the wilderness wandering where the people rebelled (9:22-24). These acts of treachery and rebellion against Yahweh led to Moses’ intercessory activity in 9:25-10:11. In 9:6 and 9:13 the people are described specifically as עֹמְקֵי-צַוְעַן “stiff-necked people” or “stubborn people.” This section then prepares the way for Moses’ exhortation to maintain covenant loyalty or to restore covenant relationship with the present generation (וְעַתָּה “and now” in 10:12 and 10:22).

In Deuteronomy 10:12-22 Moses exhorts the people to maintain covenant loyalty by balancing exhortations with statements about the

character of Yahweh in episodic fashion. The statements about Yahweh's character become the grounds for the earnest pleas to be devoted to Yahweh, their God, and it is the theme of loyal devotion, which prompts the origination of the reference to heart circumcision. The literary structure of 10:12-22 establishes heart circumcision as the central concern in Deuteronomy:

- A¹ Exhortation to Loyal Devotion: *Fear, Walk, Love, Serve, Keep* 12-13
B¹ Yahweh is Praised: Sovereign Creator and Redeemer 14-15
A² Exhortation to Loyal Devotion: Circumcise and Do Not Stiffen 16
B² Yahweh is Praised: Supreme God and Faithful to Weak 17-18
A³ Exhortation to Loyal Devotion: *Love, Fear, Serve, Cling, Swear* 19-20
B³ Yahweh is Praised: Faithful God of the Patriarchs and Exodus 21-22

The praise sections (B) function as the grounds of the exhortations (A) for the people to be loyal to Yahweh. The fact that Yahweh loved them (v. 15, 18) becomes the ground for them to love the marginalized (sojourner in v. 19) and to be loyal to Yahweh himself (v. 12-13, 20). The literary artistry of the unit is particularly acute at v. 16, the verse under investigation. The *center* of the exhortation sections (A²) contains the only positive command which calls the people to an *internal* action, i.e., to circumcise their hearts. The literary structure itself indicates that the *central* concern is the *internal* condition of the human heart. The second half of the verse (v. 16b) confirms this interpretation since it contains a negative command which further clarifies the positive one. It commands the people to cease stiffening their necks, the very rebellion Moses just rehearsed with them (cf. 9:6, 13).

The meaning of circumcision in this context is very important to the interpretation of the verse and therefore the whole section. I have suggested that circumcision positively devotes and identifies a person to loyal service of God, i.e., signifies one is a priest. If this meaning is correct, then it would also be true in this context where now circumcision is applied internally to the center of the human being's thoughts, volition, reason, and desires. A circumcised or devoted heart would then control and influence the actions and behavior of the whole person. The circumcised heart devoted to Yahweh would manifest itself in covenant loyalty as outlined by the external sections of the unit (A¹ and A³). Furthermore, because the foreskin negatively signifies an obstacle or impediment to some vital function, the removal of the foreskin of the

heart in this context indicates that the heart circumcised people would be a vital and flourishing people in covenant relationship with Yahweh. If the people had successfully obeyed the first part of verse 16, then they would have fulfilled everything God asked of them in verses 12-13 and 19-20, that is, they would have been completely loyal to Yahweh from a devoted heart.

In his article from 2003, Werner Lemke has cast doubt on the originality of Deuteronomy 10:16.⁴⁵ He defends his own suggestion that 10:16 with its reference to circumcision of the heart was a later interpolation to the text and therefore it is not the starting point for the biblical metaphor but a later development to Deuteronomy, probably to be attributed to Jeremiah in the late 7th century B.C.⁴⁶ He provides two reasons: (1) “First, the omission of v. 16 would cause no disruption of flow of the narrative, either in terms of syntax or content” and (2) “A second reason for questioning the authenticity of the originality of v. 16 has to do with the appropriateness or fit of the two metaphors used in a Deuteronomic context.”⁴⁷ I will discuss each of these objections.

Lemke’s first reason is that verse 16a contributes nothing to the context in which it is situated and therefore it is not original to this context but was interpolated in a later redaction of the book of Deuteronomy.⁴⁸ He argues that, although the presence of *כִּי* “for, because” in verse 17 could provide a motivation clause for the commands in v. 16, it functions better as a motivation or rationale for God’s election of Israel out of all the nations in v. 15.⁴⁹ Perhaps the first part of verse 17, “God of gods...,” could be construed as an explanation for the election of Israel in v. 15, but it would be awkward then to add that God “does *not* show partiality” as part of the explanation of God’s particular election of Israel from all the nations. Rather, if verse 17 with its description of the sovereign and just character of Yahweh is the ground or motivation for the people to circumcise their hearts and not to be stiff necked any longer, then the commands in v. 16 are calling the people to be devoted and faithful to—not stubborn against—their covenant Lord and his Torah.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the literary structure proposed above provides an internal reason for concluding that verse 16 is authentic to the immediate unit of discourse, since v. 16 is actually necessary for the inner logic and rhetoric of the paragraph.⁵¹

Lemke’s second reason for viewing v. 16 as a secondary insertion is that neither metaphor in the verse is characteristically deuteronomic and therefore they are not appropriate to the context. He presents a case which attempts to show that the prohibition in 16b “you shall no longer stiffen your neck” (וְעַרְפְּכֶם לֹא תִקְשׁוּ עוֹד) is not indigenous to Deu-

teronomy. Rather, Deuteronomy borrows the old idiom “stiff necked people” (עֲמֻם־קִשְׁי־עֲרָרָה) 2x (9:6, 13) from the golden calf incident in Exodus.⁵² He also lists “your stiff neck” (קִשְׁי־הַקֶּשֶׁה), which occurs 1x in Deuteronomy 31:27. However, Lemke considers the verbal expression in 10:16b as foreign to Deuteronomy and not dependent or alluding to the older narrative of the golden calf incident.⁵³ Three responses are in order: (1) Deuteronomy 2:30 does use the Hiphil of the verb קִשְׁי “to harden” with a different object.⁵⁴ (2) On Lemke’s view of verbal parallels, he would have to conclude that קִשְׁי־הַקֶּשֶׁה “your stiff neck” in 31:27 is also foreign because it is not identical in wording to Exodus, but for some reason this instance is permitted to be authentic. (3) Jason Meyer points out that 10:16b uses the adverb “still” (עוֹד), which assumes the usage of “stiff neck” in 9:6, 13.⁵⁵ Given these reasons, one can safely set aside Lemke’s objections to the authenticity of 16b based on קִשְׁי terminology.

Regarding heart circumcision, Lemke states, “A further difficulty with 10:16 is the seemingly unmotivated and isolated appearance of the circumcision metaphor in it.”⁵⁶ After asserting that Deuteronomy 30:6 belongs to the latest redactional layers of the book, he then argues that 10:16 is isolated and unmotivated. Setting aside the question of 30:6 for the moment, Lemke’s objection still misses the mark. Heart circumcision is not “unmotivated” if one adequately understands the linguistic data. First, the literary structure of the passage reveals that v. 16 is necessary for the logic of the passage to cohere. The *central* obligation in 10:16 is *internally* focused on the heart, indicating that if the center or heart is circumcised the outward actions of the people will manifest a covenantally faithful relationship with Yahweh. Second, Lemke is unaware of the positive meaning of circumcision, that it signifies one is devoted to loyal service of Yahweh.⁵⁷ Therefore, in a context full of loyalty language such as love, serve, cling, et al. why would the author not invoke the one image that would guarantee devoted, loyal service of Yahweh—heart circumcision. Rather than concluding circumcision of the heart as foreign to the context and as a secondary interpolation, the reference to it here reveals a redemptive-historical development for creating a covenant people who would be loyal to Yahweh and love him from a devoted heart brought about by circumcision. The second reference to heart circumcision in Deuteronomy 30:6 confirms this conclusion.

Deuteronomy 30:6

The second instance of circumcision in Deuteronomy comes at 30:6: “And Yahweh will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants (lit. “seed”) in order that you might love Yahweh, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul so that you might live.” The covenant curses end at 28:68, and 28:69 (EV 29:1) begins the Solemn Oath Ceremony (29-30). This section marks the agreement and entrance into the covenant made at Moab with the new generation (28:69 [29:1]). They emphasize the actual entering into the Moab covenant (28:69 [EV 29:1]) in 29:8, 11 (EV 9, 12). Peter Gentry’s outline of the Solemn Oath Ceremony is followed here:⁵⁸

I.	Heading	29:1 [28:69 H]
II.	Narrative Introduction	29:2A [29:1 H]
III.	Third Sermon	29:2B-30:20
	A.Past (<i>hesed</i> and <i>’emet</i>) of Yahweh	29:2B-9
	B.Covenant Inauguration Ritual Language	29:10-15
	C.Reminder of Curses for Covenant Disloyalty	29:16-28
	D.Secret Things – Revealed Things	29:29
	E.Future Curse Followed by Blessing	30:1-10
	F.Circumcised Heart: Reason for Future Blessing	30:11-14
	G.Final Warning RE: Life and Death	30:15-20

The Solemn Oath Ceremony rehearses the covenant form in brief: historical prologue, covenant inauguration, curses, and blessings. Chapter 30 predicts the curse, the blessing, the future blessing ensuing from the circumcised heart, and ends with a warning for the people to choose life. These chapters focus on covenant loyalty, for the people are entering into the covenant even now. The reference to heart circumcision in 30:6 as the response to impending covenant treachery (29:16-28) mirrors the usage in 10:16 where it functioned as the central response to covenant infidelity (9:1-10:11). Therefore both units (4:45-11:32 and 29:1-30:20) utilize heart circumcision as the key to resolving covenant infidelity and exile and thus heart circumcision is a theme that binds the book together.

Deuteronomy 30:1-14 expounds the blessing and the curse with an emphasis on the blessing that will accompany the return from exile. The syntax and structure of verses 1-10 are notoriously difficult, and the relationship of verses 11-14 to what precedes and follows is a crux for any interpretation of this chapter. First, my analysis of verses 1-10 is pre-

sented. Second, I attempt to relate verses 11-14 back to 1-10. Based on discourse grammar, the following structure for 30:1-14 emerges:

I. Temporal Scheme of Return	1-3
A. Protasis: The people return	1-2
B. Apodosis: Yahweh restores the people	3
II. Scope of Return	4-7
A. Protasis: Difficult Circumstances	4a
B. Apodosis: Yahweh's Power to Restore	4b-7
A ¹ Geographical Return	4bc
B ¹ Blessings	5
A ² Internal Transformation	6
B ² Blessing: Safety from Enemies	7
III. Results of Return	8-10
A ¹ Obedience	8
B ¹ Blessings	9
A ² Obedience	10
IV. Explanation of Return	11-14

Hebrew literature works in both a kaleidoscopic and recursive manner, that is, it examines a topic from one angle, then sets it down in order to pick up the same topic again and examine it from a different and complementary angle. After all angles or passes at the same topic are *heard* one can correctly interpret the text. Verses 1-10 describe the return from exile from three different but complementary angles. Verses 1-3 provide a broad temporal scheme of return from exile. Verses 4-7 treat the scope of the return from exile and as such provide the second pass on the same topic of return from exile. Verses 8-10 treat the results of the return from exile and contain the third and final pass on the matter. Verses 11-14 are the explanation (“for” כִּי) of the blessing of the return from exile. Verse 11 resumes the theme of future obedience of the command given by Moses (“which I am commanding you today”; אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם

The כִּי (“when” or “if”) of verse 1 probably introduces the protasis of a temporal clause (an interpretation as old as the LXX [ὡς ἄν]) in verses 1-2, while verse 3 functions as the apodosis. These three verses provide the general temporal framework for Israel’s return from exile. In verses 1-2, the focus is on the initiative of the people to return to Yahweh and in verse 3 Yahweh’s subsequent restoration of the people.

This first section functions as the opening to the entire unit and as such it provides the broadest of parameters for the people's return to Yahweh and Yahweh's restoration of the people. Zechariah summarizes this theme in 1:3: Return [Israel] to me and I [Yahweh] will return to you.

The division between the first unit and the second unit is determined by discourse grammar. Verse 4 opens with *x yiqtol* and therefore signals a break in the discourse sequence. In this verse, + ׀ imperfect marks the protasis of a conditional clause. This clause opens a new protasis, syntactically distinct from verse 1, and its apodosis consists of verses 4b-7. These verses are unified around the theme of Yahweh's efficacious power to return the people from exile. The protasis (4a) sets the stage in hyperbolic terms by describing the outcast of Israel as at the outermost part of the heavens.⁵⁹ Verses 4b-7 then describe Yahweh's powerful return of the outcast from the outermost part of heaven in an A¹ B¹ A² B² structure. A¹ describes the physical return from exile, while B¹ describes the blessings associated with the return in Abrahamic covenantal terms (שָׂרָה "to possess" Gen 15:7 et al.; רָבָה "to multiply" Gen. 17:2 et al.). A² further interprets the return from exile in terms of Yahweh's circumcision of the people's hearts. B² resumes the theme of blessing by describing a safety for the people, which results from Yahweh setting curses on their enemies. This theme alludes to Gen. 12:3, where Yahweh promised Abraham that he would curse the one who cursed him. That heart circumcision is juxtaposed to allusions to the Abrahamic covenant suggests a development to the theme of circumcision within the canon. In other words the OT canon—within the Abrahamic and Israelite covenants—is already showing that circumcision in Genesis 17 was an external type or pattern of the greater internal circumcision to come.

Regarding the structure, the A sections mark two stages in the return from exile, while the B sections mark the blessings associated with return from exile. A¹ details the geographical return from exile, while A² expounds the spiritual return from exile employing circumcision of the heart to explain the internal transformation which will devote the people to a loyal love of Yahweh. Although there are two distinct stages of the return in Deuteronomy, the time frame for each stage is not clearly delineated in this text. Later in redemptive history and in the canon, Isaiah will delineate two returns from exile, the geographical return to be accomplished by the servant Cyrus, and the spiritual return to be accomplished by the Suffering Servant.⁶⁰ Therefore Deuteronomy

30:1-10 is at the headwaters of a major theme to be developed by the prophets. The people will return from exile but they will not undergo spiritual return from exile until sometime later.

The division between sections two and three depends on the discourse feature in verse 8 (*x yiqtol*), which indicates a sequential break from the previous *waw* consecutive perfects in verses 5-7. This section is unified around the central theme of the results of the return from exile. Verses 8 (A¹) and 10 (A²) portray the returned people as an obedient people to Yahweh. Verse 9 (B) pronounces the blessings for covenant faithfulness. Therefore an A¹ B A² structure emerges from the final three verses, which focus attention on the main theme of return from exile present throughout verses 1-10.

There are two interpretive options regarding Deuteronomy 30:11-14 and its relationship to the preceding section: (1) Verses 11-14 return the reader to the present and teach that the Torah is not too difficult for Israel to keep.⁶¹ (2) Verses 11-14 continue the eschatological force of verses 1-10 and therefore the ease of keeping the Torah accompanies heart circumcision upon the second stage of the return from exile.⁶² The present exegesis supports the second option: the circumcision of the heart in 30:6, which the people could not do themselves (10:16), will free the people to love Yahweh. When the prophets describe the heart change to occur in the new covenant, they typically include a description of the people keeping the Torah or God's commands (Ezek 36:27; Jer 31:33-34). In Deuteronomy, the connection between internal transformation and obedience of the Torah is not made explicit in 30:6. However, if 30:11-14 continues the thought in 1-10 as a subordinate clause explaining the future implications of the circumcised heart, then 30:11-14 clarifies that the internal transformation of heart circumcision leads to keeping the Torah commanded by Moses in Moab.⁶³ The ease of keeping the Torah was not a reality tied to the circumcision of the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants; rather, it was a reality predicted to accompany the circumcision of the heart and the new covenant at the second stage of the return from exile. At this time, the exile is ended and the blessed restoration commences.

Synthesis of Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6

Heart circumcision appears twice in Deuteronomy and a comparison and contrast of the two texts and their contexts is illuminating. First, these texts and contexts share a number of parallels. Jason Meyer has

noted linguistic parallels between the two:⁶⁴

to love him 10:12	to love Yahweh 30:6
with all your heart and all your soul 10:12	with all your heart and all your soul 30:2, 6
to keep Yahweh's commands and his statutes 10:13	to keep his commands and his statutes 30:10
which I am commanding you today 10:13	which I am commanding you today 30:2
for good 10:13	for good 30:9
your fathers 10:15, 22	your fathers 30:5, 9
circumcise the foreskin of your heart 10:16	Yahweh will circumcise your heart 30:6

The parallels are deeper when the previous context of each passage is considered. As we noted in the case of 10:12-22, 9:1-10:11 recount the many failures in covenant on the part of the people. 10:12-22 functioned as the response to those covenant failures. In the face of covenant breach and Yahweh's grace, 10:12-22 instructed the people to devote themselves anew to Yahweh's covenant, which was pointedly summarized by heart circumcision in 10:16. In the case of 30:6, the previous context in Deuteronomy 29:16-28 (EV) focuses on Israel's impending plunge into exile. The curse is coming upon the people. Deuteronomy 30:1 confirms this interpretation since both the blessing and the curse will come upon Israel. But curse and exile are not the final word. As we have seen from 30:1-10, Yahweh had planned a grand return from exile, which included the circumcision of the people's hearts. Therefore, both heart circumcision texts appear in contexts which are solutions to the plights caused by failure in covenant. Heart circumcision is one theme that glues the book of Deuteronomy together.

Although there are many similarities between the passages, there is one major *difference*. In 10:16 Moses commands the people to circumcise their own hearts and to cease being rebellious. Given the full scope of redemptive history, this command is tantamount to telling a kleptomaniac to stop stealing without giving him or her any power to overcome the extreme desire to steal. In 10:16, Moses' command to circumcise one's heart is similar to his prayer for them in Numbers 11:29, "But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!'" (ESV). The bare command to circumcise one's heart will not accomplish heart circumcision. In contrast, 30:6 uses the assertive

modality and not the deontic. Part of the second stage in the return from exile includes Yahweh circumcising the hearts of the people. This circumcision will devote the people to him. Indeed, they will love Yahweh with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their might.

Conclusion

Circumcision of the foreskin marked one for devoted service to Yahweh and therefore it is a fitting sign for Israel who was called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:6). Abraham's family bore the sign which marked them as a holy priesthood and devoted them to the service of Yahweh. But Israel's history contradicts the sign they bore. Rather than being a royal priesthood, they were stubborn and rebellious (cf. Deut 9:4-6; 29:3). A people bearing the sign of circumcision of the flesh was a type, a picture of a people devoted to Yahweh and his kingdom within a covenant relationship. However, redemptive history reveals that the type underwent development from as early as Deuteronomy 10:16 and the OT was already anticipating the reality to which the type pointed: internal circumcision of the heart. Deuteronomy 30:1-14 and the rest of the OT witness reveals that this heart circumcision was to take place at the second stage of the return from exile, the stage when Yahweh would finally act to bring Babylon out of the hearts of the people. Therefore, heart circumcision resolves the curse of exile and becomes the ground for the blessing through obedience to the Torah.

The heart circumcision theme introduced in the Torah undergoes development through the canon. The Prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, continue to refer to heart (un)circumcision and widen it to include the reality of heart change (e.g. Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:27). The NT confirms that this eschatological hope dawned in Christ and through him extends to the church (cf. Rom 2:28-9; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11-12).⁶⁵ The three texts within the Torah set an early trajectory that God's people would one day experience his eternal blessing by worshipping and serving him from a devoted heart. They would ultimately have what Israel as a nation lacked—circumcised hearts.

¹ I wish to thank Peter Gentry for reading an earlier draft of this paper. His comments saved me from many errors and stimulated my thinking on this topic in significant ways.

² Michael V. Fox, "The Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in Light of the Priestly 'ot Etiologies," *RB* 81 (1974): 557-96. John Goldingay, "The Significance of Circumcision," *JSOT* 88 (2000): 3-18. Jason S. DeRouchie, "Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums: Theology, Rhetoric, and the Handling of Metaphor," *BBR* 14 (2004): 175-203. Robert G. Hall, "Circumcision." Pages 1025-31 in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed., David Noel Freedman; New York:

- Doubleday, 1992). Frans Jonckheere, "La circoncision [sic] des anciens égyptiens," *Centaurus* 1 (1951): 212-34. Philip J. King, "Circumcision: Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2006): 48-55. Meredith G. Kline, "Oath and Ordeal Signs," *WTJ* 27 (1964-65): 115-139; idem, "Oath and Ordeal Signs," *WTJ* 28 (1965-1966): 1-37. William H. C. Propp, "Circumcision: The Private Sign of the Covenant," *BRev* Aug (2004): 22-29; idem, "The Origins of Infant Circumcision in Israel," *HAR* 11 (1987): 355-70. Jack M. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 85 (1966): 473-76. Richard C. Steiner, "Incomplete Circumcision in Egypt and Edom: Jeremiah (9:24-25) in the Light of Josephus and Jonckheere," *JBL* 118 (1999): 497-505. Maurice Stracmans, "Un rite d'initiation a masque d'animal dans la plus ancienne religion égyptienne?" *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, XII (1952): 427-440; idem, "A propos d'un texte relatif à la circoncision égyptienne (1re période intermédiaire)," *Mélanges Isidore Lévy* (1955): 631-639; idem, "Encore un texte peu connue relative à la circoncision des anciens égyptiens," *Archivo Internazionale di Etnografia e Preistoria* 2 (1959): 7-15. For the question of circumcision's relationship to baptism see C. John Collins, "What Does Baptism Do For Anyone? Part I," *Presbyterion* 38/1 (2012): 1-33; idem, "What Does Baptism Do For Anyone? Part II," *Presbyterion* 38/2 (2012): 74-98. David Gibson, "Sacramental Supersessionism Revisited: A Response to Martin Salter on the Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism," *Themelios* 37.2 (2012): 191-208. Martin Salter, "Does Baptism Replace Circumcision? An Examination of the Relationship between Circumcision and Baptism in Colossians 2:11-12," *Themelios* 35.1 (2010): 15-29.
- ³ I am currently in the process of submitting for publication a paper entitled "The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel," which treats exhaustively the matter of circumcision in ancient Near Eastern cultures, especially Egypt.
- ⁴ For the argument that God made one covenant with Abraham, which was upheld with him in Gen 17 and the rest of the patriarchs, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Biblical Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 275-80. Henceforth, this work will be referred to with the abbreviation *KTC*. See also Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *JETS* 56.2 (2013): 249-71. Niehaus' argument rests on the observation that the patriarchal narratives only refers to a singular "covenant" when referring to the covenant made with Abraham and never refers to covenants with the patriarchs.
- ⁵ On Ur as the old Ura in North Syria, see Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," *JNES* 17 (1958): 30-31. See also Cyrus H. Gordon, "Abraham of Ur," in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies Presented to G. R. Driver* (eds. D. W. Thomas and W. D. McHardy; Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 77-84. More recently Hershel Shanks has defended this proposal in Hershel Shanks, "Abraham's Ur: Is the Pope Going to the Wrong Place?" *BAR* 26/1 (Jan/Feb 2000): 16-19, 66-67. See Shank's map on page 19 for the contrast between the two proposed locations. Gordon handles the seeming linguistic discrepancy between the two names as an inter-Semitic difference. The -a in Ura may be long (Aramaic definite article "the City or Station," cf. LXX) or short in which case it would be indicating the oblique case of a diptotic place name. Either way, this ending is not part of the root and would be dropped in later Hebrew. This view accounts for some of the geographical problems with the southern Ur, such as the crossing of the Euphrates (e.g. Josh 24:2-3) and the mention of the Kesed (Kasdim; "Chaldeans") in Gen 22:22 shortly after Aram. The new Ur on the south west side of the Euphrates cannot account for the details in geography, and there is no evidence of circumcision in all of eastern Mesopotamia.
- ⁶ The writer was surprised at the omission of the possibility of an Egyptian background on the part of those scholars, who considered the question of background at any length. See DeRouchie, "Circumcision," 189 n. 25. DeRouchie's treatment is typical in this respect, since he considers Ur of the Chaldeans and Canaan, but he omits Egypt from discussion. Kline, "Oath and Ordeal Signs," *WTJ* 27, 115-39. Fox, "Sign of the Covenant," 557-96. Goldingay, "Significance of Circumcision," 3-18. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. John McHugh; New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961).
- ⁷ This assertion regarding the origin of circumcision is prevalent in the literature, but this writer could not find evidence which supports it. See the examples of Fox, "Sign of the Covenant," 591-2. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 47. Adolphe Lods, *Israel: From its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century* (trans. S.H. Hooke; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1932), 198. Paul R. Williamson, "Circumcision," in *DOTP*, 122. Propp, "Origins of Infant Circumcision," 355 n. 1. Fox attempts to give anthropological evidence, which reveals that some tribes perform circumcision before marriage today, but although anthropological studies have a crucial role in answering this question, one must, as Fox does, remember the tenuous nature of such evidence, when attempting to establish ancient practice and significance (Fox, "Sign of the Covenant," 591).
- ⁸ Jonckheere, "Circumcision," 228. Jonckheere indicates that two procedures of incomplete circumcision existed in Egypt: either 1) to longitudinally split the prepuce on the medial line, or 2) to make immediately an excision taking away a triangular scrap (225; for comparison see Fig. 3, 226; see Fig. 4 and 5 for the evidence of both procedures). See Sasson, "Circumcision," 474; Steiner, "Incomplete Circumcision," 503; and DeRouchie, "Circumcision," 187, who also accept the conclusions of Jonckheere's study. For a dissenting opinion see Paul Ghalioungui, *Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 96-97. Ghalioungui's reason for doubt comes from the Greek historian Strabo, who may indicate two parts to the circumcision operation: 1) the longitudinal cut on the medial line, and 2) then a circular one, around the base of the first. However, even Ghalioungui recognizes that one must be cautious with Strabo's statements. In the final analysis, Jonckheere's primary evidence

from the *plastiques* and from mummies combined with Steiner's interpretation of Jer 9:24-25 (i.e., circumcision *with* the foreskin) should take priority over the comments of Strabo.

⁹ Jonckheere, "Circumcision," 231. He says, "It [age] must be decided by interpreting the age attained by the individuals reproduced on the two reliefs speaking of circumcision. Now, do we need to recall that in Egypt the representation of the human figure is very often conventional? The man is generally reproduced without taking account of his age and without always taking care to endow him with an express fullness of physique."

¹⁰ Ghalioungui, *Magic and Medical Science in Egypt*, 150.

¹¹ Jonckheere, "Circumcision," 232. Sasson, "Circumcision," 474. Sasson says, "In Egypt, however, texts, sculptures, and mummies seem to support, the conclusion that babies never underwent the operation; it was reserved for either a period of prenuptial ceremonies or, more likely, for initiation into the state of manhood." The evidence confirms the first part of Sasson's statement concerning babies, but the evidence does not confirm his positive proposal.

¹² For scholars who conclude that circumcision was a specific rite for priests and royalty, see George Foucart, "Circumcision (Egyptian)," in *ERE* (ed., James Hastings; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), 674a-b, 675b. Aylward M. Blackwood, "Priest, Priesthood (Egyptian)," in *ERE*, 293-302 (esp. 299b-300a). Cf. also the articles by Maurice Stracmans in note 1. For scholars who only question but do not seek to answer whether circumcision was general/specific and obligated/voluntary in Egypt, see Jonckheere, "Circumcision," 231 and Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," 474 (cf. n. 10). Unfortunately, other scholars do not even seem to be aware of the question when they attempt to understand the significance of circumcision in the OT, see Fox, "The Sign of the Covenant ...," 592. Goldingay, "The Significance of Circumcision," 3-18; Hall, "Circumcision," 1026; Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 47; Lods, *Israel: From its Beginnings to the Middle of the Eighth Century*, 198; King, "Circumcision: Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why," 48-55.

¹³ Foucart, "Circumcision (Egyptian)," 674a-b, 675b. Stracmans, "Encore un texte peu connue relative à la circoncision des anciens égyptiens," 11-12. Unfortunately, most scholars have either overlooked the research of Stracmans, or they have not presented his ideas fully enough for others to appreciate his work. Sasson is an example of the latter, for he mentions the work of Stracmans, but he does not give the reader a lucid presentation of his evidence or his arguments. See Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," 474 (esp. n. 10).

¹⁴ See Josephus, *Against Apion* (trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, in *Josephus I*; ed. G. P. Gooold, [LCL], vol. 186; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 349. Josephus' testimony may indicate ancient practice, but it certainly remains consistent with Egyptian practice in Greco-Roman times. See Aylward M. Blackwood, "Priest, Priesthood (Egyptian)," in *ERE*, 299b.

¹⁵ Foucart, "Circumcision (Egyptian)," 676a. Foucart concludes, "Among the numerous explanations suggested for circumcision in general, we must first of all, for reasons given above, exclude those that connect it, directly or indirectly, with puberty."

¹⁶ Stracmans, "Encore un texte peu connue," 14. Other texts which describe circumcision describe games and other aspects of an initiation ceremony. See Maurice Stracmans, "Un rite d'initiation a masque d'animal," 427-440. Stracmans examines the bas-relief from the Ancient Empire n° 994 in the British Museum, and discerns an animal mask, games (or dances?), and a separation aspect to the ritual. Stracmans posits that this scene depicts events consecutive to circumcision and not, as with Ankh-ma-hor, to a representation of the circumcision proper (432).

¹⁷ For this reference in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, see Jonckheere, "Circumcision," 215.

¹⁸ Foucart, "Circumcision (Egyptian)," 676b.

¹⁹ See the careful exegesis in *KTC*, 312-327. For the meaning of "holy" as "devoted" or "consecrated" see also Peter J. Gentry, "Sizemore Lectures I: Isaiah and Social Justice," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12.1 (2013): 1-15. Peter J. Gentry, "Sizemore Lectures II: No One Holy like the Lord," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 12.1 (2013): 17-38.

²⁰ I am grateful to Stephen Dempster for drawing my attention to these "uncircumcised" texts and suggesting that the foreskin blocks the flow of life and therefore the uncircumcised one will die or be cut off. For more on the negative aspects of circumcision, see *KTC*, 274-275 and the other literature cited there. For the view that the foreskin was viewed as a barrier to fruitfulness see also Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 218-9 n. 26. Although the authors mistakenly claim circumcision was a fertility ceremony practiced on adolescents in Egypt, their assessment of the foreskin as a barrier to life is correct given the biblical texts. Furthermore, circumcision was not necessarily removing a barrier for Abram to sire a son, for he had already had a son with Hagar in an uncircumcised state. This shows less of a focus on fertility and more of a focus on a sign which indicates devotion to Yahweh in covenant and now the negative effects of non-circumcision, which does not result in lack of fertility but results in being cut off from vital covenant relationship with Yahweh (Gen 17:14). This conclusion corroborates what has been suggested about heart circumcision. Not only is the heart devoted to the service of God, heart circumcision also ensures that a person will have a vital and faithful covenant relationship with Yahweh.

²¹ Though using different section headings but agreeing on the main section breaks, see Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). For a four part structure but with different divisions (1-7; 8-16; 17-22; 23-27) see Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007) 19-23.

²² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1319.

²³ Wenham, *Leviticus*, xi.

²⁴ For example, Milgrom says, "H's main distinction from P is that P restricts holiness to sanctified persons (priests) and places (sanctuaries), whereas H extends holiness in both aspects to persons, the entire people of Israel, and places, the entire promised (YHWH's) land" in Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1397.

²⁵ On the helpful distinction between "outward" and "inward" holiness as the book of Leviticus progresses see Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 45. One does not need to accept his definition of holiness

²⁶ The outline of the narrative spine of the Bible in *KTC* shows that Israel is "another Adam" and therefore Yahweh's covenant with Israel contains regulations which further develop what shape true relationships were to have in the original situation, namely, the relationships were to be characterized by justice and righteousness. See *KTC*, 302-304.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁸ Adapted from Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 22-23.

²⁹ The differences between the scenes, however, are significant. First, the people in the outer court are separated from direct access to the lampstand, perpetually burning to symbolize the eternal life of the Tree of Life. Second, the cherubim woven into the curtain, as in Genesis 3, are guarding access to the Most Holy Place and therefore Aaron and the priests are working "from outside of the curtain of the testimony" (cf. 24:3). Although the lampstand symbolized God's presence in the Holy Place where the priests operated, they were still ultimately separated from his presence symbolized on the other side of the curtain. Therefore, the divine presence in the Holy Place is still far removed from that presence experienced in the garden in Eden. cf. Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 442-3.

³⁰ Kiuchi notes, "The reason [for their punishment] becomes evident when the cause of banishment from Eden is considered: it lay in the self-hiding of the first man and woman. It has been argued that a human's self-hiding before the Lord goes hand in hand with stubbornness, a major characteristic of the egocentric nature. Since the spiritual condition of humanity corresponds to the sanctuary and the Tent, the division of the latter into two parts as well as the prescribed rituals in the Holy Place imply that humans are far removed from the Tree of Life, and that is due to their stubbornness" (443). Although I do not agree that holiness has to do with removing the egocentric nature, as Kiuchi suggests, his insight into this chapter's negative picture of the stubborn heart of the people illumines the link between chapter 24 and chapter 26.

³¹ Kiuchi, *Leviticus*, 473.

³² Werner E. Lemke, "Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor," in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (ed., B. A. Strawn and N. R. Bowen; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 307-8.

³³ The fundamental structure of Deuteronomy appears as a suzerain-vassal treaty or covenant, but the fact that Blessings (28:1-14) occur before Curses (28:15-68) and they are disproportionate to one another probably indicates influence from earlier law codes (e.g. Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi). Deuteronomy does not show signs of direct influence from Neo-Assyrian treaties of the 1st millennium since any point of comparison between these two documents can be explained from earlier forms, whereas the comparisons between Deuteronomy and 2nd millennium treaties indicate unique points of comparison not found in 1st millennium treaties. One only needs to observe the presence of a Historical Prologue, Document clause, and Blessings in Deuteronomy to see that this text is from the 2nd millennium not the 1st millennium B.C. See Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 283-89.

³⁴ *KTC* presents the proposed literary structures of Kitchen, Gentry, and Guest (358-9). My own analysis would be close to Gentry's and Guest's, acknowledging the problematic analysis of 27:11-26. This section is either the public reading (as the repeated "Amen" seems to indicate) as Gentry sees or the Appeal to Yahweh alone as divine witness or covenant enforcer as Guest envisions. On Gentry's view, there is no list of divine witnesses in Deuteronomy, which would reinforce one of the book's major themes that Yahweh is the only God worthy of worship. On Guest's view, Yahweh is the sole divine witness, which would also concur with the book's overall treatment of Yahweh alone as Israel's God. Guest also analyzed 28:69 (EV 29:1)-30:20 as the Solemn Oath Ceremony. The two scholars agree on the division of the other sections of the book. Now see Peter J. Gentry, "The Relationship of Deuteronomy to the Covenant at Sinai," *SB/T* 18.3 (2014): 35-56. Gentry has concluded with Guest that the Solemn Oath Ceremony of 28:69 (29:1)-30:20 is the formal agreement or entrance into the Moab covenant (29:8 [9]). Therefore, it is part of the covenant form and not a Mosaic appendix. That 29-30 is part of the covenant document itself also explains the two uses of circumcision of the heart in Deuteronomy—the question of this section. Heart circumcision in 10:16 and 30:6 comes as a response to covenant treachery on the part of the people of Israel.

³⁵ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns), 17, states, "In simpler words, poetics makes us aware of how texts achieve their meaning. Poetics aids interpretation. If we know *how* texts means, we are in a better position to discover *what* a particular text means."

³⁶ For these themes in the Hittite texts see Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (2nd ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 2.

³⁷ On the expectation of "wholehearted" loyalty in Hittite treaties, see Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 27-28, 55-56,

- ³⁸ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (trans., Margaret Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 40.
- ³⁹ The Historical Prologue contains many instances of the grace of Yahweh shown to Israel (e.g. the promise of land to the Patriarchs [1:6-8], the provision of effective leadership and justice [1:9-18], care in the wilderness [2:7], and the promise and fulfillment of the destruction of their enemies [2:8-23; 2:26-3:22]). The tension between gift and obedience in Deuteronomy is best synthesized as follows: Blessing (election / redemption) Obedience ←(further) Blessing (life in the land). I was first introduced to this paradigm in J. Gordon McConville, *Land and Theology in Deuteronomy* (JSOTSup 56; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1984), 11-17. I came to a similar conclusion independently as I was working out interpretations of texts like Deut 4:1 and 8:1, where obedience in the present is motivated by future blessing in the land and by the past unconditional blessing of election and redemption from Egypt (cf. Deut 7:7-8).
- ⁴⁰ These references usually contain the full phrase: “with all your heart and with all your soul” though 6:5 contains the additional בְּכָל־מְאֹדְךָ usually translated “with all your might.” In the course of my research, I was glad to see a similar study done by Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 239.
- ⁴¹ Discourse grammar marks the verb in 6:6 as an imperative in a long chain of commands beginning with the imperative in 6:4 (שְׁמַע ; “Hear”) and ending with a Qal waw consecutive perfect 2ms + 3mp in verse 6:9 (כְּתֹבְהֶם ; “Write them”).
- ⁴² Deuteronomy also emphasizes the role of teaching for attaining covenant faithfulness, but this topic will have to be set aside at present (e.g. Deut 6:6ff).
- ⁴³ Adapted from Steven W. Guest, “Deuteronomy 26:16-19 as the Central Focus of the Covenantal Framework of Deuteronomy.” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 56.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ⁴⁵ Lemke, “Circumcision,” 300-303.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 301-302.
- ⁴⁸ Lemke does not supply a reason why a later redactor would insert this verse into the narrative flow. On his reasoning, the verse does not fit the present context, therefore it cannot be original to it. However, why would a later redactor add a verse into a context in which it did not fit previously? Because the verse is “isolated” and “unexpected” and contributes no meaning to the overall unit, Lemke has made his own suggestion of a later interpolation all the more improbable. It will not do to push the perceived “problem” on to a redactor unless Lemke can supply a reason for that redactor to *add* this verse into a context where it still has no semantic or syntactic reason for being there. Is this simply an instance where Lemke and others praise the redactors of the Pentateuch for such a great feat as joining the compositions together consistently and at the same time charging them with incompetence to insert such a theologically loaded verse into a completely alien context? He nowhere explains this move on the part of the redactor. R. N. Whybray pointed out that the redactors were necessary for the Documentary Hypothesis, but their work was not clearly delineated by source critics. Specifically, one is at pains to discern what is an addition from a redactor and what is original to the source. See R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 120-126, esp. 122-123.
- ⁴⁹ Lemke, “Circumcision,” 301.
- ⁵⁰ Further evidence that the waw-consecutive perfect is an imperative comes from the use of כִּי “since” in verse 14. This particle anticipates an imperative by providing the ground for the imperative. Therefore, the use of כִּי in v. 14 and וְ v. 17 suggests the imperative in v. 16 is original. For this use of כִּי see Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 203.
- ⁵¹ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9* (2nd ed.; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 202. Christensen provides the following, alternative chiasmic structure: A The “great commandment”—fear YHWH your God (10:12-13) / B YHWH owns the whole universe but he has chosen you (10:14-16) / B' YHWH is “God of gods” and he loves the sojourner (10:17-19) / A' Fear YHWH, for he is your God (10:20-22). Although this analysis appears simpler, it ignores verse 16, the crux of the unit, and it does not fully integrate it with verses 14-15 in the commentary. וַיִּשְׁמַע (waw-consecutive perfect) in v. 16 is not sequential to verses 14-15 (v. 14 is a verbless clause, marking a digression from the main even line; v. 15 uses an *x qatal* + *wayyiqtol* to indicate past time) but rather it continues the deontic modality initiated by the question “What does Yahweh, your God, demand from you?” Verse 12a is further explained by four infinitive constructs + וְ in v. 12 (fear... walk... love... serve) and these are further explained by the modal infinitive + וְ in v. 13 (by keeping...). Given the strong emphasis on loyal obedience in verses 12-13 it is more logical to take the waw-consecutive perfect in v. 16 as sequential with these verses and to understand verses 14-15 as a digression from the main event line, providing the initial ground for being loyal to Yahweh. Similarly, verses 19-20 (v. 19 וַיִּשְׁמַע [waw-consecutive perfect]; v. 20 *x yiqtol*) is not understood as sequential with verses 17-18 (v. 17 is a verbless clause marking a digression from the main event line; v. 18 is also a verbless clause, containing two participles indicating concurrence but digression to verse 17b “not showing partiality” and “taking no bribe”) but rather these verses continue the deontic modality initiated in vv. 12-13 and continued in v. 16. Verse 21 contains two verbless clauses and are also digressive to the main event line. These clauses provide

more grounds for Israel to be loyal to Yahweh. Verse 22 contains two verbal clauses (*x qatal + x qatal*), which mark the end of the section. Interestingly, the verbs in 11:1 switch from 2mp forms to 2ms forms, perhaps indicating the beginning of a new unit.

⁵² Lemke, "Circumcision," 301. He lists Exod. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9.

⁵³ Lemke notes that the expression is used in several "later texts" such as 1 Kgs. 17:14; Jer. 7:26 et al, and therefore relegates Deut 10:16b to this later date. *Ibid.*, 302. This begs the question and appears to rule out any chance for Deuteronomy to stand at the headwaters of the metaphor.

⁵⁴ The Hebrew of 2:30 is close to the construction in 10:16b: אֶת־רוּחוֹ אֶת־לִבּוֹ אֶת־קִשְׁתּוֹ אֶת־חַרְבּוֹ אֶת־קִשְׁתּוֹ אֶת־חַרְבּוֹ. Yahweh stiffened the spirit of Sihon and hardened his heart. The meaning is the same as stiff necked. These expressions describe the stubborn and obstinate.

⁵⁵ Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 246.

⁵⁶ Lemke, "Circumcision," 302. Lemke later expands on this reason, "Circumcision [in connection with Abrahamic covenant in Gen 17] plays no role in the book of Deuteronomy, and where the ancestors are mentioned at all, it is usually collectively and with reference to God's love of or oath and promise to them, rather than the covenant of circumcision." *Ibid.*, 302. Lemke then appeals to source critical theory which designates Genesis 17 to P, a later source than D as the argument goes. But what is interesting here is that Lemke is arguing against Moshe Weinfeld, who concludes in his commentary that 10:16 is authentic because of the numerous appeals to the patriarchs in Deuteronomy and the specific reference to "your fathers" in Deut 10:15, 22. Due to source critical theory, Lemke was unpersuaded by Weinfeld's argument and concludes that if one wants to hold the priority of D over P and the originality of 10:16, then the introduction of the metaphor "is a rather isolated and unexpected invention by the author of Deuteronomy, who used it essentially as a synonym for the more commonly known metaphor of the stiff neck." *Ibid.*, 303. For Weinfeld's contribution see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 437.

⁵⁷ Lemke, "Circumcision," 299-300. Lemke posits that circumcision related to initiation and/or marriage rites. He also notes that circumcision became primarily associated with inclusion into the covenant community. All notions of a positive sign of devotion or consecration are absent from his short discussion which points to the ABD article by Hall. For interaction with Hall, see the discussion on the background of circumcision above.

⁵⁸ Gentry, "The Relationship," 35-56.

⁵⁹ The singular "outcast," even though representative of the whole community, may still emphasize the fact that Yahweh is concerned to return each individual from exile.

⁶⁰ Cf. KTC, 437-439 (for Isaiah), 538-541 (for Daniel).

⁶¹ This is the majority opinion. J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002) 429. Although McConville believes the perspective reverts "to the present time," he does allow for the tension created by this paragraph which indicates the ease of keeping the Torah and the deuteronomistic theme of Israel's inability to keep it (cf. Deut 9:4-6). But he decides that "the appeal to the Moab generation has its own integrity" even though he also sees that "ultimately the realization of an obedient people will depend on Yahweh's new act in compassion."

⁶² Mark Baker, "In Your Mouth and in Your Heart: The Future Promise of Deuteronomy 30:11-14" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Region of the ETS, Birmingham, AL, March 21, 2013) 1-18. Steven R. Coxhead, "Deuteronomy 30:11-14 As a Prophet of the New Covenant in Christ," *WTJ* 68 (2006): 305-20. Stephen Dempster also alludes to this position, "Although one does not need to go up to heaven or cross the sea in search of the Torah, one cannot fulfill its demands without a circumcised heart (Deut. 30:11-14; cf. 30:5-7)." Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 121.

⁶³ Space constraints prohibit further probing of this passage. Baker does answer several objections regarding this view. Chief among these objections include: how did those under the old covenant like Caleb and Josiah keep the Torah? Baker answers, "Those like Caleb and Josiah who seem to have 'circumcised hearts' should be seen as trusting in God's future promises of total redemption. Their hope in a future actualization of new covenant benefits has produced present godliness, but this should not be seen as any kind of internal circumcision of the heart that happens apart from the actualization of the new covenant itself" (Baker, 7). I point out along with Coxhead and Baker that there are only verbless clauses in verses 11-14. These clauses depend on the context for their temporal aspects. Cf. Ellen van Wolde, "The Verbless Clause and Its Textual Function," in *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (ed. Cynthia Miller; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 333.

⁶⁴ Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 247-8. The list has been slightly revised and adapted.

⁶⁵ For an extended discussion of these texts, cf. John D. Meade, "Circumcision of the Flesh to Circumcision of the Heart: The Developing Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism* (ed., Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker; Nashville, TN: B&H, forthcoming).