

# Circumcision and Redemption - Atonement and Passover

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28th day of the Sixth month 5845 years after creation  
The Sixth Month in the Sabbatical Year

September 19, 2009

Shabbat Shalom Brethren,

On Wednesday of this past week I went out in the early morning hours to see the last phases of the crescent moon as it was above and near Venus. Then on Thursday I saw it from the last time this month as it was very low on the horizon and 12 degrees away from where it was the day before.

I hope you all have done the same and gone out to look. After seeing the last phase of the moon just before the conjunction which takes place on Friday, I then knew as did David that the first sighted moon would be in three days' time. This is why Jonathan said to David in 1 Samuel 20:19 18 Then Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty.

They knew when the New Moon would come not because of calculating as is done in a conjunctured moon but because of observation just we did this week.

Brethren we are currently learning about the birth of Yahshua at this time of year in the fall season. I have taught that this took place on the 1st of the Seventh month. Others say it was on the first of Sukkot.

We are not going to argue this point this year as it distracts from many other teachings associated with the birth of Yahshua. Two weeks ago, and again last week you learned about the meaning of the name. In fact, you should have learned just how important the naming of any child is. It is not just left to chance. And now you know that Jesus does not mean anything in Hebrew whereas Yah Shua certainly does and Ye Shua has another meaning many may not have been aware of.

You also should have learned about the pedigree of Yahshua and how it had many a skeleton in the closet and was in actual fact a blessing to see how others were brought into the umbrella of Israel no matter how colored their past was.

We continue this week with the circumcision and redemption ceremonies. But as you read this week's article again by Professor Liebenberg of Hebraic Roots Teaching Institute <http://www.hrti.co.za/default.aspx> please keep in mind just how often these things relate to both the Exodus and to the Day of Atonement; Circumcision to the Day of Atonement and the redemption of the first born to the Exodus.

And just as Passover was one part of the life of Messiah, it is not complete until the Day of Atonement when we see the fullness of many prophetic events. This is portrayed in the laying on of the hands upon the goat that was led into the wilderness; this was the goat that was responsible for the sins of the whole world, representing Satan, and the other goat which was for Yahweh and represented Yahshua which was sacrificed.

We are not going to get into the argument about whether or not you need to be circumcised. But rather we are just going to read about how it was done and what the symbolism of this ceremony means and why we do it as we are told to do so. We continue to follow the days immediately after the birth of Yahshua.

From the book by Professor Liebenberg titled The Hebraic Biography of Y'shua  
History of circumcision

"And God spoke to Abraham saying: ...This is my covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and thy seed after you -every male child among you shall be circumcised". (Gen 17:12)

Brit Milah, the "covenant of circumcision", was commanded by God to Abraham over 3 700 years ago. It has been carried out faithfully, from generation to generation, even during times of religious and ethnic persecution when Jews were forced to practice their rituals in secret. In fact, the only time the Jewish people willingly desisted from this practice was during the 40 years of wandering in the Sinai wilderness. Before entering Canaan, every male was circumcised by Joshua.

Since the time of Abraham, Jews have observed the ritual of circumcision as the fundamental sign of the covenant between God and Israel. "The Covenant of Circumcision" is known as Brit (or Bris meaning "pact") Milah in Hebrew. For Jews, this is more than merely a medical procedure. The circumcision is a sign of the child's entry into Judaism.

In every country where Jews resided, they have practiced this ritual, sometimes at great personal risk and sacrifice.

The Procedure:

The procedure involved in Brit Milah differs from medical circumcision in that heavy clamping or other interventional instruments are forbidden. It is performed by a Mohel (Ritual Circumcisor) who uses a protective shield to ensure the utmost safety for the child. Afterwards, the incision is cleaned thoroughly through a uniquely Jewish practice called m'tzitzah. If even a thread or speck is left, it is considered to be incomplete.

The procedure is extremely quick, and relatively painless. According to most Rabbinic authorities, Jewish law does allow the use of a topical anesthetic cream. Many Mohalim (ritual Circumcisors) use it routinely, with the approval of the family's doctor.

#### Who Performs the Procedure:

A Mohel (ritual Circumcisor) performs the procedure. This person must be trained and certified. A Mohel must be trained in both circumcision and Jewish laws and traditions. While traditionally a job held by men, there are now female Mohalim in some communities. A Mohel must be an expert in both medical and surgical procedures and sterilization. This person must also be an observant Jew. In this way, the child is entered into spiritual life at the time of the procedure.

#### When:

A Brit Milah (Circumcision) is performed on the eighth day after birth if the baby is healthy. Even if this day would be Shabbat (the Sabbath), or any festival, even on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), nothing is to stop this service.

Orthodox tradition says that the Brit of a baby delivered by caesarean section, should not be performed on the Sabbath or on a Jewish holiday. If the eighth day falls on one of these, then the Brit should be delayed until the next weekday.

A Brit Milah is never performed if it poses any danger to the infant. The doctor and/or mohel's advice to delay a Brit for health reasons should always be heeded. In case of jaundice (yellow pigmentation of the skin), the brit cannot be performed; it is delayed until the bilirubin in the blood drops to a safe level. The brit may then be performed without endangering the child. In some cases of illness, a delay of seven days following full recovery is required.

It is forbidden to postpone the brit for any reason other than health of the child, or in order to obtain a proper Mohel. It is the responsibility of the Mohel, in consultation with the doctor and the family, to determine if a delay is required.

#### The Ceremony:

For it is written, "And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised", and it was taught: The whole day is valid for circumcision, but the zealous are early (to perform) their religious duties, for it is said, "And Abraham rose early in the morning"! (Gen 22:3). The best time, therefore, for circumcision is early in the morning (Pesachim 4a.)

The baby is brought in to the room, carried by the kvatter and kvatterin (the godparents).

There are two chairs prepared. The first is the one for the sandek who holds the baby on their knees during the actual circumcision. The lap of the sandek is considered similar to the altar of the Temple. It is considered a great honour to be the sandek. Tradition says that this honour links the soul of sandek and the child. This person will be the spiritual mentor of the child. Often one of the grandfathers assumes this role.

The second chair is set aside for the spirit of Elijah the Prophet of blessed memory. According to Jewish tradition, Elijah comes to every circumcision to testify before the Almighty to the commitment of the Jewish people to this great mitzvah (commandment) through the generations. Just before the Brit, the baby is placed on the chair of Elijah, and the Mohel recites a special prayer asking for the spirit of Elijah to stand over him as he performs the Brit.

The mohel uses a probe to lift the priah, underlying membrane, into the orlah, foreskin. He determines the amount to be removed and fixes a shield in the correct place. The priah and orlah are cut with one sweep along the shield. A special knife called an izmail is used. Traditionally, the knife is sharp on both edges to eliminate the possibility of causing the child pain. Lastly, blood is drawn, metzitzah, a therapeutic prescription from the Talmudic period. A sterile dressing with topical anesthetic is applied. When performed by a competent mohel the entire procedure, which flows as one continuous motion, takes less than a minute. The excised foreskin is buried in the earth.

The parents recite the berakhah (blessing) "...who has sanctified us by Thy commandments and commanded us to enter our sons into the covenant of Abraham, our father". The mohel responds "...even as this child has entered into the covenant, so may he enter into a life of Torah, the marriage canopy and good deeds".

The child is then held by the mohel, sandak or another honoured guest. With kiddush cup in hand, the mohel recites the blessing for "wine", giving a drop to the child. A second blessing praising God, "who established a covenant with His people, Israel", is said.

Finally, the mohel offers a prayer for the welfare of the child during which his Hebrew name is formally announced. The child is given another taste of "wine".

The brit milah is a cause for celebration and should be treated that way. You may want to decorate the house or synagogue with flowers or candles. "Every Mitzvah that they accepted upon themselves with joy... they still perform with joy". (Talmud, Shabbat 130a.) Rashi interpreted this to mean that a festive meal should be prepared. Included in this meal should be challah (bread) and kosher "wine". The meal was/is a foreshadowing of the "Holy Communion". While you will probably want to provide a festive table of food for your "selected" guests (the meal considered a seudat mitzvah, a meal with sacred status), at a minimum you will need the loaf of challah or other bread (or two if it is Shabbat or a holiday), kosher wine, and a kiddush cup.

It is customary not to issue a direct invitation to the circumcision meal, for one may not refuse to attend. To do so would be equal to turning down the opportunity to perform a Mitzvah (commandment). At the conclusion of the meal, Birkat Hamazon is recited with special blessings for the child, parents, sandak and mohel.

In an ideal world, a minyan (ten Jewish men above age 13 – or in some conservative or reform traditions, 10 adult Jews) will be present for the brit, but it is not required.

Baby Naming:

I mentioned the Hebrew name. This is an important part of synagogue life. In the Torah it says that God changed Abraham's name from Avram to Avraham at the time of his circumcision. In keeping with that tradition, a Jewish boy is given his Hebrew name at the time of his Brit Milah. Judaism places a great deal of significance on a child's Hebrew name. It is customary to name the child after someone who led a righteous life so that the child will try to emulate that individual.

The Hebrew naming of a baby girl should take place at the first occasion after the baby is born when the father can be called to the Torah scroll. At that time there is a special prayer recited on behalf of the mother and the baby, and a Hebrew name is given to the child. In conservative and reform traditions, the mother and father may both be called to the Torah scroll. Who a baby girl is named after is the same as for boys.

It is interesting to note that the ritual of "Pidyon HaBin" (redemption of the firstborn) is not being performed for Yochanan. The reason is that both Elizabeth and Zacharias were descendants of the tribe of Levi, and this ritual does not apply to them. See the Pidyon HaBin section under "The Visitations" as it was applicable to Y'shua.

From [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/928156/jewish/What-Why.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/928156/jewish/What-Why.htm) we can learn about the Pidyon HaBin.

#### The History of the Pidyon Haben Ceremony

A pidyon haben, or "redemption of the firstborn son," is a ceremony wherein the father of a firstborn male redeems his son by giving a kohen (a priestly descendent of Aaron) five silver coins, thirty days after the baby's birth.

What is the reason for this procedure?

Originally, the Jewish firstborn were the sanctified priestly class. They were inducted into G d's service when they were spared from the Plague of the Firstborn that struck Egypt. However, when the Jews – firstborn included – served the Golden Calf, the firstborn forfeited their status. The priesthood was transferred to the tribe that did not participate in the Golden Calf hoopla—the Levites, and particularly the children of Aaron.

Since G d is the first being, it is fitting that firstborns are consecrated to Him. Ever since, all male Israelite firstborn must redeem themselves in a pidyon haben ceremony from a kohen. The Chinuch<sup>1</sup> adds that this reminds us that everything in the world belongs to G d. When we consecrate our very first and very best, we are reminded that everything really belongs to our Creator, and that we must "purchase" it from Him before using it.

The Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, 1525-1609) explains that since G d is the first being, it is fitting that firstborns are consecrated to Him.<sup>2</sup> Biblical Sources:

Just before the Exodus from Egypt, Moses relayed the following commandment from G d:

...Every firstborn of man among your sons, you shall redeem. And it will come to pass if your son asks you in the future, saying, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "With a mighty hand did G d take us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass when Pharaoh was too stubborn to let us out, G d slew every firstborn in the land of Egypt...—Exodus 13:13-16.

Nachmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, 1195-1270) explains that at that point, the exact procedure for the redemption of the firstborns, as well as the fact that they would be replaced as priests by the seed of Aaron, had yet to be laid out.

Only later, when most of the Jews – including firstborns – sinned with the Golden Calf, did the firstborns forfeit their status. The priesthood was then transferred to those that did not participate in the service of the Golden Calf. At that time, G d commanded:

Take the Levites instead of all the firstborns among the children of Israel... You shall take five shekels per head, according to the holy shekel, by which the shekel is twenty gerahs— Numbers 3:45-47.

And the commandment to redeem the firstborn was born.

Why are only firstborn males redeemed?

Our firstborns achieved special status when, although our nation was spiritually fallen in Egypt and quite similar to our Egyptian neighbors, G d spared us during the Plague of the Firstborn. But while both male and female firstborns died among the native Egyptians, only firstborn males died among the foreigners. As non-native Egyptians, it is only our firstborn males who otherwise would have died and were spared.

In addition, the Jewish women were never similar to their Egyptian counterparts. Our Sages teach us that we were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of the righteous women. The fact that the firstborn females were spared was not as striking and is therefore not commemorated.

Another reason why females do not need to be redeemed is that the coins are given to the kohen in exchange for the service in the Temple which the kohen performs in place of the firstborn (who would have served if not for the fact that the firstborns participated in the Golden Calf debacle). Since women do not serve in the Temple anyway, they do not need to be redeemed.

Luke chapter 2)

“(21) And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS (Y'SHUA), which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb”. Here we can see that the Hebraic custom of bris was followed very carefully by Y'shua's parents. We will see that Y'shua complied fully with the traditions and customs of Judaism.

1) Bris was carried out on the eighth day, and

2) Secondly, only after the bris was His name officially given to Him.

Circumcision shows the faith of the parents, not the child. If the child were given the option, he would probably vote against it, since it is not always a pleasant experience. That is why circumcision was not fulfilled in baptism. An infant circumcision was no grounds for infant baptism, because baptism always shows the faith of the one being baptized. Circumcision is when a newborn Jewish male is joined to the Jewish People by bris on the eighth day of his life. From here we will see that Y'shua the Jew complied fully with Judaism and was also joint to His people on the eighth day through bris.

Circumcision strictly to Judaism is always on the eighth day (Positive Law 215 – Gen 17:10 – On circumcising one’s son – Lev 12:3), and also the time in the Jewish world for the official naming of the baby. Circumcision was inaugurated in two covenants, the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. Each had a different purpose. Circumcision under the Abrahamic Covenant was a sign of Jewishness. Circumcision under the Mosaic Covenant was a sign of submission to the Law. It is still necessary for the Jew under the Abrahamic Covenant because this was an eternal covenant.

“Bris” means “pact”. Abraham’s faith was tested ten times by God, after which God was assured that his convictions were unshakable. The ninth ordeal was to remove the excess foreskin of the male organ, denoting spiritual domination over base compulsion. After all, ten, Abraham entered into a pact of mutual faith with God that lives forever. It is said that Abraham accomplished this on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei, later designated as Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), when the sins of the Jewish people were forgiven. It is important to note that the dominant symbol of bris is its blood, and understanding the seven main festivals of Lev 23 (especially Yom Kippur) you will know that that blood was needed for the remission of sin. This is exactly what Y’shua did for us on Calvary. Bris is then also a reminder of another Covenant, the New Covenant, every time when a family sees the blood. Also, when the Israelites came out of Egypt, and celebrated the first Passover (symbolic of Y’shua being sacrificed for us), they were all commanded to be circumcised, including all the strangers who joined them (Exodus 12:43-51).

Why did God choose the sexual organ to place thereon His eternal covenant with His Jewish nation?

There are two primary reasons why God commanded the Jew to place the symbol of their covenant in the male sexual organ:

- 1) God wanted this sign to be in the very part of the body which symbolizes pleasure. This is supposed to be a constant reminder to them that they should be focused on their special relationship with God and not get lost in life’s pleasures and vices. Basically, they should always keep in mind that which is important and that which is quite trivial.
- 2) They place their sign on their reproductive member for they pass on their covenant with God to their children. (The Rambam writes that cutting off the foreskin actually lessens a person’s sexual pleasures.)

Customs:

- The three main participants, the father, mohel and sandak, wear talitot (prayer shawl).
- Shalom Zakhor (also Ben Zakhor): On the first Friday night after a boy is born, it is customary to celebrate by gathering in the home of the newborn to welcome him. “As soon as a male comes into the world, peace comes into the world”. (Talmud, Nidarim 31b). God finished the creation of the world with the Sabbath and introduced peace and rest. Thus, the Sabbath surrounds the newborn with an aura of holiness and enhances his entry into the Covenant of Abraham, the Jewish father.
- It is customary to light lamps in the room where the brit is to take place.

For today:

- Circumcision is an obligation that was placed upon Abraham and his household, and the strangers who lived among them, because of the covenant that God had made to give the Land of Israel to Abraham's descendants through the line of Isaac and Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel (the Jews today).
- The covenant that God made with Abraham, to give him the Land, pre-dates the command to be circumcised and is irrevocable. Circumcision is the outward sign of participation in the Covenant, just as Baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit are the outward signs of a Believer in Y'shua.
- The Covenant of Circumcision has not vanished, as some would like to infer from Hebrews 8:13. The Torah itself is not diminished in any way, and we can observe as much as we are able, without condemnation for our failures. The Torah is there for moral standards and guidelines, and cannot give eternal life through "works". Eternal life can only be obtained through the shed blood of Y'shua HaMashiach.
- The Jews are under an obligation to be circumcised, because of the irrevocable covenant that God made with Abraham, to give them the Land of Israel. The Gentiles are under no such obligation. For assimilated Jews and people of mixed origin, it depends on the extent of their association with the Land of Israel and its people.
- Circumcision has nothing to do with salvation.

As said eight days later, according to Luke 2:21, Y'shua was circumcised. Not in the Temple as some suppose, but in Bethlehem, in the Succah where He was born. Mary would still be ceremonially unclean for the remaining of the 33 days according to Lev 12. Besides, she would be unlikely to travel to Jerusalem so soon after the birth even though it was not very far. Y'shua presented in the Temple – Pidyon HaBen – the second of the Jewish Lifecycle customs (We continue to read from Luke chapter 2)

- (22) "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;
- (23) (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;)
- (24) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.
- (25) And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.
- (26) And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
- (27) And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
- (28) Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
- (29) Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
- (30) For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
- (31) Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;



- (32) A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
- (33) And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.
- (34) And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
- (35) (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
- (36) And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity;
- (37) And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.
- (38) And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem”.

#### Background on Pidyon HaBen:

The special excitement and wonder accompanying the birth of the firstborn male is captured in Judaism in the special ceremony for the redemption of the first son, Pidyon HaBen. One explanation given for this commandment is that it commemorates the great miracle that took place in Egypt when the Almighty killed all the firstborn Egyptian males and spared the Jewish sons.

Furthermore, the firstborn male child has special rights concerning inheritance and a certain religious obligation to fast on the eve of Pesach (Passover). The sunrise to sunset ta’anit (fast) bechorim (of the firstborn) is the only fast that applies to just a segment of the community: all males who are the firstborn children in their families (if the firstborn child is female, the first son born after her is not required). The father of a child too young to fast fasts for him and if he himself is bekor, the mother fasts for the child on the day of Erev Pesach (the day in which Pesach begins at nightfall). Since it is forbidden to withdraw from eating on Shabbat (except for Yom Kippur), when Erev Pesach falls on Saturday night, the fast takes place on Thursday. This stems from the historic fact that the Almighty sanctified the firstborn males of the Jewish people while they were still in bondage in Egypt, so that they would devote their lives as priests in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

This is interpreted as a reward for the faith and trust in God displayed by the Jewish people, who fulfilled the commandment of and the Pesach (Passover) sacrifice while in Egypt and under the difficult conditions imposed upon them, as well as the circumcision which followed later. As the entire nation proved their loyalty to God by joining the covenant, the Almighty did not isolate the entire nation for the priesthood but only their firstborn, as it is written: “Sanctify each firstborn male child to Me, among the children of Israel”. (Exod 13:13).

However, since the firstborn males joined the nation in their act of worshipping the golden calf in the desert, the Almighty replaced them with the Levites, ordaining: “And each firstborn male child shall be redeemed” and “And you shall take the Levites for Me, the Almighty, instead of each firstborn male child in Israel”.

The sanctity of the firstborn is retained in his birthright and in the religious regulations specific to him, such as the Pidyon HaBen ceremony and the obligation to fast on the eve of (that is, the night before) Passover.

The ceremony for the redemption of the firstborn is a mitzvah (commandment) bound in religious law (Positive Law 82 – Exod 13:13 – Sanctify each firstborn male child to Me...) The root of this mitzvah is that by performing the determined symbolic act of redeeming his first-born male child from the Almighty, man acknowledges that all belongs to the Creator and that man has only that which God wishes to bestow upon him.

This happened when God commanded the Israelites that once they arrive in the land of Canaan, they must “redeem every first-born male among your children” (Exod 13:13).

The Pidyon HaBen ceremony is when neither the mother nor the father of the child is a Kohain or Levi (from a priestly descend). This firstborn child must be redeemed from the Kohain (priest) for the sum of five silver Shekels. “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I (Moses) sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem”. (Exod 13:15.)

To qualify for kohanic tutelage, the boy must be the first natural child, and first natural birth, from his parent's: if he was preceded by a miscarriage / stillborn, or has an older sibling, or was born Caesarian, he wasn't “born first”. Both parents must also be Israelites, obviously.

This “redemption” ceremony is done normally on the thirty-third day after the seven unclean days of the mother following the birth of the child, which is forty days after birth. This redemption ceremony is accompanied by a Seudas Mitzvah (a Mitzvah (commandment) Meal). “And those that are to be redeemed from a (Jewish) month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs”. (Num 18:16). If this day falls on Shabbat or a Yom Tov (Holy Day), the ceremony is postpone