

MLPJ 16 - How many Foreskins?

We all know of the biblical injunction of circumcision - called in Hebrew *brit milah* . A brit is a covenant. We read about the covenant God established with Abraham in Gen. 17: 8-12,

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you:

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised.

So, the *brit milah*, or circumcision, of a Jewish baby boy is a sign in the flesh which becomes a constant, physical reminder of his unconditional covenant with God. We may ask, Why does God stipulate the 8th day? Physiologically, the medical profession has proven that the 8th day is the very best day as that is when the blood will congeal quickly.

Is there any significance or meaning spiritually or psychologically?

Firstly, it is recognised that an 8 day period will include one Sabbath. The baby will have lived through one Shabbat - the day that is designed to offer the experience of Shalom, peace and the harmony of life as God intended - a foretaste of His eternal Kingdom to come. More on the 8th day later, but in the meantime...

Another interesting question comes to mind... if circumcision is a requirement for boy babies, what about girls? Well...herein lies the heart attitude towards women in Judaism - girls don't need this outward physical sign of the covenant because they, inherently, are more spiritual than boys. Women already possess a natural inclination toward loving and serving God, which men usually need to learn and to be reminded of very personally and physically on a constant and regular basis.

This is also the basis for the commandment of *tzitzit* (the ritual fringes or tassels) on a *tallit*. As Deut. 22:9 says, "You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself." The knots and threads of these tassels add up to 613 - the number of commandments in the Torah. They are worn as a daily reminder of the Presence of God with him and of his service to Him. When a man is fulfilling his God-given role all the family, and the community are blessed. But again, what about the woman? Women are relieved of the *brit milah* - there are, however, 3 further circumcisions we can discern in Scripture - three removals of foreskins that both men and women need undergo.

What exactly is a foreskin? In Hebrew it is an *orlah* - a thick covering that forms a barrier. Naturally and medically it has been proven that the removal of the foreskin in circumcision is very beneficial to a male. The 3 non-physical foreskins are those of the lips, the ears and the heart.

We find a hint at the circumcision of the **lips** in Isaiah 6:5-7,

And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" We read, then, that one of the seraphim, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar, touched Isaiah's lips with it and he was cleansed of his sin.

In chapter 42, Isaiah also refers to those who have **ears** but do not hear. There is a barrier on the ears. You can find many similar references in Scripture. And, a clear directive of circumcision of the **heart** is found in Deut. 10:13, *Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.*

The purpose for these circumcisions or removal of barriers is given at the start of the following chapter - Deut. 11:1,

"You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always."

Interestingly, in the pattern of the *brit milah*, rabbinic commentary posits that each foreskin is circumcised on the 8th day! How does this work? Let us consider the circumcision of the lips.

As we are created in the image of our Creator who spoke all things into being, we have lips that enable us to use the precious gift of communication - of speaking words.

The highest use of our mouth and lips is to offer thanks and praise to God and to commune with Him in prayer. But in order to do this we need revelation of Him - we need to "see" Him and come to know Him. Therefore, the use of our eyes - the opening of our eyes and removal of the veil over them - is connected with the removal of the barrier that prevents our lips from thanking and praising God. This unveiling and seeing occurs during the 8 days of the festival of Chanukah, which falls during the darkness of winter. The word Chanukah means dedication, and we can only dedicate our lives to God once our eyes are opened and we move from the darkness of the world into His light. There are 36 candles lit during the 8 nights and as we contemplate their growing light, and remember the miracles God has performed for us His children, the foreskin-barrier on our lips is removed and we are set free to praise Him. We now can, as Paul writes in Ephesians 5:8-10, "live as children of light and find out what pleases God" as we enjoy "the Fruit of the light, which is all goodness, righteousness and truth!"

What about the foreskin of the **ears**? Another 7 day festival is Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. This is associated with **hearing** the sound of the shofar! The literally hundreds of blasts sounded during the month of Elul and the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that lead up to Sukkoth slowly but surely wear away the the thick foreskin-barrier on our ears that prevents us from hearing truly and clearly the voice of God and His words to us. As we draw aside from the cacophony of the world and enter the quiet shelter of the sukkah, we can listen for

His whispers; and finally on the 8th day - *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simchat Torah* - our ears are fully opened to hear and comprehend His Word more clearly and how we can rejoice in the joy of His Torah - His living Word to us!

Finally, what of the foreskin of the **heart**? Such a thick barrier covers the heart that we can remain far from God. What then is required for the circumcision of the heart? The instrument God has given us is *teshuvah* - repentance!

The holiest time of repentance - when the circumcision happens and the heart returns to God - is the Day of Atonement - Yom Kippur. How does the number 8 feature here? We learn that it was 7 days before Yom Kippur that the High Priest was separated from his home and family to accomplish the physical and spiritual preparation necessary before he entered the Holy of Holies on the 8th day of Yom Kippur. His heart needed this concentrated time of purification and preparation to ensure that he was able to enter the Presence and the glory of God without being overcome and actually dying!

Just as in the days of the Temple, when the sacrificial offerings were made and the High Priest carried the blood into the Holy of Holies, so our High Priest, Yeshua, presented His blood and made a way for all to enter the Presence of God. We can, however, only do so with prepared hearts - those circumcised and purified by true repentance.

Although the physical circumcision of the foreskin remains, we find that sin and disobedience cause repeated accumulation of the barriers of the lips, ears and heart. Repentance, unfortunately, is not a one-time requirement. We should daily cleanse ourselves of any reoccurring layer of any barrier that draws us away from the Presence of God. To help us do this, we can appropriate the special times He has appointed in the annual Festival Cycle, to receive the particular gift of revelation and repentance inherent in each one. In so doing, we become more and more *Echad* - one with our Father, the Source of Life - and there can be no obstacle, or barrier, that will be in the way of fulfilling His will and purpose for our life on this earth.

May all we do be to the Father's glory in Yeshua.

Amen and Shalom from My Little Place in Jerusalem!

~ Keren Hannah