

This is a study article offered to the scattered churches of God who assume that God no longer requires physical circumcision for males in the NT church.

Mainstream Christendom claims much of God's Law and His perpetual covenants have been cancelled for the NT church and even the churches of God are not free from this liberal thinking. A few years back an elder wrote in The Journal that we can be certain that physical circumcision no longer applies to males in the Church of God. Really? Does God institute perpetual laws and covenants, such as the Sabbath and the circumcision covenants but allows men to cancel these in the NT church?

Our Lord Jesus goes before us in all things and He was circumcised on the eighth day. Paul reminds us that the NT church is joined unto Abraham's seed (Gal 3:29) and that implies the need for physical circumcision that God imposed on Abraham's household as a perpetual covenant (Gen 17:1-19).

At the "Jerusalem Conference" of Acts 15 it was said that certain Jews claimed that "*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" is required for salvation (Acts 15:1). At this Jerusalem Conference the apostles denied this claim but does this mean they cancelled God's circumcision covenant, which God had introduced in Abraham's household?

Peter inferred at this Jerusalem Conference that "*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" was too great a yoke to bear even for the apostles, let alone for

new converts (Acts 15:10).

Since physical circumcision, is a momentary discomfort for male infants and a slightly longer one for adults, Peter could not have been referring to physical circumcision being too great a yoke to bear!

So what was "*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" that was the subject of the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15)? Let us recall that physical circumcision was after the manner of Abraham rather than after the manner of Moses because God had introduced physical circumcision to Abraham and his entire household. From there it passed to the households of Isaac, Jacob and the tribes of Israel.

God commanded Moses that Israel's newly born males should be circumcised on the eighth day (Lev 12:1-4).

Despite this we read in Joshua 5:2-9 that under Moses males born in the desert had not been circumcised (verse 5) and that therefore God instructed Joshua to correct this omission under Moses by circumcising all males born in the desert.

It is plain that "*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" does not entail physical circumcision because this was not close to Moses' heart. For example, Exodus 4:24-26 shows Moses being saved from God's wrath through his wife, Zipporah, quickly circumcising their son.

"*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" (Acts 15:1) clearly does not refer to physical circumcision and therefore we must ask, *What does it refer to?*

In my January 2008 advertisement, which

is also available as article A1 at my home page, it was explained how Moses had also disobeyed God by replacing God's *No-Divorce & No-Remarriage* law with a *Divorce & Remarriage* rule. That this was contrary to God's wish is plain from our Lord Jesus' severe criticism of Moses in Matthew 19:4-9 and Mark 10:4-9.

Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell address to Israel (Deut 1:1) in which he restated God's law but introduced also some changes without God's approval. One such change being Deuteronomy 24:1-4 which is the replacement of God's *No-D & No-R* law with Moses' *D & R* rule of which our Lord Jesus spoke so critically.

That was the start of a cumbersome set of man-made rules that over the centuries grew to become a yoke too great to bear.

That yoke is Judaism with its many rules and regulations. Moses' farewell address to the people of Israel recorded in Deuteronomy went in places beyond God's intention.

All God's servant failed at some time and God does not always correct them. For example, in 1974 Mr Armstrong similarly replaced God's *No-D & No-R* law with Moses' *D & R* rule for the hardness of our heart (see article A1). Yet unlike Israel of Exodus, the NT Church of God had God's holy spirit and therefore should not have shown any hardness of heart demanding such a change!

"*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" of Acts 15:1 is a figure of speech for Judaism, which is a burdensome yoke of man-made rules. "*Circumcision after the manner of Moses*" does not denote

specifically physical circumcision.

Similarly when Paul refers in his epistles to *Circumcision* and *Circumcised* or to *Uncircumcision* and *Uncircumcised*, he mainly uses these terms as figures of speech for respectively *Jews* and *Judaism* or for *Gentiles* and their pagan practices. With these terms Paul does not pronounce against physical circumcision. After all circumcision was introduced by God in Abraham's household as a perpetual covenant for all generations and this has never been cancelled. This is further attested by the infant Jesus having been circumcised on the eighth day.

Acts 16:1-3 reveals that soon after the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) Paul had Timothy circumcised, who was the son of a Jewish mother. The KJV says Paul had Timothy circumcised "*because of the Jews*" but which suggests that Paul acted hypocritically. A better translation is '*by the Jews*' reflecting Paul's sensibly turning to the Jews who are experts in circumcision, for the adult Timothy!

This episode again shows that the Jerusalem Conference did not abolish physical circumcision. After all the apostles had no authority to override God's perpetual circumcision covenant that began with Abraham (Gen 17) and was restated to Moses (Lev 12:1-4).

Read articles A1 and Q3 ("*The True Church of God*") at my home page www.rightly-dividing.net or request these in writing from: Henk Jens, PO Box 121, Belmore, 2192, NSW, Australia.