

## BECOMING ISRAELITE: JOSHUA 5:2–9 AS THE FINAL STAGE OF SHEDDING EGYPTIAN MORES

The recircumcision of the second-generation Israelite men takes place forty years after the initial exodus from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Karl Deenick suggests that circumcision ceased during the exodus due to the people’s rebellious nature.<sup>2</sup> The need to circumcise adult men of fighting age supports Deenick’s observations. Yahweh’s removal of this “disgrace” (Josh 5:9) implies that a connection to Egyptian mores remained in the foreground of the Israelite worldview until the final days of the exodus. T. C. Butler broadens the interpretation of קִרְפָּת by suggesting that “disgrace” refers to the whole Egyptian captivity experience. For Butler, the entrance into the promised land reflects genuine freedom.<sup>3</sup> However, Butler ignores the narrower context of the recircumcision narrative as a necessary event in achieving national status. Jerome Creach suggests that the circumcision narrative denotes the removal of the consequences of the first generation.

In Joshua’s theological schema the wilderness generation never completely shook off the stigma of Egyptian bondage, because it was not willing to accept the freedom of land possession. The wilderness wanderers carried a disgrace they could not remove, since they had a ‘life sentence’ that disallowed their realization of the promise of Canaan.<sup>4</sup>

The second generation born in the wilderness did not know about life in Egypt apart from the assimilation of the Israelites to Egyptian culture that remained during the migration. Therefore, it

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 14:34; cf. Acts 13:18

<sup>2</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 23–25.

<sup>3</sup> T. C. Butler, *Joshua*, Word Biblical Commentary 7 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Jerome Creach, *Joshua*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 57.

is difficult to understand how any “disgrace of Egypt” in terms of tyranny and captivity might still be upon the Israelites in the context of exodus and conquest.

The narrative sequence presents Yahweh’s command for the new generation of Israelite men “who had not been circumcised along the way” (Josh 5:7) to undergo Abrahamic circumcision according to the standard set forth in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:9–14). The Egyptians (along with other ANE cultures) practiced circumcision; however, they performed the rite to adolescent and adult males by making a dorsal incision in the foreskin while leaving the remainder of the foreskin intact.<sup>5</sup> There are two points of contention between Abrahamic circumcision and the circumcision practices of the Egyptians: (1) the Egyptians adopted the practice of circumcising infants at a much later date and (2) Egyptian circumcision did not remove the entire foreskin. The narrative sequence of the book of Exodus presents a people-group who are ethnically different from but culturally assimilated to Egypt. This suggests, following the work of Jack Sasson, that an Egyptian form of circumcision replaced the prescribed Abrahamic form of circumcision (cf. Gen 17:12) allowing the law of Moses to specify the Abrahamic version in Lev 12:3. Therefore, the male children of the second generation must undergo Abrahamic circumcision—removing the entire foreskin—to become partakers in the Abrahamic covenant, which granted the land of Canaan to the Israelites.<sup>6</sup>

This essay first explores the purpose and method of circumcision in the Abrahamic covenant as it defines Israelite identity in terms of otherness. Having developed a foundation of Abrahamic identity throughout the patriarchal history, an evaluation of Israel’s time in the wilderness as the process of forming national Israelite identity is necessary. This frames Joshua 5:2–9 as Israel’s final stage of developing a national identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Sasson, “Circumcision,” 474.

<sup>6</sup> The curse of Canaan in Gen 9:25 foreshadows the conquest.

### **Pre-Israelite Identity: Who is and Who Is Not?**

The patriarchal tradition displays a cycle of a man who is married to a barren woman. This woman supernaturally becomes pregnant and gives birth to two sons who oppose each other. Yahweh then accepts one of the sons as the one through whom the original Abrahamic promise passes along. Abraham, the first patriarch, married Sarah, a barren woman, and had two sons— Ishmael, the son of Hagar, and Isaac, the son of Sarah.<sup>7</sup> Isaac carried the covenant as the child of promise. Then, Isaac married Rebekah, a barren woman who, through supernatural means, had two sons—Jacob and Esau. Jacob carried the covenant promise while Esau began his own people-group.<sup>8</sup> Jacob married Rachel, a barren woman, and, through the provision of God, had two sons with her—Joseph and Benjamin.<sup>9</sup> In its earliest form, the term “Israel” speaks specifically of Jacob the patriarch and subsequently of his twelve sons and their lineage.<sup>10</sup> The twelve sons of Israel/Jacob present the first time in the patriarchal narrative where all the male

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<sup>7</sup> Abraham has other children besides Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 25:1, 4; 1 Chron 1:32–33). However, these are not pertinent to the covenantal narrative.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob and Esau follow the pattern of Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac carried the covenant, and Ishmael began his own people-group.

<sup>9</sup> Pre-Israelite refers to those of the patriarchal tradition who fully partake in the Abrahamic covenant. Additionally, pre-Israelite extends from creation to Jacob.<sup>9</sup> Pre-Israelite is not synonymous with gentile. Hebrews 11 presents a series of non-Jew, pre-Jew, and Jew character studies. From this perspective, faith is what marks someone as belonging to the faith community. The author of Hebrews includes a discussion of Abel and Noah (pre-Jew) and Rahab (non-Jew); however, each one receives acceptance from God because of their faith. The issue is not whether these characters are concretely historical. The author uses their narratives as an object lesson for actionable faith. Erich Grässer suggests the author understands the time before Christ (particularly realized in Heb 11) as a time when God tested faith. See, Erich Grässer, *Der Glaube im Hebräerbrief* (Marburg: Elwert, 1965), 65-66, 79.

<sup>10</sup> The name “Israel” means “to strive with God.” The account of Jacob’s renaming is as follows. “So, Jacob was left alone. Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not defeat Jacob, he struck the socket of his hip so the socket of Jacob’s hip was dislocated while he wrestled with him. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for the dawn is breaking.’ ‘I will not let you go,’ Jacob replied, ‘unless you bless me.’ The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He answered, ‘Jacob.’ ‘No longer will your name be Jacob,’ the man told him, ‘but Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed.’” (Gen 32:24–28).

descendants of a patriarch make up a united people-group who share equally in the covenantal Abrahamic blessing.<sup>11</sup>

Understanding circumcision within the Abrahamic covenant establishes a disjunction between the original rite and the removal of the “disgrace of Egypt” in the recircumcision narrative at Gilgal. Genesis 12:1–3 establishes the relationship between Abram and Yahweh from which the covenant and its sign will derive. Circumcision is absent from Abram’s call narrative. For Yahweh, Abram’s obedience to the original command of Gen 12:1 stands at the crux of their relationship. Though theologians have long stated that Abram immediately obeyed Yahweh’s call, Abram does not obey the command to “leave his family.” Instead, he took his nephew Lot along the journey (cf. Gen 12:4).<sup>12</sup>

The parenthetical statement signified by the disjunctive ׀ in Gen 12:4 indicates Abram’s motivation to disobey Yahweh’s command to “leave his family.”<sup>13</sup> The second clause in v. 4 presents the ׀ + noun construct denoting the disjunction from the previous clause. The narrative continues from the waw consecutive (וַיִּקְרָא) in v. 5 indicating a parenthetical commentary on

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<sup>11</sup> Isaac is the first to undergo true Abrahamic circumcision in which he underwent circumcision on the eighth day and received his name (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3). Abraham, Ishmael, and the men in Abraham’s house also underwent circumcision, but these individuals are older than eight days and had already received their names. Erich Isaac notes this issue and suggests circumcision symbolizes a new birth for Abraham. Whether Abraham in becoming ‘a new man’ also died symbolically is not clear. A ‘death’ is possibly hinted at in the first covenant ‘... a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a dread, even a great darkness, fell upon him’ (Gen 15:12). This sleep, described as *tardēmā* is considered a deathlike sleep. Both Jewish and Patristic exegesis have regarded sleep and death as a continuum.” Isaac goes on to say that circumcision may represent Abraham’s “rebirth” because he receives a new name on the day of his circumcision (Gen 17:5). Abraham is not the only one to receive a new name in the Gen 17 pericope. Sarai also receives a new name (i.e., Sarah) and undergoes a significant physical change in the opening of her womb. On the other hand, there is no evidence to suggest that the slaves or Ishmael received a new name at their circumcisions, so one should not press this observation too far. See Erich Isaac, “Circumcision as a Covenant Rite,” *Anthropos* 1964 (59): 452.

<sup>12</sup> The end of Genesis 11 and 12:1–4 are not in chronological order. Stephen (Acts 7:2) said, “The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in *Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran*” (emphasis added). Note also that the NIV and KJV translate 12:1 as, “God had said,” which the Waw consec allows. When Terah died Abram finally went to the land God would show him but took Lot. So, Abraham did not leave his country, his kindred, or his father’s house at the beginning.

<sup>13</sup> וַיִּלְךָ אַבְרָם בְּאֶשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה וַיִּלְךָ אִתּוֹ לֹט וְאַבְרָם בְּרִי־הָמֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה בְּצֵאתוֹ מִקְרָן

Abram's age. From Abram's perspective, Lot served as the logical heir to the aging, childless Abram. However, at its core, the call narrative presents Yahweh as the one who blesses and Abram as the one blessed.

Yahweh solidifies his promise to Abram by "cutting" a covenant with him.<sup>14</sup> This cutting of the covenant assures the promise of Gen 12:1–3 because of Abram's obedience to the original call. Covenant language does not occur within the call narrative of Gen 12:1–3. Rather, Yahweh's words exhibit what he will do for Abram as the result of his election. The assuredness of the promise appears in Gen 15:17–21 as the formal covenant. In contrast to the call of Abram in Gen 12:1–3 where the text presents no obvious reluctance or hesitation from Abram, Gen 15:2–3 characterizes him as impatient and doubtful.

But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what will you give me since I continue to be childless, and my heir is Eliezer of Damascus?" Abram added, "Since you have not given me a descendant, then look, one born in my house will be my heir!"

Yahweh proves the truth of his promise by swearing an oath by himself (Gen 15:9–21). The imagery of passing between the divided animals allows Yahweh to assert, "May what happened to these animals also happen to me if I do not keep my promise."<sup>15</sup> Although the HB states that lying is outside Yahweh's nature (e.g., Num 23:19), Genesis 15 places Abram in a context where he does not yet know the fullness of Yahweh's theological attributes. At this point, for Abram,

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<sup>14</sup> Debate abounds regarding the covenant of Gen 15:1–21. For an analysis of these debates, see Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Steinmann observes, "The visible sign of God's covenant promise comes in the form of a ceremony involving animal carcasses (vv. 9–10). The splitting of all the animals except the birds, which were probably too small to split, was part of a ceremony that accompanied the pledging of a covenant. Such a ceremony is mentioned at Jeremiah 34:18–19. It is also probably reflected in the Hebrew idiom for making a covenant: 'to cut a covenant'. When the parties to the covenant passed between the divided animals, they were pledging to keep the terms of the covenant. If they failed to do so, they were symbolically invoking the fate of the animals on themselves: they, also, would be cut in two. Since God would pass between the animals, and since God cannot be divided, Abram would have absolute assurance that God would keep his promise." Andrew Steinmann, *Genesis*, TOCT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 174.

Yahweh is like the other deities of ANE religion.<sup>16</sup> These gods are tricksters and liars who throw dangerous tantrums.<sup>17</sup> In this light, the cutting of the covenant allows Abram to understand Yahweh on his terms in his nature. Thus, Gen 12:1–3 presents the election of Abram while Gen 15:1–21 establishes God’s covenantal promise with Abram.

Abrahamic circumcision served as the “reminder of the covenant between me and you” (Gen 17:11). At its core, the Abrahamic covenant is a promise for descendants and land. Abraham’s seed (זרע) is the raw material needed to form this nation. Circumcision is a visible mark on the organ involved in the act that will produce the fulfilment of this covenant. Leonard Glick suggests that circumcision served as a sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Glick suggests that the circumcision of an infant signified the outpouring of blood from a subject who could not resist.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Glick does not account for circumcision’s role outside of the priestly documents. The HB never identifies circumcision as a sacrifice, and to align circumcision with the cut animals of Genesis 15 ignores the purpose of the rite as a *sign* (אֵימָה) of the covenant—not the

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<sup>16</sup> Joshua 24:2 states that Terah was an idol worshipper. Abraham certainly came from a polytheistic culture. Benjamin Sommer notes, “Biblical authors inform us that a great many Israelites – at times, perhaps even most Israelites – were polytheistic. This is true for the period in which the Israelites wandered in the desert, which is described in the Books of Exodus and Numbers; it is true for the earliest period of Israelite settlement in Canaan, which is described in the Book of Judges; and it is true through the period of the monarchies described in Kings. The Book of Judges narrates a repeating cycle of polytheistic worship by the Israelites, followed by punishment by Yahweh, forgiveness from Yahweh, and further polytheism on the people’s part. The Book of Kings puts tremendous emphasis on the polytheism of Israelites both north and south. Some kings (for example, Hezekiah and Josiah in the south, Jehu in the north) are portrayed as having been exclusively loyal to Yahweh, but quite a few (Manasseh in the south and Ahab in the north, to take two notorious examples) encouraged the worship of many deities in the temples they sponsored. Prophetic books dating from this era paint the same picture. The prophets excoriate Israelites north and south for worshipping Baal and various other deities, whose names some prophets do not deign to report, merely terming them “nothings” (אֵלִילִים).” See Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Ishtar in the Gilgamesh epic or the older gods in Enuma Elish who become upset at the noise of the younger gods. Further, some gods can be evil while still retaining divinity (e.g., Set in Egypt).

<sup>18</sup> Leonard B. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–18.

<sup>19</sup> Glick has a clear anti-circumcision agenda. However, his observations have merit for historical data. Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh*, 3–11.

covenant itself. Though males are the ones who carry this sign in their flesh, sexual intercourse exposes the female to the sign as well.<sup>20</sup> The female carries the result of the promise and gives birth to the fulfilment of the promise. Thus, men and women bear a sign of the promise that is visible at certain times and involves the reproductive organs.

The role of circumcision among non-covenant carriers of Abraham's descendants remains a debated topic among scholars.<sup>21</sup> Ishmael undergoes circumcision although he is not the recipient of the Abrahamic promise and is thirteen years old when he receives the rite (Gen 17:25). Additionally, the text does not forthrightly inform the reader of the circumcision status of Esau, though Jacob passed the ritual of circumcision on to his sons (cf. Gen 34:13–17) inferring both Jacob and Esau likely received the rite according to its fullest observance.<sup>22</sup> For Abraham, circumcision looks ahead to future descendants while circumcision for national Israel looks back to the promise of Yahweh to the patriarchs.

The command to circumcise males on the eighth day does not make Abraham, Ishmael, or the men in Abraham's household ineligible for circumcision as Yahweh commands that these men receive the rite as well.

Abraham took his son Ishmael and every male in his household (whether born in his house or bought with money) and circumcised them on that very same day, just as God had told him to do. Now Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised; his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised. Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on the very same day. All the men of his household, whether born in

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<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, a gentile woman can obviously become pregnant. Thus, the woman's pregnancy can only serve as the completion of the sign's promise when connected to an Israelite man.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed analysis of the issue, see Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> "According to a new reading of Josephus, *Ant.* 13.9.1 §§257–58, [the Edomites] too were circumcised in a way different from the Jews. Smith translates the passage as follows: 'And of Idumea Hyrcanus takes the cities Adora and Marisa. And having subjugated all the Idumeans, he permitted them to remain in the land if they would be circumcised and consent to use the laws of the Jews. And they, from desire of their ancestral land, undertook to make the circumcision and the other way of life the same as the Jews.' The Edomites practiced circumcision but not the way the Jews did." Richard Steiner, "Incomplete Circumcision in Egypt and Edom: Jeremiah (9:24–25) in Light of Josephus and Jonckheere," *JBL* 118 (1999): 503.

his household or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. (Gen 17:23–27).

Though Ishmael is not the child of promise, he must bear the sign of the promise. When Isaac enters the narrative, Abraham obeys Yahweh’s command to circumcise Isaac on the eighth day (Gen 17:12, 19; Gen 21:4) making Isaac the first to receive Abrahamic circumcision according to the fullest standard of the covenantal command.

Genesis 34 presents circumcision as an identifying mark for those who belong to the Abrahamic heritage.<sup>23</sup> Claudia Camp discusses the issue from a source critical perspective.

Dinah’s story seems to inscribe the riddle of identity, with its heart in priestly discourse. It was the priests for whom circumcision had such an important and multidimensional symbolic value: a sign of fertility, kinship, descent and maleness, it defined the turf of identity. But it must also have been priests who perceived that it was not a sufficient identity marker, for Israel or for themselves. Any man, after all, could be circumcised. Circumcision was, then, a powerful but insufficient symbol, requiring reinforcement from other cultural forms.<sup>24</sup>

Genesis 34 presents circumcision as a practice observed by the Hebrew community and a requirement for those who desire to join that community.<sup>25</sup> The phrase אִם תְּהִי־וּ כְּמִנּוּ לְהַמְלִיךְ לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר (Gen 34:15) demonstrates the reality that circumcision had transitioned from a mark of the covenant to a mark of a people-group within three generations. The word כְּמִנּוּ places circumcision as the way in which an outsider becomes part of the covenantal community.

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<sup>23</sup> Others argue that the circumcision of Shechem reverses the rape of Dinah by self-mutilation of the genitals. This, however, seems at best to be a modern literary formulation not offered by the text. See Glick, *Marked in Your Flesh*, 25.

<sup>24</sup> Claudia Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, JSOTSS 320 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 301.

<sup>25</sup> “Dinah’s body metonymically represents the boundaries of Israelite identity. Should they be fluid or fixed? Open or closed? Can strangers be allowed to force their way in? Can they be allowed to negotiate their way in?” Quoted in Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 50, from Anthea Portier-Young, “Daughter of Simeon and Daughter of Dinah: Genesis 34 in Judith and Joseph and Asenath” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association, 5–8 August 2006).



Additionally, the explanatory use of the niph'al infinitive construct לְהַמְלִיךָ demonstrates that the act of circumcision is how Shechem and his men would become כְּמִנְיָו (i.e., like the sons of Jacob).<sup>26</sup>

Issues arise concerning the place of circumcision among the people of Israel in their context as Egyptian slaves. Circumcision does not appear in the Joseph narrative nor in the birth narrative of Moses. Further, there is no evidence that the Hebrews continued the practice of *Abrahamic* circumcision while in Egyptian captivity.<sup>27</sup> Circumcision in the Mosaic law appears in three contexts: (1) circumcision is the ritual marking of a Hebrew male child (Lev 12:3), (2) circumcision is a prerequisite for partaking of the Passover (Exod 12:44–49), and (3) circumcision is as a metaphorical description of spiritual purity (Deut 10:16; 30:6).<sup>28</sup> The Mosaic law does not connect the command for circumcision to the Abrahamic covenant. Circumcision occurs more frequently in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as a description of spiritual purity (cf. Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; Deut 30:6).

Joshua 5:2–12 presents the clearest example of Moses's negligence concerning circumcision. The terms שִׁוּבוּ (qal imperative MS) and לֵל (qal imperative MS) are not joined by a conjunctive ו. The LXX changes the imperative + imperative construct to participle + imperative (i.e., καθίσας περίτεμε τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραηλ; *while sitting, circumcise the sons of Israel*). The second verb in a Hebrew imperative + imperative construct without the copula governs the clause; thus, לֵל is the governing verb.<sup>29</sup> שִׁוּבוּ serves as an adverbial periphrasis meaning

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<sup>26</sup> Williams, *Williams Hebrew Syntax*, §195.

<sup>27</sup> I do not mean for this statement to take away from the NT view of baptism as circumcision in the heart. In fact, circumcision marks the new Israel (i.e., the church) not in the flesh but in the heart (Col 2:11–12).

<sup>28</sup> Exodus 12:43–49 cannot be part of the original Passover command. It is likely that Moses inserted this material to offer extra information and commentary on the meal. 12:43–49 serves as a footnote to the 10th plague narrative.

<sup>29</sup> Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 386.

“again.”<sup>30</sup> But does “again” refer to the resumption of a forgotten ritual or the necessity to repeat an already performed ritual in a new way?

The second term of note is שְׁנִיָּהּ. The LXX provides equivalent for this term. While it is possible that a former mass circumcision may have occurred at the first Passover (cf. Exod 12:48), the more likely interpretation is that both וְשִׁנֵּיב and שְׁנִיָּהּ refer to a prior Egyptian form of circumcision. Conversely, the use of לֹא־מָלְוּ in Joshua 5:5 suggests an objective absence of circumcision.<sup>31</sup> English translations tend to accept לֹא as a syntactical marker of an objective denial of fact.

For the author of Joshua, *Egyptian* circumcision would not have been a valid form of “true” circumcision because Egyptian circumcision did not completely remove the foreskin. If this second Israelite generation formerly underwent an Egyptian circumcision, the author of Joshua would not accept this circumcision as valid for either the law of Moses or for the Abrahamic covenant. The issue then is not that the new generation had not undergone circumcision at all but that the new generation had not undergone the proper form of circumcision. This best explains the desires of Josh 5:7 to place blame on the fathers of the second generation and not on Moses.

This short exploration of the institution of circumcision presents the theological contrast between Egyptian circumcision and Abrahamic circumcision. Yahweh institutes circumcision as the sign of the covenantal promise to make Abraham the father of nations. Throughout subsequent generations, circumcision morphs into the identifier of Yahweh’s people.<sup>32</sup> By

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<sup>30</sup> Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 387.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 143.

<sup>32</sup> The book of Jubilees holds this interpretation of circumcision. In addition, the rabbis use circumcision to exclude the gentiles from the designation “sons of the covenant.” See Sidney Hoenig, “Circumcision: The Covenant of Abraham,” *JQR* 53 (1963): 330.

removing the entire foreskin, both the bearer of the sign (i.e., the male) and the recipient of the sign's promise (i.e., the female) experience the sign within the procreative act. The adoption of Egyptian circumcision perverts the theological significance of Abrahamic circumcision.

### **The Exodus as Identity Formation**

Debate abounds concerning the date and circumstances of Israel's formation as a sovereign nation. Aaron Sherwood argues that the mixed multitude of Exod 12:38 defines national Israel by its worship instead of its genealogy.<sup>33</sup> However, Kevin Burrell argues, "The ethnic self can be imagined only in contrast to an ethnic other" implying the identity of national Israel must exist in contrast with other national entities.<sup>34</sup> Shimon Bakon and Benjamin Goodnick argue that Israel's national status begins as early as Jacob as the text presents him in juxtaposition to Laban (i.e., the Aramean) and Esau (i.e., Edom). For Bakon, Jacob's settlement in Goshen, while a temporary settlement, allowed his family to "continue its traditional way of life" implying the nationalistic identity of Israel begins with its namesake.<sup>35</sup> Goodnick argues, "The travels of Jacob with his family and followers portray the original transformation and development into a distinct people."<sup>36</sup>

Reflecting the perspective of more recent critical scholarship, Elizabeth Bloch-Smith argues that national Israel begins as early as the twelfth or eleventh centuries BCE based on a

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<sup>33</sup> Aaron Sherwood, "The Mixed Multitude in Exodus 12:38: Glorification, Creation, and Yahweh's Plunder of Israel and the Nations," *HBT* 34 (2012): 141.

<sup>34</sup> Kevin Burrell, *Cushites in the Hebrew Bible: Negotiating Ethnic Identity in the Past and Present* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 104.

<sup>35</sup> Shimon Bakon, "Jacob: The Father of a Nation," *JBQ* 28 (2000): 42.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Goodnick, "Israel's Defining Experience: From Family to Nation," *JBQ* 27 (1999): 192.

combination of archaeological evidence with the biblical record.<sup>37</sup> For Bloch-Smith, there is no Israel if there is no archaeological evidence to support the claims of the biblical text.<sup>38</sup> However, the term “nation” again presents issue. The Merneptah Stele, though shrouded with controversy, presents a hieroglyphic inscription that most scholars translate as “Israel.”<sup>39</sup>



Figure 1: ysꜣꜣr (Israel) Hieroglyph in Line 27 of the Merneptah Stele

The other cities in the list of conquest include the determinative for a city (i.e., a throw stick and three mountains). However, Israel’s determinative (i.e., the last three symbols in fig. 3) is the symbol for a foreign (i.e., the throw stick) people (i.e., the seated man and woman). Thus, the identity of Israel cannot be that of a “nation” in the minds of the Egyptians.<sup>40</sup>

Nathan Dwight Frank places the crux of the issue on the term “nation” rather than on the term “Israel.” Frank notes that the title of “Israel” can refer to a patriarch, a geographical territory, and an idealized community depending on its context.<sup>41</sup> The terms “nation” and “national” reflect a modern phenomenon that requires more than kinship and culture as essential

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, “Israelite Ethnicity in Iron I: Archaeology Preserves What Is Remembered and What is Forgotten in Israel’s History,” *JBL* 122 (2003): 402.

<sup>38</sup> Baruch Halpern suggests, “It is from that era [Deborah’s time] that real Israelite nationhood in the institutional and ideological senses can be traced.” See Baruch Halpern, *The Emergence of Israel in Canaan* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 241.

<sup>39</sup> While “Israel” is generally the accepted translation, other suggestions exist. However, scholars do not widely accept these other suggested translations. See Drower, Margaret. *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology*. Wisconsin Studies in Classics (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 221.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase “בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” appears in the HB as an identifier of the Israelite nation during its united monarchy (cf. 1 Sam 7:2; 2 Kgs 17:6; 18:11). The description בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל appears throughout the HB as well, though most notably in Exodus—a context in which the “nation” (i.e., בְּיַת) of Israel does not formally exist.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan Dwight Frank, “Recrafting Israel: Toward an Ethnotechnical Conception of the Nation,” *BibInt* 23 (2015): 325. See also, E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite Identity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 57.

elements.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the terms “nation” and “ethnicity” are not synonymous.<sup>43</sup> In this light, Israel may at times fit the categories of “proto-nationalism” and “precocious nationalism” depending on its temporal context.<sup>44</sup>

If kinship and culture do not define a “nation,” defining “national Israel” must encompass specific criteria that is not unique to its own identity. The HB does not offer much aid in this endeavor despite its strong desire to ascribe the status of “nation” to Israel at an early point.<sup>45</sup> Though scholars present an array of arguments regarding the exact time when Israel became a nation, most scholars tend to ignore the two defining features of a nation: (1) a governing law and (2) the possession of land.

Using the Mosaic law as a defining feature of Israel as a nation is not without its challenges. At the forefront is the definition and understanding of the term תּוֹרָה.<sup>46</sup> On the surface, the term denotes teaching.

Specifically law refers to any set of regulations; e.g., Ex 12 contains the law in regard to observing the Passover. Some other specific laws include those for the various offerings (Lev 7:37), for leprosy (Lev 14:57) and for jealousy (Num 5:29). In this light law is often considered to consist of statutes, ordinances, precepts, commandments, and testimonies. The meaning of the word gains further perspective in the light of Deut. According to Deut 1:5 Moses sets about to explain the law; law here would encompass the moral law, both in its apodictic and casuistic formulation, and the ceremonial law. The genius of Deut is that it interprets the external law in the light of its desired effect on man’s inner attitudes. In addition, the book of Deut itself shows that the law has a broad meaning to

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<sup>42</sup> Frank, “Recrafting Israel,” 319.

<sup>43</sup> Frank summarizes the issue. “Nobody seems to have any problem ascribing *ethnic* traits to ancient groups, since all that does is characterize the group in a limited way that precludes having to deal with or explain an ancient nation or nationalism. But ascribing *national* traits to ancient groups immediately opens the inquiry to the problem of reconciling the existence of an ancient nation with the ‘broad consensus’ of modernist theories that fail to explain ancient nations.” See Frank, “Recrafting Israel,” 321.

<sup>44</sup> Frank, “Recrafting Israel,” 320.

<sup>45</sup> Frank, “Recrafting Israel,” 317.

<sup>46</sup> When denoted as “Torah,” the term denotes a division of the HB, Genesis to Deuteronomy. When left תּוֹרָה, the term denotes “instruction” or “law” as a legal code. To limit confusion, I have opted for the term “Pentateuch” in place of “Torah.”

encompass history, regulations and their interpretation, and exhortations. It is not merely the listing of casuistic statements as is the case in Hammurabi's code. Later the word extended to include the first five books of the Bible in all their variety.<sup>47</sup>

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 states that the Israelites were to teach the תּוֹרָה to their children emphasizing its didactic purpose. On the other hand, the תּוֹרָה also served as a legal code for the Israelites in religious and civic contexts.

Julius Wellhausen suggests that the תּוֹרָה serves as legally binding in the nation of Israel more than it serves as morally binding for the whole world.

The knowledge of God, which Hosea (chapter iv.) regards as the contents of the torah, has yet a closer connection with jurisprudence than with theology; but as its practical issue is that God requires of man righteousness, and faithfulness, and good-will, it is fundamentally and essentially morality, though morality at that time addressed its demands less to the conscience than to society. A ritual tradition naturally developed itself even before the exile (2 Kings xvii. 27, 28). But only those rites were included in the Torah which the priests had to teach others, not those which they discharged themselves; even in Leviticus this distinction may be traced; the instructions characterized as torah being chiefly those as to animals which might or might not be eaten, as to clean and unclean states, as to leprosy and its marks (cf. Deut xxiv. 8). So it was in Israel, to which the testimony applies which we have cited: and so it was in Judah also.<sup>48</sup>

Wellhausen observes that the תּוֹרָה, because it is from God, is essentially moral, and this morality concerns benevolent care, justice, and loyalty. As such, for Wellhausen, the תּוֹרָה is not in its entirety theological. Wellhausen ascribes the law as jurisprudence rather than religious dogma.<sup>49</sup>

Following Wellhausen to some degree, David Carr suggests that the Pentateuch became legally binding during Josiah's reform.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> John Hartley, "תּוֹרָה," *TWOT* 2:910.

<sup>48</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), Kindle edition, 395–96.

<sup>49</sup> Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 395.

<sup>50</sup> David Carr, "The Rise of Torah," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary Koppers and Bernard Levinson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 47.

Both Wellhausen and Carr assume a redacted approach to the Pentateuch. While such approaches may lead to a discovery of the final composition of the Pentateuch, it does not address the literary and historical context of the final scene within the exodus narrative, which attributes the authority of the תּוֹרָה to the narrative of Deuteronomy 5:1. To that end, the perspective of Brevard Childs deserves attention. Childs championed the view that the final form of the text is the form that one should study. Childs does not promote his method as another critical approach to the text. Instead, Childs argues that this approach serves as a hermeneutic for reading Scripture in which one looks for the canonical context and shape.<sup>51</sup>

From the narrator's perspective, the children of Israel possessed a legally binding code prior to and required for their entry into Canaan. The giving of the law before Israel's entry into Canaan implies that they were no longer subject to other laws. The exodus required a legal framework. The תּוֹרָה provided this framework establishing the foundations of a nation by defining the people's relationship with Yahweh and with one another. The legal provisions of the תּוֹרָה structured Israel's governance and provided a framework for resolving disputes. This legal system promoted fairness and justice enabling the stability of the nation. Furthermore, the תּוֹרָה addressed the role of its leaders stating that they too were subject to the legal constraints in the law. In this manner, the law developed a sense of collective purpose by committing to a shared set of values and beliefs.

The physical territory occupied by a nation plays a fundamental role in defining the identity of a nation. It serves as the backdrop on which to write a nation's history, culture, and collective memory. David Goodblatt observes, "The concept of a nation can and should be

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<sup>51</sup> Childs introduces his approach in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. For an analysis of Childs' approach, see Kittel, "Brevard Childs' Development of the Canonical Critical Approach," 2–11; Brueggemann, "Brevard Childs' Canon Criticism," 312.

distinguished from that of a state.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the sum of ethnic parts tends to define a nation; however, this view makes national identity a fluid concept.

Land serves as the setting for collective memories and historical narratives. Within national borders, landmarks and monuments become tangible links to the past. While natural landmarks define national identity the narratives of the exodus and conquest present manufactured landmarks as memorials.<sup>53</sup> Joshua 4:1–9 gives an example of constructed landmarks serving as a reminder of the crossing of the Jordan.

When the entire nation was on the other side, the LORD told Joshua, “Select for yourselves twelve men from the people, one per tribe. Instruct them, ‘Pick up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from the very place where the priests stand firmly, and carry them over with you and put them in the place where you camp tonight.’” Joshua summoned the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one per tribe. Joshua told them, “Go in front of the ark of the LORD your God to the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to put a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the Israelite tribes. The stones will be a reminder to you. When your children ask someday, ‘Why are these stones important to you?’ tell them how the water of the Jordan stopped flowing before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the water of the Jordan stopped flowing. These stones will be a lasting memorial for the Israelites.” The Israelites did just as Joshua commanded. They picked up twelve stones, according to the number of the Israelite tribes, from the middle of the Jordan as the LORD had instructed Joshua. They carried them over with them to the camp and put them there. Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan in the very place where the priests carrying the ark of the covenant stood. They remain there to this very day.

These stones served as a permanent memorial to prompt Israel’s memory of the crossing of the Jordan through intergenerational teaching.<sup>54</sup> This story passes from generation to generation by means of the landmark’s heritage rather than the psychological memory of the event.

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<sup>52</sup> David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>53</sup> Mt. Sinai/Horeb serves this role for Israel.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Dozeman, *Joshua 1–12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 292.



The delineation of borders defines territorial integrity and places limitations on its governing power. Upon entry into the promised land, Yahweh delineates borders to the new generation of Israelites.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses: “Give these instructions to the Israelites, and tell them: ‘When you enter Canaan, the land that has been assigned to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan with its borders, your southern border will extend from the wilderness of Zin along the Edomite border, and your southern border will run eastward to the extremity of the Salt Sea, and then the border will turn from the south to the Scorpion Ascent, continue to Zin, and then its direction will be from the south to Kadesh Barnea. Then it will go to Hazar Addar and pass over to Azmon. There the border will turn from Azmon to the Stream of Egypt, and then its direction is to the sea. And for a western border you will have the Great Sea. This will be your western border. And this will be your northern border: From the Great Sea you will draw a line to Mount Hor; from Mount Hor you will draw a line to Lebo Hamath, and the direction of the border will be to Zedad. The border will continue to Ziphron, and its direction will be to Hazar Enan. This will be your northern border. For your eastern border you will draw a line from Hazar Enan to Shepham. The border will run down from Shepham to Riblah, on the east side of Ain, and the border will descend and reach the eastern side of the Sea of Kinnereth. Then the border will continue down the Jordan River and its direction will be to the Salt Sea. This will be your land by its borders that surround it” (Num 34:1–12).

Genesis 15:18–21 gives another account of the borders of the promised land.

That day the LORD made a covenant with Abram: “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River— the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

While the borders of Gen 15:18–21 and the borders of Num 34:1–12 do not correspond entirely, Moshe Weinfeld helpfully notes that both are idealistic systems.<sup>55</sup> Nili Wazana’s interpretation is convincing: “The differences in form and context reveal that these are two separate genres that convey two different *conceptions* of the promised land, but not two different *territorial units*.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of Canaan by the Israelites* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 55.

<sup>56</sup> Nili Wazana, “From Dan to Beer-Sheba and from the Wilderness to the Sea: Literal and Literary Images of the Promised Land in the Bible,” in *Experiences of Place*, ed. Mary N. MacDonald (Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2003), 63–64 (emphasis original).

The fluidity of borders in the ancient world does not negate the reality that nations understood territorial limits.<sup>57</sup>

Through the exodus, Yahweh takes a people with no formal law and no formal land to a setting in which both law and land define and unify the group. The exodus is not merely a journey from one physical place to another but is a transitional period by which the Hebrews become “national Israel.” Clearly, the Hebrews had some form of a law (i.e., Egyptian legal codes) and land (i.e., Goshen) while in Egyptian captivity; however, the exodus demonstrates a unique identity given from Yahweh.

### **The Need to Recircumcise in Joshua 5:2–9**

Prior to the exodus, the Israelites are territorially nomadic. At the end of the exodus journey, Yahweh gives the Israelites land, which ceases their nomadic nature, and a law, which defines their cultural distinctiveness. Admittedly, scholars have long recognized that much of the law places restrictions on Canaanite rituals.<sup>58</sup> However, viewing Israel as anti-Egypt demands a

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<sup>57</sup> Grosby questions the consensus that all borders in the ANE were unnuanced. He states, “Examination of evidence from the ancient Near East and Armenia, spanning a period of more than a thousand years, indicates the existence of conceptions of relatively precise boundaries, territories, and perhaps also nations.” Steven Grosby, “Borders, Territory and Nationality in the Ancient Near East and Armenia,” *JESHO* 40 (1997): 1.

<sup>58</sup> For example, one explanation of the command to not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk (Exod 23:19) is that such was a practice of the Canaanites in the region. For more on the command of cooking a young goat in its mother’s milk, see C. M. Carmichael, “On Separating Life and Death: An Explanation of Some Biblical Laws,” *HTR* 69 (1976): 1–7; J. Milgrom, “You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother’s Milk,” *BRev* 1 (1985): 48–55; R. J. Ratner and B. Zuckerman, “In Rereading the ‘Kid in Milk’ Inscriptions,” *BRev* 1 (1985): 56–58; and M. Haran, “Seething a Kid in Its Mother’s Milk,” *JJS* 30 (1979): 23–35. “The older sources show, accordingly, that the conquest of Canaan by Israel was a process that extended over sever centuries. The aborigines were not exterminated, but certain Hebrew clans forced their way into the land, and occupied the rural districts, while the walled cities remained, for the most part, hands of the Canaanites. For a long while there was hostility between the two races; but gradually this ceased, and a process of amalgamation began. Cities that could not be conquered were eventually united to Israel by treaties that gave them full political rights. Whole tribes that made peace and accepted the worship of Yahweh were incorporated into the nation and counted as “sons of Israel.” In process of time, through conquest, treaty, or inter-marriage, Canaanites and Hebrews were fused into one people and dwelt in the same cities, as was the case, for instance in Shechem in the days of Abimelech (Jgds 9).” Lewis Bayles Paton, “Canaanite Influence on the Religion of Israel,” *AJT* 18 (1914): 208.

different hermeneutic in which law and land do not make Israel anti-Canaan but removes Egyptian cultural and religious mores.

Dietary and clothing restrictions in the law of Moses depict an anti-Egyptian agenda. The following chart demonstrates the contrasting juxtaposition between Egyptian mores and exodus events/laws.

<b>Egyptian Mores<sup>59</sup></b>	<b>Exodus Events/Laws</b>
Polytheism	Monotheism (Exod 20:3; Deut 6:4)
The use of idols	No graven image of Yahweh (Exod 20:4–6)
Wearing mixed material garments	Prohibition of mixed material garments (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:11)
Crossdressing	Prohibition of wearing clothing belonging to the other gender (Deut 22:5)
Tattoos <sup>60</sup>	Prohibition against tattoos (Lev 19:28)
Staple diet of Nile fish (esp. catfish)	Prohibition against water animal that do not have fins and scales (Lev 11:9–12)
Adult circumcision	8 <sup>th</sup> day circumcision (Lev 12:3)

Table 1: A Comparison of Egyptian Mores and the Law of Moses

The above chart is not exhaustive but illustrates the point. This hermeneutic suggests that Israel’s time in the wilderness was transformative rather than formative *ex nihilo*. Thus, the shedding of a former Egyptian identity proves crucial to the development of Israel as a sovereign nation.

Taking this approach, the Israelites shed their Egyptian mores in four primary stages.

The first occurs in their craving for Egyptian food. Though their cravings clouded their

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<sup>59</sup> Chapter 2 has dealt with most of these mores in detail. I bring them up here to demonstrate a correlation between standard Egyptian daily life and the exodus.

<sup>60</sup> The practice of tattooing has been around for thousands of years. Several mummies have been found with basic tattoos made with carbon. Elizabeth Kerner notes, “In ancient times, tattooing was an altogether dangerous undertaking, as the risk of infection was high due to suboptimal cleanliness and a lack of knowledge of hygiene. The skin was either cut with a sharp instrument and the pigment then rubbed into the wound, or the pigment was brought under the skin by repeated pricking with a pointed object. There are no ancient written records telling us how it was done, but as the most ancient forms of tattooing known to us were carried out in these ways, we have to assume that this was also the case in earlier times.” Elizabeth Kerner, “The Ancient Practice of Tattooing,” *Ancient Egypt Magazine* 13 (2012): 38.

memories of enslavement, Yahweh provided quail and manna (Exod 16:13–15). The provision of food unknown in Egypt removes the more of food as culturally identifying. The second occurs when Moses destroyed the gold taken in the Egyptian plunder (Exod 3:22; cf. Deut 15:13) that formed the golden calf then used the remainder of the ornaments (עֲדָנִים) to construct the tabernacle and its contents. In doing so, Moses destroys the more of cultural luxury and nationally defining symbols. The third is the giving of the law. While scholars debate the presence of a formal written law in Egypt, the consensus is that all Egyptians at the least observed the law of Ma’at.<sup>61</sup> Israel’s possessing of a formal, written document that defines behavior among the group sheds the legal or at the least the moral mores of Egypt. Finally, a mass circumcision must occur before the second generation can enter the promised land. The circumcision of Josh 5:2–9 is a recircumcision narrative in which Abrahamic circumcision—a necessary component of the Abrahamic covenant—replaces Egyptian circumcision. The formation of Israelite identity in the Hexateuch follows a chiasmic structure.

- (A) The promise of land (Gen 15)
- (B) The institution of Abrahamic circumcision (Gen 17)
- (C) Israel’s (Jacob’s) descendants (Gen 30:1–24; 35:15)
- (D) Israel in Egypt (Gen –Exod 12)
- (C) Israel’s descendants of the second generation (Josh 5:4)
- (B) Circumcision of the second generation (Josh 5:2–9)
- (A) The obtaining of land (Josh 5:10–12)

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<sup>61</sup> Regarding Ma’at in ancient Egypt, J. G. Manning observes, “The concept of ‘law’ and ‘justice’ are intimately associated with the proper behavior of kings and were embedded in every royal ritual. They were also a frequent theme in literary portrayals of the ‘good king.’ Ordinary people, too, were governed by the same concept. Proper behavior was expected in all relationships, within the family, between neighbors, between officials and the governed, and so on.” J. G. Manning, “The Representation of Justice in Ancient Egypt,” *Yale JL&H* 24 (2012): 112.

Circumcision was common in the ANE. In addition to the Egyptians, the Midianites and the Phoenicians also observed the rite.<sup>62</sup> Thus, Israel's practice of circumcision does not forthrightly place them in terms of "otherness." The physical act of surgery cannot serve as Israel's defining feature at this time in their history.<sup>63</sup> However, the theological basis on which Abrahamic circumcision rests places circumcision as a meaningful identifier for Israel's national identity. If a previous Egyptian form of circumcision is synonymous with the "disgrace of Egypt" in Josh 5:9, there must be a theological issue with the Egyptianized form that does not uphold the dogmatic implications of circumcision for Israel.<sup>64</sup>

Sasson notes the purpose of Egyptian circumcision.

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. Still remaining to be decided is the question of whether circumcision among the Egyptians was voluntary or universally imposed; whether it was adopted by the common populace or reserved for a high caste which included the pharaoh, his priests, his courtiers, and his immediate servants.<sup>65</sup>

Abrahamic circumcision differs from Egyptian circumcision in occasion, method, and meaning. The occasion of Abrahamic circumcision is the eighth day of a male child's life. There are no connections of circumcision in an Israelite context as a passage into adulthood or a prerequisite for prenuptial events. Further, the method by which one undergoes Egyptian circumcision exhibits a precise surgical procedure. The recircumcision of Josh 5:2–9 employed flint knives to

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<sup>62</sup> Scholars continue to debate the cultural and religious significance of circumcision. It seems doubtful that a consensus will occur. For a current bibliography on the issue, see Isaac, "Circumcision," 444–56.

<sup>63</sup> The second temple period presents an era in which the circumcised and uncircumcised stand in greater juxtaposition.

<sup>64</sup> Deenick suggests that different forms of circumcision do not appear in the text since it is the second generation that underwent circumcision rather than the generation of Egypt. However, evidence from the exodus proves that Egyptian practices lasted throughout the exodus event to its final days before the conquest of Canaan. Deenick's comments "...the text makes no room for a different kind of circumcision" ignores the historical now-actions of the exodus setting. Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Sasson, "Circumcision," 474.

remove the entire foreskin emphasizing the archaic history of the practice and the specificity of its method.<sup>66</sup> Whereas Egyptian circumcision denoted maturity, authority, and divinity in some cases, Abrahamic circumcision offered no implications for the establishment of authority or divinity.<sup>67</sup>

The Abrahamic covenant promises the two items necessary to form a nation—people and land. This people originated through Abraham’s seed (עֲרֵב) to which the sign of circumcision served as a reminder that Yahweh would fulfill the promise.<sup>68</sup> Joshua 5:2–9 stands as an intriguing passage within the conquest narrative—a moment seemingly disconnected from the military campaign narratives that ensue shortly thereafter. Circumcision was not merely a physical act but a symbol of commitment to God’s covenant promises, a sign of separation from other nations, and a means of ensuring continuity of the covenant lineage.

The circumcision of the second-generation Israelite males in Josh 5:2–9 presents the renewal of the Abrahamic covenant with God. The act emphasizes Israel’s dependence on divine favor and protection as they embark on the conquest. It symbolizes their obedience to God’s commandments by emphasizing that success is contingent on their faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant. While it seems unusual to read of a serious surgery to those of fighting age in the context of a military conquest, the recircumcision narrative expresses a deep theological

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<sup>66</sup> Sasson, “Circumcision,” 475.

<sup>67</sup> “A passage from the Book of the Dead speaks of the god Re’s self-induced circumcision. The king of Egypt, as the son and the representation of this divinity probably underwent the same operation as he entered manhood. This possibly self-imposed immolation may find a parallel in the experience of Abraham (Gen 17 and that of Bata in the Egyptian tale of the Two Brothers. Sesostri I is known have remarked: ‘As a child, when I had not yet lost my foreskin...’ (Stracman *AIEP*, pp. 8–9). Similarly, Khnumhotpe, monarch of Beni-Hassan during the XII Dynasty, boasted that his father ‘governed at a time when he had not yet lost prepuce’ (Urk. VII:34). The rite appears thus to have been unconnected with accession to power, at least in Egypt.” See Sasson, “Circumcision,” 474.

<sup>68</sup> Rupert of Deutz (12th c.) stated, “Thus rightly, in the same way for Abraham, because he believed God saying that in his seed all nation would be blessed, in the place of the seed, that is, in the genital part of the body, a sign of that same faith was placed.” Rupert Tuitiensis, *De Trinitate* 5.31 (PL 167:395, translation by Karl Deenick). See also, Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 49.

significance. The recircumcision of the second generation provided the way in which this new generation recommitted themselves to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

### **Conclusion**

The replacement of Egyptian circumcision with Abrahamic circumcision at Gilgal presents the final stage of shedding Egyptian mores. Before the conquest and settlement in Canaan can occur, the Israelites must reinstate the original covenant for land (Gen 15:18) and descendants (Gen 15:4–5). The need to circumcise “again” (שָׁנִיתָ) implies the use of a non-Abrahamic form of circumcision during the exodus. The use of לֹא as an objective denial of fact in v. 5 (לֹא־מָלְוּ) does not signify a total absence of circumcision. Rather, it reflects the author’s view that Egyptian circumcision is not a form of proper circumcision. To become “national Israel,” Israel needed the components of a nation: people, law, and land.

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