

Romans 4:10-12 Commentary

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Romans 4:10 [How then](#) was it [credited](#)? While he was [circumcised](#), [or uncircumcised](#)? Not while [circumcised](#), but while [uncircumcised](#); ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [pos oun elogisthe?](#) (3SAPI) [en peritome onti](#) (PAPMSD) [e en akrobustia?](#) [ouk en peritome all' en akrobustia](#)

Amplified: How then was it credited [to him]? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: But how did his faith help him? Was he declared righteous only after he had been circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? The answer is that God accepted him first, and then he was circumcised later! ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: How then was it put to his account, at the time when he was circumcised or at the time when he was uncircumcised? Not in circumcision but in uncircumcision.

Young's Literal: how then was it reckoned? he being in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision;

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 1:18-3:20

Romans 3:21-5:21

Romans 6:1-8:39

Romans 9:1-11:36

Romans 12:1-16:27

SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

HOW THEN WAS IT RECKONED: pos oun elogisthe (3SAPI):

- Listen to Dr J Vernon McGee on Mp3 - [Romans 4:9-25](#)
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:9-12 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 1](#) - John MacArthur

How then - Notice how Paul draws us into his logical argument. He is like a defense attorney, defending the Gospel of Salvation against witnesses who would try to refute its truth. Jesus frequently engaged his detractors with unnerving questions. It forced them to think and to make a decision (either for or against). When we are explaining the Gospel to others, keep this "technique" in mind and attempt to ask questions which draw them into your presentation of the Gospel, forcing them to actively engage intellectually (and then prayerfully, the Holy Spirit can "seal" the deal so to speak by convicting them of sin, righteousness and the judgment to come.)

It - **Righteousness (dikaioisune)** which ultimately was made available by Christ's death, burial and resurrection (Christ's righteousness 1Co 1:30, 2Co 5:21)

Reckoned ([3049](#)) (**logizomai**) means how was God's righteousness imputed or credited to Abraham's "spiritual bank account"?

- See commentary on Genesis 15:6.
- [What was the Old Testament way of salvation?](#)
- [What can we learn from the life of Abraham?](#)

In a very real sense, Abraham was justified (declared righteous or in right standing ["positionally"] before God) while still a Gentile, and this flings the door open for **any** Gentile to be justified by a faith of the same kind as expressed by Abraham (see Peter's expression "a faith of the same kind as ours" 2Pe 1:1-note), which makes this divine righteousness completely apart from (and unobtainable by) works of the law or physical circumcision.

WHILE HE WAS CIRCUMCISED OR UNCIRCUMCISED: en peritome onti (PAPMSD):

- Ge 15:5,6,16; 16:1, 2, 3; 17:1,10,23, 24, 25, 26, 27; 1 Cor 7:18,19; Gal 5:6; 6:15

- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
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Paul addressed the "**circumcision question**" in relationship to marital issues, asking...

Was any man called (unto salvation) when he was already circumcised? (refers to Jews who have been saved) He is not to become uncircumcised. Has anyone been called in uncircumcision? (refers to Gentiles) He is not to be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God (cp "to obey is better than sacrifice" 1Sa 15:22). (1Co 7:18, 19)

Comment: The question of a physically circumcised Jew becoming uncircumcised strikes us as somewhat ridiculous but Josephus describes this practice writing "they (Jews who sought the favor of the Greek ruler Antiochus) desired his (Antiochus') permission to build them a Gymnasium at Jerusalem (thus emulating Greek culture - gyms were "big" with the Greeks). And when he had given them leave **they also hid the circumcision of their genitals**, that even when they were naked (Greeks exercised in the nude in the "gyms"! they might appear to be Greeks. Accordingly, they (the compromising Jews) left off all the customs that belonged to their own country, and imitated the practices of the other nations (the Gentiles)." (Ant 12.241)

Paul adds in his letter to the **Galatians**...

For **in** Christ Jesus (the key word is "in" - when by grace through faith we who were in Adam [cp Ro 5:12] note] are placed forever in Christ - cp 1Co 15:22) neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything (external acts/rites are immaterial and worthless, unless they reflect genuine internal righteousness - i.e., they are supernaturally motivated by a desire to please God and not by a fleshly futile attempt to merit His favor), but faith working through love (Saving faith proves its genuine character by works of love cp Ro 13:10-note). (Gal 5:6)

While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? - Paul does not leave this question open for debate but answers that it was while he was **uncircumcised**, which is a physical state the Jews equated with the "goyim" or the "Gentile dogs"! This was the state of their physical ancestor Abraham, whether they like it or not, or whether they accept it or not. It is an indisputable fact!

- See Excursus on Circumcision of the Heart

Circumcised (4061) (peritome [word study]) (See exposition of **Scriptures on Circumcision**) refers of course to his physical circumcision. His heart had been "spiritually circumcised" by grace through faith in the good news (Gal 3:8, Ge 15:6, cp what God's desire always was for the Jews - Dt 10:16, Jer 4:4, Ezek 18:31 a supernatural transaction which ultimately only God could effect and one He prophesied would one day be fulfilled for the Jews - Dt 30:6, Ezek 11:19, 20, Ezek 36:26-27, Jer 32:39 - When fulfilled? At the end of this age when the Deliverer returns and all Israel [who believe] will be saved [experience heart circumcision] Ro 11:26, 27-note)

How does this apply today? There are millions who have been taught as children, and even as adults that the thing that makes them acceptable to God is the fact that they were **baptized** or **joined a church**, etc. To the Jew it was the **rite of circumcision** what made a man acceptable to God. But they distorted the clear teaching of both the Old & New Testament teaching. Why? because they failed to read what had been clearly stated -- circumcision was only was a sign of the covenant (Ge 17:11). It was an external sign of an internal work of grace by faith (Genesis 15:6), when Abraham believed.

The Jews read what the "sages" and "wise" rabbis wrote in the Talmud and other writings about the meaning of **circumcision** -- they read and heard what other men said (the "commentaries" so to speak) but failed to check it out with what God said (Acts 17:11) and it cost them dearly (and eternally). The question one must ask is has the modern day church gone the same route placing more emphasis on what men say about the Word of God than in what God says in His Word?

- [Circumcision - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Circumcision - Torrey's Topical Textbook](#)
- [Circumcision - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Circumcision - Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament](#)

NOT WHILE CIRCUMCISED BUT WHILE UNCIRCUMCISED: e en akrobustia ouk en peritome all en akrobustia

- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
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Uncircumcised (203) (**akrobustia** from **ákron** = the extreme + **búo** = cover) means uncircumcised or uncircumcision and thus referred to the **prepuce** or **foreskin**.

The chronology of Genesis proves Paul's case to any honest observer who allows the text to speak for itself! Abraham's age when he was declared righteous (Ge 15:6) is not stated, but later when Hagar bore him Ishmael, Scripture records his age as 86yo (Ge 16:16). Ishmael was 13yo when both he and Abraham were circumcised (Ge 17:25,26) and Abraham was 99yo (Ge 17:24). But God declared Abraham righteous before Ishmael had been conceived (Ge 15:6; 16:2-4), which would have been at least 14 years before Abraham's circumcision.

In short, Abraham righteousness was not credited to his "spiritual bank account" because he was circumcised. In fact the converse is true - Abraham was circumcised as a testimony to the fact that he had been justified by faith.

RELIGION SAVES NO ONE!

Most of the world is "**religious**" (We all have a God shaped vacuum which will be filled with some genre of "spirituality", either true or false) in the sense that they keep some religious ordinances, rituals, and rules. Rites and rituals are good in the sense that they prompt us to think about a higher being ("higher power"), but they are bad in the sense that they falsely lead the individual into the belief that he or she has become (or is becoming if they keep up the religious activities) acceptable to God. Religious rites and rituals of this type are nothing more than works based righteousness, which always falls short the perfect righteousness of Christ (1Cor 1:30, 2Cor 5:21), the only righteousness which is acceptable to the Father. Romans 4:10 obliterates this false hope, which is really the deadly, deceptive, age old lie of the Devil to Eve that "God knows that in the day you eat from it (the forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God** (viz, "carry out these rituals and achieve a "God-kind of righteousness"), knowing good and evil." (Ge 3:5). It was the lie that led to the death of the human race and will lead to the eternal damnation of every soul who falls for the trap!

Romans 4:11 and he [received](#) the [sign](#) of [circumcision](#), a [seal](#) of the [righteousness](#) of the [faith](#) which he had while [uncircumcised](#), so that he might be the [father](#) of [all](#) who [believe without being circumcised](#), that [righteousness](#) might be [credited](#) to them, ([NASB: Lockman](#))

Greek: [kai semeion elaben](#) (3SAAI) [peritomes](#), [sphragida tes dikaiousunes tes pisteos tes en te akrobustia](#), [eis to einai](#) (PAN) [auton patera panton ton pisteuonton](#) (PAPMPG) [di' akrobustias](#), [eis to logisthenai](#) (APN) [\[kai\] autois \[ten\] dikaiousunen](#).

Amplified: He received the mark of circumcision as a token or an evidence [and] seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised--[faith] so that he was to be made the father of all who [truly] believe, though without circumcision, and who thus have righteousness (right standing with God) imputed to them and credited to their account, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: The circumcision ceremony was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous – even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are made right with God by faith. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: And he received the attesting sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteous character of the faith which he had in his uncircumcision, resulting in his being the father of all who believe while in the state of uncircumcision, in order that there may be put to their account the righteousness;

Young's Literal: and a sign he did receive of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith in the uncircumcision, for his being father of all those believing through uncircumcision, for the righteousness also being reckoned to them,

AND HE RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION: [kai semeion elaben](#) (3SAAI) [peritomes](#):

- Genesis 17:10; Exodus 12:13; 31:13,17; Ezekiel 20:12,20
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:9-12 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 1](#) - John MacArthur

Sign (4592) (**semeion** from **semaino** =signify, make known, declare from **sema** = mark) describes an indication, a distinguishing mark, or here a sign. Thus **semeion** is a sign by which something is designated, distinguished or known.

Webster has a relevant definition stating that a sign is something material or external that stands for or signifies something spiritual. **Semeion** is something indicating the presence or existence of something else.

Semeion - 77x in 69v - distinguishing mark(1), miracle(2), sign(35), signs(39).

Matt 12:38-39; 16:1, 3-4; 24:3, 24, 30; 26:48; Mark 8:11-12, 13:4, 22; 16:17, 20; Luke 2:12, 34; 11:16, 29-30; 21:7, 11, 25; 23:8; John 2:11, 18, 23; 3:2; 4:48, 54; 6:2, 14, 26, 30; 7:31; 9:16; 10:41; 11:47; 12:18, 37; 20:30; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; Rom 4:11; 15:19; 1 Cor 1:22; 14:22; 2 Cor 12:12; 2Thess 2:9; 3:17; Heb 2:4; Rev 12:1, 3; 13:13-14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20.

Circumcision (4061) (**peritome**) (See exposition of Scriptures on Circumcision) was not the instrumental cause of Abraham's justification (declaration of righteousness) but was merely an outward sign in his physical flesh that he had been **justified by faith** and in effect received circumcision of his heart Ro 2:28, 28, 29-note). Circumcision was always meant to be only an external token of the unconditional covenant between God and the people of Israel (Ge 17:11).

A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH: sphragida tes dikaiousunes tes pisteos:

- Ro 2:28,29; Deuteronomy 30:6; 2Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; Revelation 9:4
- Ro 4:13; 3:22; 9:30; 10:6; Galatians 5:5; Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 11:7; 2Peter 1:1
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
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Seal (4973) (**sphragis** - see study on verb **sphragizo**) was used to describe an engraved object used to make a mark, the mark in turn denoting ownership, approval, or closure of something. A seal in ancient days was often made by pressing a ring (signet) into heated wax which was affixed to a document or letter marking it as a valid, authentic or genuine document.

Sphragis - 16x in 16v - Ro 4:11; 1Cor 9:2; 2Ti 2:19; Rev 5:1-2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 7:2; 8:1; 9:4

In sum a **sign** points to the existence of that which it signifies. A **seal** authenticates, confirms, certifies, or guarantees the genuineness of that which is signified.

- [Seal - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Seal - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Sign - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Sign - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Sign - Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible](#)

Every time circumcision was performed, the people of Israel were to be reminded of God's righteousness that Abraham received by grace through faith.

Circumcision served as a seal which confirmed to Abraham that he was regarded by God as righteous through faith. Circumcision did not bring righteousness, but was the visible sign to Abraham's descendants of the righteousness that was imputed to him by faith. Once righteousness has been imputed to an individual, he or she is sealed as it were forever.

Warren Wiersbe explains that "As a **sign**, it (circumcision) was evidence that he belonged to God and believed His promise. As a **seal**, it was a reminder to him that God had given the promise and would keep it. Circumcision did not add to Abraham's salvation; it merely attested to it.." ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary 1989. Victor](#)) (Bolding added)

It is fascinating to read the rabbinical literature that speaks of circumcision as the **'seal of Abraham'**.

John Piper has an interesting application regarding a **sign/seal** explaining that "When your life begins to conform to the will of God, this is a **sign** (**Ed**: Because natural man is hostile to God and totally opposed to His will. Inclination toward His will therefore is a clear mark of a supernatural effect/power). It is a sign and seal that your faith is real and that you have an unshakable righteousness, namely, the righteousness of God in Christ. An act like circumcision, or any other act in obedience to God, does not give you your right standing with God. Faith alone does. But the acts of obedience are a **sign** and a **seal** that your faith is real and that Christ is your perfect righteousness." (cp the relationship of faith and obedience = Ro 1:5-note, Ro 2:8-note, Ro 15:18,19-note, Ro 16:26-note) (from [Why Does It Matter Which Came First: Circumcision or Justification?](#)) (Bolding added)

WHICH HE HAD WHILE UNCIRCUMCISED: tes en te akrobustia

ABRAHAM'S CIRCUMCISION FOLLOWS HIS JUSTIFICATION		
ABRAHAM'S AGE	PASSAGE	EVENT
75	Genesis 12:4	Called by God from Haran
75-86 (Cannot date from Scripture)	Genesis 15:6	Abraham Justified by Faith
86	Genesis 16:16	Hagar bore Ishmael
99	Genesis 17:1	Abraham Circumcised
100	Genesis 17:17 Genesis 21	Isaac is born

A review of this chart clearly shows that Abraham was**circumcised AFTER** he was **justified by faith**. At age 86 Abraham went into Hagar, a union which resulted in the birth of Ishmael, the product of the flesh, not of the promise--the flesh can never please God! So God appeared to Abram whose body was as good as dead and He told him that He was his EL Shaddai (God Almighty) and promised (to paraphrase it) "I will establish My covenant. I am your all sufficient One. Quit seeking other ways. Rest in Me. Trust Me." (Ge 17:1,2) **Where do you run when you need help?** Run to the rock that is higher than you (Ps 61:2[note](#)) and you too find your promised strength in His sufficient strength, **EL Shaddai**.

John Piper notes that Paul is clearly stating "that you do not have to be a physical Jew or even a kosher proselyte to be a part of the covenant that God made with Abraham. What makes you a child of Abraham and a fellow heir of the promise (He 11:9-note, cp Ro 8:17-note, Ep 3:6-note, 1Pe 3:7-note) is not circumcision or any other Jewish custom. It is faith in the God Who justifies the ungodly (Ro 4:5-note). That is what united Abraham to God. And that is what will unite others to God and to him. [Why Does it Matter Which Came First- Circumcision or Justification](#))

SO THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE WITHOUT BEING CIRCUMCISED THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE RECKONED TO THEM: eis to einai (PAN) auton patera panton ton pisteuonton (PAPMPG) di' akrobustias, eis to logisthenai (APN) [kai] autois [ten] dikaiosunen:

- Ro 4:12,16, 17, 18; 3:22,26; 9:6,33; 10:4,11; Mt 8:11; 16:16; Luke 19:9; Jn 3:15,16,36; 6:35,40,40,47; 7:38,39; 8:33; 11:25,26; Gal 3:7,22,29; 6:16
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
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So that (6x in Romans 1:20, 4:11, 7:3, 6, 11:19, 15:19, 15:32) - This phrase (sometimes just the conjunction "that") usually indicates the writer is showing the purpose for something (usually preceding which will force you to examine the context). "So that" occurs 580x in the NAS (77) which will give you many opportunities to pause and ponder the purpose.

Physically, Abraham is the father of all Jews (they are both physically circumcised, thus the Jewish leaders were partially correct in answering Jesus in Jn 8:39), but spiritually Abraham is the father of both believing Jews and believing Gentiles (whether they are or are not circumcised) (Gal 3:7, 29).

John Piper adds "God's point in justifying Abraham by faith alone before his being circumcised is to make clear that Abraham is the spiritual father of all who are justified by faith, no matter what people group they are from. ([Why Does it Matter Which Came First- Circumcision or Justification](#))

THE ISRAEL OF GOD

When Paul says that Abraham is the father of believing Gentiles, there is no thought of physical descent. It simply means that these believers are his children because they imitate his faith (Gal 3:7,29). They are not his children by birth but become his children by faith in Christ. It is important to note that Paul is not teaching that **believing Gentiles** become the **Israel of God** [see study] (Gal 6:16). The **Israel of God** is composed of those physical Jews by birth who accept Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Many commentaries have unfortunately incorrectly interpreted "**Israel of God**" (Gal 6:16) as a term which equates with the church which they in turn then designate as the so-called "new Israel".

The implication from this misinterpretation leads to the belief that God is "finished" with Israel and that all of the promises He made to them in the OT have been or will be fulfilled in the church, the "new Israel". This teaching, which I personally consider to be incorrect, has been promulgated by those who go on to espouse the false teaching that God is finished with the physical nation of Israel. If that were true, I wonder why God wasted His time to go to such "sovereign lengths" to restore physical Israel to their physical land in May, 1948 against humanly impossible odds! (Fascinating DVD [albeit not Christian] = [Against All Odds - Israel Survives](#)) Those who interpret Gal 6:16 as fulfilled in "the church" are forced to "do away with" the **literal interpretation** of the 1000 year reign of Messiah (see study of The Millennium), this 1000 year period being repeatedly alluded to in Revelation 20 (see Rev 20:2-note, Re 20:3-note, Re 20:4-note, Re 20:5-note, Re 20:6-note, Re 20:7-note). It is not surprising that commentaries which take this non-literal approach to Scripture interpretation have considerable difficulty interpreting literally the numerous Old Testament passages that prophesy of a coming earthly Messianic Kingdom (See Review of OT Millennial Scriptures). On the other hand, if Galatians 6:16 is interpreted literally and in **context** (which is absolutely crucial if one seeks the correct interpretation of any individual passage), the "**Israel of God**" refers to those who are Jews by natural birth (physical Jews) who have accepted the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. This interpretation parallels Paul's teaching in (Ro 2:28, 29-note) where he explains a "true Jew" is a physical Jew who accepts Messiah by faith. (Note: A careful study of [Romans 9-11](#) also makes it very clear that God is not finished with the Jew. E.g., see Ro 11:1, 2-note, Ro 11:25, 26-note)

Righteousness (1343) (**dikaioσune** from **dikaioσ** [word study] = being proper or right in the sense of being fully justified being or in accordance with what God requires) is the quality of being upright. In its simplest sense **dikaioσune** conveys the idea of conformity to a standard or norm. In this sense **righteousness** is the opposite of hamartia (sin), which is defined as missing of the mark set by God. In this sense **righteousness** is the opposite of hamartia (sin), which is defined as missing of the mark set by God.

Dikaioσune is rightness of character before God and rightness of actions before men. Righteousness of God could be succinctly stated as all that God is, all that He commands, all that He demands, all that He approves, all that He provides through faith in Christ (Click here to read Pastor Ray Pritchard's interesting analysis of **righteousness** in the Gospel of Matthew).

Reckoned (3049) (**logizomai** [word study]) in this context again is used as a technical term of God's act of justification more fully explained in Romans 4:6. It is that **imputation** or the act of crediting to a person God's righteousness (see Ro 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24).

Romans 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. (NASB: Lockman)

Greek: [kai patera peritomes tois ouk ek peritomes monon alla kai tois stoichousin](#) (PAPMPD) [tois ichnesin tes en akrobustia pisteos tou patros hemon Abraam](#)

Amplified: As well as [that he be made] the father of those circumcised persons who are not merely circumcised, but also walk in the way of that faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Wuest: and the father of circumcision to these who are not of the circumcision only but to those who walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham when he was in uncircumcision.

Young's Literal: and father of circumcision to those not of circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of the faith, that is in the uncircumcision of our father Abraham.

AND THE FATHER OF CIRCUMCISION TO THOSE WHO NOT ONLY ARE OF THE CIRCUMCISION: kai patera peritomes tois ouk ek peritomes monon:

- Romans 9:6,7; Matthew 3:9; Luke 16:23-31; John 8:39,40; Galatians 4:22-31
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
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The father of circumcision - Abraham is spiritual father to all who receive spiritual circumcision of their heart.

Circumcision (4061) (**peritome** from **perí** = around + **témno** = cut off) refers literally to cutting and removal of the foreskin. As discussed below both the Old and New Testament also use the concept of circumcision in a figurative or metaphorical sense. (See also exposition of **Scriptures on Circumcision**)

Although **circumcision** was required by the Mosaic law, the rite was neglected during the days when the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness. Perhaps this was a sign that the nation had broken their covenant with God through their disobedience. The rite was resumed when they entered the land of Canaan, with Joshua performing the ritual on the generation born in the wilderness (Joshua 5). The Hebrew people came to take great pride in circumcision; in fact, it became a badge of their spiritual and national superiority. This practice fostered an exclusivist mentality instead of a missionary zeal to reach the Gentiles which was God's original intent for His "chosen" people.

A daily prayer of a strict Jewish male was to thank God that he was neither a woman, a Samaritan, nor a Gentile. Gentiles came to be regarded by the Jews as the "**uncircumcision**," a term of disrespect implying that non-Jewish peoples were outside the circle of God's love. As discussed below, God applied the very same term ("uncircumcised") to describe His "chosen" people. The terms "**circumcised**" and "**uncircumcised**" became emotionally charged symbols to Israel and their Gentile neighbors. This issue later brought discord into the fellowship of the New Testament church and especially caused confusion about how one obtained genuine salvation.

Bartlett comments on the Jewish misinterpretation of physical (and spiritual) circumcision writing that for the Jews...

Circumcision was commonly regarded as affording immunity from penalty. In these assumptions, the Jews overlooked two basic facts, namely, that **birth** is not **worth**, and that **rites** do not in themselves confer **rights**. And we must keep ever in view that it is **faith alone which saves**. **Forms** without truth are **plates** without food. They are **empty words** without meaning and value. ([Galatians 3:1-22 - Doctrinal Exposition](#)) (Bolding added)

The Jews should have known the true meaning of circumcision, for Moses and the prophets repeatedly used this very term **circumcised** as a symbol for **purity of heart** and **readiness to hear and obey**. For example, through Moses the Lord challenged the Israelites to submit to

Circumcise then your heart, and stiffen your neck no more. (Dt 10:16).

Comment: Clearly Moses was not speaking of physical circumcision. Can't you hear the Jewish audience say (I am speculating here) "What in the world is Moses talking about? I can't cut my own heart. I wouldn't be able to live without a heart." Whatever their response to this truth, it was clearly spoken to "peak" their interest. Even in this same sentence, Moses gives a clue as to what he meant for he associates an uncircumcised heart with one who stiffens their neck (clearly a metaphor that pictures a person who was stubborn and/or disobedient - the Hebrew words translated "stiff necked" are elsewhere rendered "stubborn" in the NASU - e.g., Dt 9:6, 13, 31:27, Neh 9:16, 17, see also same 2 Hebrew words in Jer 7:26, 17:23, 19:15). In other words, an uncircumcised heart reflected a will that was hardened toward God's commands.

Circumcision as first prescribed in (Ge 17:10, 11, 12, 13, 14) meant to cut away the fleshly part of the male sexual organ, that part which might hold disease in its folds and so potentially might pass the disease on to the wives. Thus physical circumcision had an important role in the preservation of God's people physically.

Nelson's Study Bible has an interesting thought on **physical circumcision** noting that

Since the Canaanite worship system involved sexual excess, the distinctive sign on the body of the male Hebrew would be a significant reminder not to participate in the rituals of the Canaanites. ([Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. The Nelson Study Bible: NKJV. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

In any event, the more significant meaning of **circumcision** was as a symbol of the need for the heart to be cleansed from sin's deadly disease. This "cutting" needed to happen internally, for God was calling for the removal of the "body of flesh", which was the predisposition to sin (inherited from Adam) and which kept man from being spiritually devoted to God. It seems that God selected the reproductive organ as the location of the symbol for man's need of cleansing for sin, because it is the instrument most indicative of his depravity, since by it he reproduces generations of sinners. In any event, physical circumcision was a sign of being under God's covenant with Abraham, a covenant that was entered into by faith, not by works. We find Abraham entering that unconditional covenant with Jehovah in (Ge 15:6) where Moses records that Abraham

believed (Hebrew = "aman" conveys basic root idea of firmness or certainty. Thus Abram in a sense "leaned his whole weight upon", he said in essence "Amen, Lord" or "so be it Lord") in the LORD and He **reckoned** [God imputed Christ's righteousness or placed it on Abraham's account] it to him as righteousness." (Ge 15:6)

In the midst of a series of warnings to Israel regarding punishment for disobedience to the LORD, Moses records a ray of hope in God's gracious promise that

If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me— I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies—or if their **uncircumcised heart** becomes humbled (conveys the basic sense of being lowly, meek) so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land (this is the same covenant Abraham entered into by faith not works). ([Lev 26:40, 41, 42](#))

The cause of Israel's rebellion was an "uncircumcised heart," a heart that had never been changed by the Lord and one which refused to bow (to be humbled) before Him.

Moses gave Israel a prophetic promise that

the LORD your God **will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Dt 30:6)

What God's **law** demanded, God's **grace** would enable. This verse primarily refers to the future salvation of Jews alive at the return of Christ (cp Ro 11:26, 27-note), when by grace through faith their hearts will be spiritually circumcised. In the intervening centuries, God has partially fulfilled this promise, as there have always been physical Jews who by faith received God's promise of new life in Christ (the so called **remnant**). In the OT, these Jewish believers were looking forward to the Cross, whereas in the NT they (and all believers today) look back to the finished work of Christ on the Cross. Thus circumcision of heart defines an internal work by God and is another description of true salvation, a salvation that imparts to that individual a new will that now desires to obey God instead of to rebel against Him (Ezek 36:27). This promise of a **new heart** would allow the Israelites to love the Lord with all their heart and soul. This promise is most fully expressed in the New Covenant originally promised to Israel (see [Jer 31:31, 32, 33, 34, Ezek 11:19, 36:26](#) discussed in the topic New Covenant in the Old Testament).

The **physical circumcision** God had called for was always meant to be an **external sign** of an **internal change of heart** resulting in a love for God. Thus Paul wrote that in Christ the believers at Colossae

were also **circumcised** with a **circumcision made without hands**, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the **circumcision** of Christ (Col 2:11-note)

Here in Romans 4:10, 11, 12, 13 **Paul** is explaining the figurative meaning of circumcision as the "cutting off" of Christ from the living via Crucifixion. Earlier in Romans Paul had made it clear that

he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is **circumcision** that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision** is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Ro 2:28, 29-note).

This internal "**circumcision**" is what Jesus was calling for in the Jewish leaders (who knew the letter of the law) when He declared

You blind Pharisee, first **clean** (katharizo - aorist imperative - commanded calling for an immediate, definitive response!) the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. (Mt 23:26)

Jeremiah addressing faithless, unbelieving Judah and Jerusalem declared

Circumcise (not a suggestion but a **command**) yourselves to the Lord and **remove** (command) the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it. (Jer 4:4)

Comment: You would have thought (considering the "promise" of God), that the Jewish hearers would have sought to obey this command or at least to humble themselves and seek His face that He might reveal to them what this metaphor meant. Tragically, as the Biblical record reveals, Judah refused to heed the divine (merciful) warnings and were utterly destroyed by Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar. (Read the sad words in 2Chr 36:15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)

Jeremiah characterized rebellious Israel as having "**uncircumcised**" ears declaring

"To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears **are closed** (Hebrew literally = **uncircumcised**) and they cannot listen. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them." (Jer 6:10)

Through **Jeremiah** the LORD later says

Behold, the days are coming, that I will punish all who are **circumcised** and yet **uncircumcised** (clearly alluding to the Jews who refused spiritual or internal "heart circumcision" available only by faith in the Messiah)-- Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the sons of Ammon, and Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations (Gentiles) are **uncircumcised** (literal - most of the Gentiles were physically uncircumcised), and all the house of Israel are **uncircumcised of heart**. (figurative - lacked spiritual circumcision)" (Jer 9:25, 26)

The Jews boasted in the covenant sign of **circumcision**, but it was only in their flesh. The true spiritual circumcision God desired had never reached their hearts. In a similar way, people today who depend on baptism and some other church sacrament (ordinance), and yet who have never repented and trusted Christ, are in the same situation as the Jews in Jeremiah's day - they think they're a part of the divine covenant, but their confidence is false and they stand deceived and in imminent danger of entering into a Christ-less eternity.

In Acts **Stephen** infuriated his Jewish audience with the indictment that

You men who are stiff-necked (literally "hard necked" and thus obstinate, stubborn, rebellious) and **uncircumcised in heart and ears** are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. (Acts 7:51)

Their **uncircumcision** in heart and ears marks the Jews as just like the unsaved Gentiles (who were often referred to as the "uncircumcision"). Their sin had never been forgiven. They were as unclean before God as uncircumcised Gentiles and they therefore stood condemned before God.

A crisis erupted in the church at Antioch when some men

some men (Judaizers) came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are **circumcised** according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. (Acts 15:1)

The Judaizers insisted that a believer from a non-Jewish background (Gentile) must first become a Jew ceremonially (by being circumcised) before he could be admitted to the Christian brotherhood. A council of apostles and elders was convened in Jerusalem to resolve the issue (Acts 15:6-29). Among those attending were Paul, Barnabas, Simon Peter, and James, a leader of the Jerusalem church. To insist on circumcision for the Gentiles, Peter argued, would amount to a burdensome yoke (Acts 15:10,19). This was the decision handed down by the council, and the church broke away from the binding legalism of Judaism which demanded physical circumcision.

In summary, here in Romans 4:12, Paul is saying that there is a difference between being Abraham's physical descendants and Abraham's spiritual children. Jesus had said the same thing to the Pharisees,

"I know that you are Abraham's (physical) offspring" (Jn 8:37).

But then He went on to say,

"If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham (believe like Abraham did and become his spiritual children also)." (Jn 8:39).

In summary, in these passages in Romans 4, Paul insists that **physical circumcision** is not what counts (Ro 2:28, 29-note). There must be faith in the living God (Ro 4:3-note). Those of the circumcision (those who are physically Jews) who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are the true **Israel of God** (Gal 6:16) (**Click analysis of the phrase Israel of God**)

BUT WHO ALSO FOLLOW IN THE STEPS: alla kai tois stoichousin (PAPMPD) tois ichnesin:

- Job 33:11; Proverbs 2:20; Song1:8; 2Corinthians 12:18; 1Peter 2:21
- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:9-12 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 1](#) - John MacArthur

But - Always practice pausing to ponder and query this **term of contrast**. until it becomes your natural reflex as you read the Biblical text.

Follow in (4748) (**stoicheo** [word study] from **stoichos** = row, line, rank (walk in line, of walking in relation to others) means to live in conformity with some presumed standard or set of customs. (See study of related word stoicheion). To be to in line with a person (in this case Abraham) who is considered as standard for one's conduct in the life of faith.

Stoicheo - 5x in 5v - Acts 21:24; Rom 4:12; Gal 5:25; 6:16; Phil 3:16. NAS = follow(1), living(1), walk(2), walk orderly(1).

Stoicheo, signifies the general conduct of a person in relation to others whereas the more frequent word for "walk", **peripateo** [word study], signifies activities and conduct of the individual life, apart from relation to others.

Paul uses it very graphically, of "falling into line" with Abraham's faith or to describe the activities and conduct of the life. The point Paul is making is Abraham has "blazed" a trail (the only trail) to righteousness by his faith & all who follow him must walk in his same steps -- apart from works, apart from any merit imputed by circumcision... only by faith.

OF THE FAITH OF OUR FATHER ABRAHAM WHICH HE HAD WHILE UNCIRCUMCISED: tes en te akrobustia pisteos tou patros hemon abraam:

- [Romans 4 Resources](#) - Multiple sermons and commentaries
- [Romans 4:9-15: Religion Can't Save You](#) - Steven Cole
- [Romans 4:9-12 Abraham-Justified by Grace, Part 1](#) - John MacArthur

Faith (4102) (**pistis**) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. As **pistis** relates to God, it is the conviction that God exists and is the Creator and Ruler of all things well as the Provider and Bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. As faith relates to Christ it represents a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Stated another way, eternal salvation comes **only** through belief in Jesus Christ and no other way.

Faith alone saves but the **faith** that truly saves is never alone!

- [Why is faith without works dead?](#)
- [Does God expect us to have blind faith?](#)
- [The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans Part I: The Meaning of Hupakoe pisteos \(Ro 1:5; 16:26\)](#)
- [The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans Part II- The Obedience of Faith and Judgment by Works](#)
- [The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans — Part III- The Obedience of Christ and the Obedience of the Christian](#)
- [The Obedience of Faith in the Letter to the Romans — Part III Continued](#)

Uncircumcised (203) (**akrobustia** from **ákrōn** = the extreme + **búō** = cover) means uncircumcised (the foreskin not cut off) refers here to absence of physical circumcision.

Akrobustia - 20x in 17v - Acts 11:3; Ro 2:25, 26, 27; 3:30; 4:9, 10, 11, 12; 1Cor 7:18, 19; Gal 2:7; 5:6; 6:15; Eph 2:11; Col 2:13; 3:11.

Akrobusia - 11x in the Septuagint (LXX) - Ge 17:11, 14, 23, 24, 25; 34:14, 24; Ex 4:25; Lev 12:3; Josh 5:3; 1Sa 18:25, 27; 2Sam 3:14; Jer 9:25.

Paul makes clear that circumcision alone cannot save--only faith can.

MODERN DAY "CIRCUMCISION"

Are there any modern day parallels to circumcision? Absolutely! What about the symbols of baptism or church membership. What about the person who says I was baptized at "Camp So Long Ago" years ago and I know you remember that don't you God? It doesn't make any difference that I beat my wife and kids, hate the neighbors and cheat on my income tax does it God? After all I've gone under the waters. And besides God I became a member of "Church of the Hopeful" five years ago (sure I know it's not good that I only go on Easter but you understand I've got to set some priorities), so that surely makes me acceptable in Your sight. And what does God say? The same thing He says to the Jews. Things like water baptism and membership at a church are symbols or signs that point to what one is or ideally should be by faith in Christ. God doesn't care if you were even baptized in the Jordan River on a trip to Israel with your church. All He wants to know is did you believe in My only begotten Son Jesus Christ? It is not that these symbols such as baptism and church membership are not important because they are. The problem arises when we begin to place our faith in the sign or symbol rather than the reality that they point to, in this case Christ. It would be like someone claiming to be a sailor because they had a tattoo on their arm. Tattoos won't help sailors get to heaven. They need to be marked by a new heart and a blessed hope. To hope in a symbol is hopeless vanity. To hope in Jesus Christ is the only Hope that will never disappoint.

DEAR READER
IN WHAT ARE YOU TRUSTING...
THE SIGN?
OR
THE SAVIOR?