

Old Testament and AmaXhosa perspectives on circumcision: A comparative approach.

By

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SUMMARY

This dissertation considers circumcision from two perspectives, namely the Old Testament and the amaXhosa. From the Old Testament perspective, it explores the pre-exilic or the non-P understanding of circumcision. The dissertation looks at how pre-exilic Israel practised circumcision and what the significance of circumcision was in this period. Thereafter, I looked at how the Ancient Near Eastern people and particularly the Egyptians practised and understood circumcision.

In the pre-exilic period, circumcision was practised prior to marriage, and it was also practised as a tool that enhances fertility. This is based on the texts that I have analysed which are: Genesis 34:8-22, Exodus 4:24-26 and Joshua 5:2-9. From the Egyptian perspective, circumcision differed from Kingdom to Kingdom. It was practised on pubertal boys as a rite of passage to manhood, for fertility or for marriage. In the New Kingdom it was then moved to infant circumcision.

The post-exilic perspective of circumcision was different from that of the pre-exilic view. This is the period whereby circumcision became the mark of the covenant between God and Abraham. Infant circumcision was instituted in this period. In this period, circumcision was practised in order for one to be able to participate or partake in the Passover. In the Passover context, circumcision brought a sense of belonging, because even the non-Israelites who were circumcised could participate in the Passover festival and partake of the Passover meal. Whoever was not circumcised was not accepted as part of this Israelite community and would be cut off from this community. This understanding is based on the texts that I have analysed, which are: Genesis 17:9-14, Leviticus 12:1-4, and Exodus 12:43-50.

Regarding the amaXhosa community, I know that this is the tribal group that resides in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This is one of the tribes in South Africa known for practising circumcision. One significance that I found interesting in the amaXhosa perspective of circumcision is that they practise it as an obligation to their ancestors. The amaXhosa practise circumcision as a rite of passage to manhood. Any male that is not circumcised is not regarded as a man and cannot participate in any community matter. Uncircumcised males are regarded as not having morals, for they have not gone through the initiation school to be taught the matters of becoming

a man. Circumcised males are said to be ready to start their own families and ready to get married.

Since this study is about the comparison of circumcision observances from different perspectives, I then looked at the insights that comparative studies could bring to the comparative approach. I briefly engaged in the comparative studies, its pitfalls, historical context and the potential. In doing this, I wanted to understand the insights that comparative studies brought to this dissertation.

The findings for this dissertation are that the post-exilic and the amaXhosa understanding of circumcision have some parallels. In both communities, circumcision is an adherence to the divine being. Uncircumcised males are not accepted to be part of these communities. The Egyptians and amaXhosa practise circumcision as a rite of passage to manhood. In the pre-exilic understanding, I did not find any parallels or similarities with the amaXhosa community, however in both communities, circumcision has something to do with marriage. In pre-exilic Israel, circumcision was practised before marriage and in amaXhosa the next step after circumcision is marriage, because matters of sexuality and marriage are taught in their initiation schools.

ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

ANE	*Ancient Near East
ASV	*American Standard Version
BC	*Before Christ
BCE	*Before the Common Era.
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
MT	*Masoretic Text
NIV	*New International Version
NJPS	*New Jewish Publication Society
OT	*Old Testament

Terminology and orthography

Xhosa Terminology

Abakhwetha	<i>aba</i> means a community, and kwetha means learning
amabali , (singular ibali)	tales, or stories
Izinyanya	the ancestors
amakrwala and in a stage known as ubukrwala	– graduates of the initiation ritual
amaXhosa	the Xhosa people
bhuti	“brother”
ebhumeni, entabeni, or ethontweni	– “in the mountain”
esigcawini	an important and respected place between the cattle kraal and the homestead, where cultural functions are performed
ibhoma	the temporary shelter for the initiates
ikhankatha (singular) / amakhankatha (plural)	– traditional guardian for the initiates
ikrwala (singular) / amakrwala (plural)	– graduate/s
ilulwane (singular) / amalulwane (plural)	a label of humiliation. Literally, it is a word for a bat which is a flying mammal with features of both rat and bird.
iminombo	genealogies
indoda	a man
ingcawa	a blanket
ingcibi	a traditional surgeon
Initiation	Initiation is a step whereby the initiates are incorporated into the community, and acquire the various statuses, rights and privileges vested in a discrete group of individuals who co-operate in certain activities, share common property and are conscious of their existence as an organised body (Twala, 2007:24).
inkweknkwe	a boy
isidoda	a certain language or a way of talking used by the initiates to help them to legitimise their manhood when with men who have undergone <i>ulwaluko</i> .

<i>isiko</i>	a custom or rite; is a very religious and spiritual practice, which connects African people to God and the ancestors (Ntombana 2011:634)
<i>isiXhosa</i>	the language spoken by the Xhosa people
<i>ithonto</i>	a temporary shelter or lodge used by the initiates
<i>izibazana</i>	the mother of an initiate
<i>izibongo</i>	praises
<i>ubuntu</i>	an ancient African word meaning 'humanity to others'.
<i>ukunyamazela</i>	the bearing of pain
<i>ukuyala</i>	giving words of wisdom to the <i>ikrwala</i>
<i>ukwaluka</i>	being initiated or circumcised
<i>ulwaluko</i>	the initiation ritual. The purpose is to transform boys into men. Circumcision is one of the rituals performed (Magodyo, Andipatin & Jackson 2016:344)
<i>umgidi</i>	the celebration ceremony of the coming out of the boys from initiation
<i>umnqayi</i>	a black stick given to an initiate
<i>umkhwetha</i>	the initiate
<i>umphumo</i>	the coming out of the boys from initiation
<i>umzi</i>	a homestead
<i>uphuma</i>	the day of 'coming out' for the initiates
<i>usosuthu</i>	the host of the initiation ritual
Xhosa	the amaXhosa people

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Title

Old Testament and Xhosa perspectives on circumcision: A comparative approach.

1. Introduction

Among the amaXhosa of South Africa, male circumcision remains a very important ritual (Papu & Verster 2006:178). As a South African Xhosa male who grew up in kwa Gcaleka in the Eastern Cape I understood that one day I will have to go through circumcision. In order for a Xhosa male to transition from a boy to a man he has to go through circumcision. Buso and Meissner (2007:371) argue that:

Male circumcision is an old Xhosa tradition that is still widely practised in this population group throughout South Africa. It is a rite that prepares the initiate for transition to manhood.

Vincent (2008:77) agrees with Buso and Meissner (2007:371) in saying:

The South African Xhosa ethnic group, the majority of whom live in the country's Eastern Cape province, are one of several ethnic groups in southern Africa that practise the ritual of circumcision as part of a rite admitting boys to manhood.

This is a very important phenomenon to the amaXhosa nation and when this ritual takes place it is celebrated with jubilation.

This study will also deal with the issue of circumcision as portrayed in the Old Testament (OT) and its historical significance within the Ancient Near East. Meyer (2016:93) describes it as follows:

Many scholars agree that circumcision was not something uniquely Israelite, at least not in the pre-exilic period. Most of the surrounding peoples did practise

circumcision, including Egyptians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, Phoenicians, but Philistines did not.

Thus, circumcision was not uniquely Israelite before the exile. What is clear from the OT, is that at some stage, circumcision did become important. Scholars think that after the exile, circumcision became a sign of exclusivity to other peoples. Exodus 12:48 mentions that in order for male strangers to be able to observe Passover, they should be circumcised. Bernat (2009:47) describes it this way:

The *גר* who elects to partake of the Passover, in effect, more fully enters into the fold of the host community of Israelites in order to celebrate the quintessential *ברית*-centred festival. To gain the privilege, he must forfeit some of his independent status and subordinate himself to the Israelite and Yahweh (YHWH). He must signal this commitment by being circumcised. The status of the foreigner relative to the Israelite and YHWH can be broadly represented by the following analogy: the foreigner is to the Israelite as the Israelite is to God.

Circumcision is designated as a sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17), yet that was an ancient practice, not new to Abraham and his family (Walton et al. 2000:39).

Most scholars agree that this is the exilic / post-exilic idea where circumcision is portrayed as uniquely Israel, and whereby other nations had to be circumcised in order to partake in Israel's festivals. However, during the pre-exilic period it is unclear how this applied to other nations. Jacob's sons in Genesis 34:13-16 told Hamor and Shechem, his son, that unless they are circumcised, they cannot marry their sister.

I am undertaking a comparative study of circumcision from ancient Israel and its surroundings with that of the amaXhosa people. Circumcision in Israel seems to be what separated them from other peoples during and after exile, similar to the case of the amaXhosa people.

Walton et al. (2000:49) says:

Circumcision was practised widely in the Ancient Near East as a rite of puberty, fertility or marriage. Although the Israelites were not the only people to circumcise their sons, this sign was used to mark them as members of the covenantal community cf. (Pfeiffer, Vos & Rea 1975:354).

Pfeiffer et al. (1975:355) notes:

The normal age for circumcision is 13, since Ishmael was circumcised at that age (Gen 17:25).

Gollaher (2000:3) says:

Within the magico-religious framework of Egyptian science and medicine, circumcision apparently was a ritual marking the passage from youth to manhood.

The original significance of this practice is uncertain (Pfeiffer et al., 1975:354).

Regarding the circumcision of infants, Bernat (2009:63) says:

Thus, the eighth day is significant as regards circumcision, not because the eighth day has any special ritual power, but because it is the first possible day in the infant's life when the rite can be carried out. In this respect, we can point up P's intent to have an Israelite infant circumcised immediately. Beyond that, the specific timebound nature of the practice is indicative of P's attention to seven-day cycles and the typological import of the number seven in the Priestly mindset.

Bernat (2009:13) says:

Infant circumcision reflected both faith in the covenant and the desire to distinguish Israelite males from their uncircumcised neighbours, a concern that grew acute during the Babylonian exile (587-522 B.C.).

If the circumcision of infants is an exilic practice, can it be that before exile, circumcision was practised differently? If Ishmael was circumcised at 13 years of age, can this be the standard age for circumcision before the exile?

We are uncertain about how circumcision was practiced before the exile. Some scholars think that circumcision was a rite of passage for a boy to become a man. Can a comparison with amaXhosa practices shed any light on this question?

This study will try and give an overview on the amaXhosa circumcision, and their understanding and meaning of this phenomenon. In doing so I will look at the historical as well as the modern understanding of this practice.

I will also look at the Old Testament (Israel) view of this custom in their different contexts. After I have dealt with both the Old Testament (Israel) and the amaXhosa understanding and meaning of this practice, this study will argue that there are similarities in both the Old Testament and amaXhosa practice of circumcision. As Ntombana (2011:635) says:

The Xhosa view is that initiation is necessary to make the transition from the stage of irresponsibility to the stage of responsible manhood.

Perhaps this in comparison with the 13 years of age in Ishmael's case can lead us to what I am looking for in this study.

Ntombana (2011:635) says about the amaXhosa understanding of circumcision:

Only males who have been through the ritual may be recognised as men, may participate in community discussions, may become chiefs, and have earned the right to marriage. Expressions such as '*inkwekwe yinja*' (the boy is a dog) heard in amaXhosa communities imply that anyone who is not circumcised is not regarded as a human being in the community; the person who has not gone through initiation has no moral standards.

By conducting this comparison, I will be trying to see if the amaXhosa circumcision practice can help us to understand how circumcision was practised in Israel before the exile.

1.1. Research problem

What does the cultural practice of circumcision amongst the amaXhosa have in common with the Old Testament view of circumcision? On the other hand, the question would be how these two cultures differ on circumcision? From the discussion above it should be clear that there is not a unified view of circumcision in the OT, but that there probably was a difference between the pre-exilic and the post-exilic customs. This study is interested in the amaXhosa custom compared to both views of circumcision in the Old Testament.

1.2. Hypothesis

At this stage of this comparative study, I have identified three similarities that this study will try to explore, namely:

- The rite of passage from a boy to a man in the amaXhosa circumcision tradition and circumcision in pre-exilic Israel.
- The exclusivity of other nations by the circumcised man of the amaXhosa and exclusivity of other nations by post-exilic Israel.
- Circumcision might be linked to fertility in both amaXhosa culture and circumcision in pre-exilic Israel.

1.3. Research aims

The principal aims of this research study are:

- To engage the methodology of comparative approach and its historical context with its possible potentials and pitfalls.
- To analyse the historical context of circumcision in the Ancient Near East and pre-exilic Israel.
- To examine the Old Testament portrayal of child circumcision.
- To analyse three of the pre-exilic Old Testament texts (Genesis 34:8-22, Exodus 4:24-26 and Joshua 5:2-9) that are associated with circumcision.
- To analyse three of the post-exilic Old Testament texts (Genesis 17:9-14, Exodus 12:43-50 and Leviticus 12:1-4) that are associated with circumcision.
- To examine the relationship between the amaXhosa view of circumcision and the Old Testament view of circumcision.

1.4. Methodology

This study will deal with the differences as well as the similarities between these two nations. I want to get a fundamental understanding of circumcision from both their perspectives and will be providing a literature review of the work done by

anthropologists and social studies regarding circumcision and particularly the amaXhosa perspective of this custom. The following aspects will be discussed:

- Definition of circumcision.
- Definition of initiation.
- Historical context of amaXhosa initiation and circumcision.

Regarding the Old Testament view and understanding of circumcision, this study will be engaging with the scholars who did historical critical work on circumcision. In doing so the following will be discussed:

- Definition of circumcision.
- Circumcision in the Ancient Near Eastern region.
- History of circumcision in Israel.
- Meaning and understanding of this practice.
- The Old Testament portrayal of circumcision.
- Analysis of Genesis 34:8-22, Exodus 4:24-26 and Joshua 5:2-9.
- Analysis of Genesis 17:9-14 and Leviticus 12:1-4 and Exodus 12:43-50.

1.5. Expected Results

In this study I will give an understanding of circumcision from an Old Testament perspective, with its historical understanding in Israel and their neighbours within the Ancient Near Eastern region. After that has been done, I will engage with how amaXhosa people carry out circumcision.

I will then do a comparison of both Old Testament (Israel) and amaXhosa perspectives on circumcision. The comparison will then try to answer the question as to how circumcision was practised during the pre-exilic period.

This study will then bring a vivid clarity of Old Testament, as well as amaXhosa understandings and perspectives of circumcision.

Chapter 2: Circumcision in the Ancient Near East (ANE) and pre-exilic Israel

2.1. Introduction.

The Old Testament portrays pre-exilic Israel as the nation that lived and followed similar traditions to other nations within the Ancient Near Eastern region.

Archaeological findings have contributed a lot to the study of ancient Israel. These findings helped most scholars to understand how ancient people lived.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand how circumcision was practised in the Ancient Near East during the pre-exilic period. Most scholars agree that during the pre-exilic period circumcision was practised by most nations around Israel except for the Philistines¹. Circumcision is said to be an ancient observance among the people of the Ancient Near Eastern region. Lemche (1988:185) says:

The custom of circumcision is admittedly very ancient in the Israelite - Jewish society, and it is also attested elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, even before Israel came into existence.

Similarly, Kidner (1967:153) argues that:

Circumcision itself was widespread in the Near East; the Philistines from the west were thought outlandish for not practising it.

Whilst dealing with this practice, I will provide an overview and explore the understanding of circumcision within the Ancient Near East. By doing so, I want to see what the similarities and the differences are between the nations practising circumcision. On this, Rugwiji (2014:241) says:

It is probable that the rite of circumcision which became popular amongst biblical societies might have been borrowed from other cultures outside Israel such as the Euphrates, Mesopotamia, Syria, Phoenicia or Egypt, with which the Jewish patriarchs (e.g., Terah or Abraham), had interacted.

¹ See Bright (2000:263); Coogan (2010:34); Collins (2018:105); Mounce (2006:110)

I will then conduct a literature study on this practice in the nation of Israel and engage with scholars who studied this subject from an historical-critical perspective. The main aim of this part of the study is to uncover how the ancient people practised circumcision and why they carried it out. In order to thoroughly understand the meaning of this practice, I will also look at how the Ancient Near Eastern people understood circumcision and then compare their understanding with that of ancient Israel as portrayed in the Old Testament. In so doing I want to know and understand circumcision in pre-exilic Israel. If circumcision as the Mark of the Covenant is the post-exilic ideology, I need to know the significance and meaning of circumcision in pre-exilic Israel. The Old Testament texts that I will engage with in this chapter are mostly non-P texts presumably from the pre-exilic period.

2.2. Overview of circumcision in the ANE.

Circumcision can be defined as the custom of cutting the foreskin of the male genitalia as part of a religious rite. The earliest attestation of circumcision is in depictions of West Semitic Syrian warriors unearthed in Syria and Egypt, dating to the third millennium BCE (Longman III et al., 2013:427). For post-exilic Israel, it is said that circumcision became a very important phenomenon which had everything to do with their identity. This is the period where circumcision became an Abrahamic Mark of the Covenant. It is nevertheless significant that this particular custom became especially important at this time, that is, when the Judeans in Babylon lived in the midst of a people who did not practise circumcision (Lemche, 1988:185).

Before that period, it is not clear exactly how circumcision was perceived and practised either in Israel or the nations around Israel i.e., their neighbours. It is a fact that male circumcision is a surgical procedure in which the prepuce of the penis is removed (Morse 2002:183, c.f. Rugwiji, 2014:239). However, there is some discrepancy around how exactly the cutting was done and when it was done. On the matter, Sasson (1966:474) says:

One can note a basic difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians in the surgical process involved in circumcision. Whereas the Hebrews amputated the prepuce and thus exposed the corona of the penis, the Egyptian practice consisted of a dorsal incision upon the foreskin which liberated the glans penis.

Perhaps the reason for the Hebrew amputation of the foreskin is based on the language they used to describe circumcision. In explaining this, Rugwiji (2014:239) says:

The Hebrew term for circumcision which is employed in Genesis 17:11 derives from the root word *nâmal* (which means “to become clipped” or “circumcised”). A different root word *mûwl* (meaning “to cut short” or “curtail”), used in other Old Testament passages (cf. Gn. 17:10, 12-14, 24-26, 21:4; 34:15-17, 22-24; Ex. 4:26; 12:44-48; Lv. 12:3; Dt. 10:16; 30:6; Jsh. 5:2-8; Jr. 4:4; 9:25) still carries the same meaning (“to circumcise”; it can also be defined as “to blunt” or “to destroy”).

Jeremiah 9:25-26 (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS))	Jeremiah 9:25-26 (New King James)
<p>Jeremiah 9:25–26 (BHS)</p> <p>25 הַגָּה יָמִים בָּאִים וְנָאֵם יְהוָה וּפְקֹדֹתַי עַל-כָּל-מוֹל בְּעֶרְלָה:</p> <p>26 עַל-מִצְרַיִם וְעַל-יְהוּדָה וְעַל-אֲדוֹם וְעַל-בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וְעַל-מוֹאָב וְעַל-כָּל-קְצוּצֵי פְּאֵה הַיִּשְׁבִּיִּים בְּמִדְבָּר כִּי כָל-הַגּוֹיִם עֶרְלִים וְכָל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶרְלֵי-לֵב: ׀</p>	<p>²⁵ “Behold the days are coming” says the LORD, “that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised- ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart!</p>

Regarding the passage above, Steiner (1999:501-502) implies that the nations mentioned were partially circumcised, especially the Egyptians, when he says:

All of them are circumcised, and, nonetheless, have a foreskin. In the case of the Egyptians, etc., the physical foreskin is not completely removed. The conclusion of *llkr jrpr llk* structure, the assertion that “all of the nations have

foreskins,” refers to those nations that are partially circumcised like the Egyptians, and perhaps also to those that are not circumcised at all, like the Philistines.

In light of Steiner’s observations, it is unclear whether this implies just cutting a small piece of the prepuce or simply cutting into the prepuce, or were the Egyptians just making a cut or a mark on the penis? Rather, Morse (2002:184) brings a different matter with regard to the Egyptians’ circumcision. About a tomb uncovered in Egypt., Morse says:

Another Sixth Dynasty tomb at Saqqara shows a relief of the circumcision of two puberty-aged males. In it, a mortuary priest is seen squatting on his haunches before a standing youth whose hands are tightly held by an assistant. The priest is holding the boy’s penis in his left hand. In the priest’s right hand appears to be circular flint with which he is removing the prepuce. The second puberty-aged male is seen standing in front of the squatting mortuary priest. The youth’s left hand is resting on the priest’s head, and the youth’s right is by his side. The priest who is about to circumcise, is holding the youth’s penis in his left hand, and a flint knife in his right hand (cf. Megahed & Vymazalova, 2011:156).

The contradiction between Morse’s portrayal and that of earlier cited scholars is clear. Morse seems to imply cutting off the whole prepuce, while earlier scholars spoke of partial cuts. I will explore this issue later, but first I need to look at the rest of the Ancient Near East before I return to Egypt.

2.2.1. Circumcision in the ANE.

According to Carson et al. (1994:30):

Circumcision was a fairly common practice in the Ancient Near East. Therefore, if circumcision is to be understood in Israel’s context, it is helpful to understand its Ancient Near Eastern form (Walton et al., 2000:8). Mounce (2006:110) agrees when saying:

Circumcision involved cutting the foreskin of the male sexual organ. In the ancient world, the Western Semites and the Egyptians practised a form of circumcision (a slitting of the foreskin); Israel was unique in cutting off the foreskin completely as a commanded religious ritual. The Philistines and Mesopotamians were termed "uncircumcised."

There are quite a number of records in the biblical text that mention the Philistines as being uncircumcised. The other nations are those mentioned above by Jeremiah. That might be because the other nations did perform circumcision. There are a couple of references to the Philistines being called "uncircumcised" in the Old Testament, including the following:

Judges 14:3 (BHS)	Judges 14:3 (New King James)
3 וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ הֲאִין בְּבָנוֹת אַחֵיךָ וּבְכָל-עַמִּי אִשָּׁה כִּי-אֲתָהּ הוֹלֵךְ לִקְחַת אִשָּׁה מִפְּלִשְׁתִּים הָעֵרְלִים וַיֹּאמֶר שִׁמְשׁוֹן אֶל-אָבִיו אוֹתָהּ קַח-לִי כִּי-הִיא יִשְׂרָה בְּעֵינַי:	Then his father and mother said to him, is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren, among all my people, that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"

This text refers to Samson, who wanted to take a Philistine wife. The next text is a reference to Goliath.

1 Samuel 17:26b (BHS)	1 Samuel 17:26b (New King James)
26 כִּי מִי הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָעֵרְלִי הַזֶּה כִּי חָרַף מַעַרְכוֹת אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים:	"For whom is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

The next verse is part of David's response to King Saul.

1 Samuel 17:36 (BHS)	1 Samuel 17:36 (New King James)
36 גַּם אֶת-הָאָרִי גַם-הַדָּב הִכָּה עַבְדְּךָ וְהִיָּה הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי הָעֵרְלִי הַזֶּה כְּאֶחָד מֵהֵם כִּי חָרַף מַעַרְכַּת אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים: ׀	Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them.

In the next verse David is lamenting for King Saul and Jonathan after their death in the battle with the Philistines.

2 Samuel 1:20 (BHS)	2 Samuel 1;20 (New King James)
<p>20 אֶל-תְּגִידוֹ בְּגַת אֶל-תְּבַשְׂרוֹ בְּחוּצַת אֶשְׁקֶלֶן פֶּן־ תִּשְׂמַחְנָה בָּנוֹת פְּלִשְׁתִּים פֶּן־תַּעֲלֶזְנָה בָּנוֹת הָעֶרְלִים:</p>	<p>Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Eshkelon, Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.</p>

An understanding of the practice of circumcision in the Ancient Near East may provide helpful guidelines for our assessment of it in the Bible (Walton et al, 2000:23). Circumcision in the Ancient Near East was performed as a rite of passage, for example in Egypt, Forshey (1973:152) argues that it was the rite of passage to manhood. According to Sarna (1989:386):

Texts like Jeremiah 9:25., and Ezekiel 31:18 and 32:22-30 clearly attest to the wide diffusion of circumcision among peoples of Transjordan, Phoenicia, and Asia Minor. Clearly, then, the originality of the biblical law does not lie in the fact of the institution itself but in the total transformation of widespread and ancient ritual. In those cultures that traditionally practice circumcision, the age at which it is performed may vary widely, but the overwhelming preference is at puberty or as prenuptial rite. In either case, it takes place at a crucial period in the male life cycle and marks the initiation of the individual into the common life of his group (c.f. Walton et al, 2000:67).

Hall (1992:1522) argues:

Circumcision was also an apotropaic rite, that is, a ritual to ward off evil. In a Phoenician myth El escapes grave danger by sacrificing his only son, then circumcising himself and his confederates. Although this passage is late (from Philo of Byblos, ca. 100 CE), it probably preserves an ancient Phoenician belief that circumcision turns evil away. In Exod. 4:24–26 an act of circumcision turns aside a threat of death.

This Phoenician understanding of circumcision is not very popular as I can see that only Hall highlights it, however it is very interesting that it is likened to that of the biblical text in Exodus 4, a text I will look at later.

In my Ancient Near East search on how circumcision was practised there was nothing much I could find except the above-mentioned Phoenician perspective and the Egyptian perspective. Out of the Ancient Near Eastern nations, Egypt seems to be the fertile ground that would provide a better understanding of circumcision by ancient people. This is not to say that Egypt was the only nation that practised circumcision in the Ancient Near East. Other nations also practised circumcision, for example Sasson (1966:476) says that:

Circumcision was known to the inhabitants of North Syria during the early third millennium BCE.

Even though other nations practised circumcision, for the purpose of this study ancient Egypt will be the focus, simply because more is known about Egypt than about other nations of the time.

2.2.2. Circumcision in Egypt.

In this part of the chapter, I want to discuss the circumcision practised in ancient Egypt. Unlike infant circumcision in the post-exilic period, circumcision was performed on adolescent boys. According to Forshey (1973:152):

The function of circumcision in ancient Egypt is not clear. Implications of a group of 120 men being circumcised at one time, together with the portrait of a priest performing the operation, are that the practice may have been connected with initiation into the state of manhood.

Walton et al. (2000:216) say:

Egyptian reliefs from as early as the third millennium BCE depict the circumcision of adolescents by priests using flint knives.

It seems like circumcision in Egypt was performed on adolescent boys in the era mentioned above by Walton et al. (2000). Forshey (1973:152) - above - explains why circumcision was performed on boys of this age group in Egypt.

According to Forshey (1973:151) circumcision originated in Africa, either Egypt or Ethiopia, and then it was adopted by the Israelites as well as the Phoenicians

through their influence by the Egyptians. In the light of this information, one could think that since circumcision by the Egyptians was done on adolescent boys, and it was about initiation into manhood, then Israel adopted the practice from the Egyptians in its original form. However, for now this is just speculation with no evidence cf. (Kennedy 1970:175). The origin of the practice of circumcision in ancient Egypt is not known (Megahed & Vymazolova, 2011:157). Similar to Forshey, Doyle (2005:280) says:

It is now thought that the Egyptians adopted circumcision much earlier, from peoples living further south, in today's Sudan and Ethiopia, where dark-skinned peoples are known to have practised circumcision.

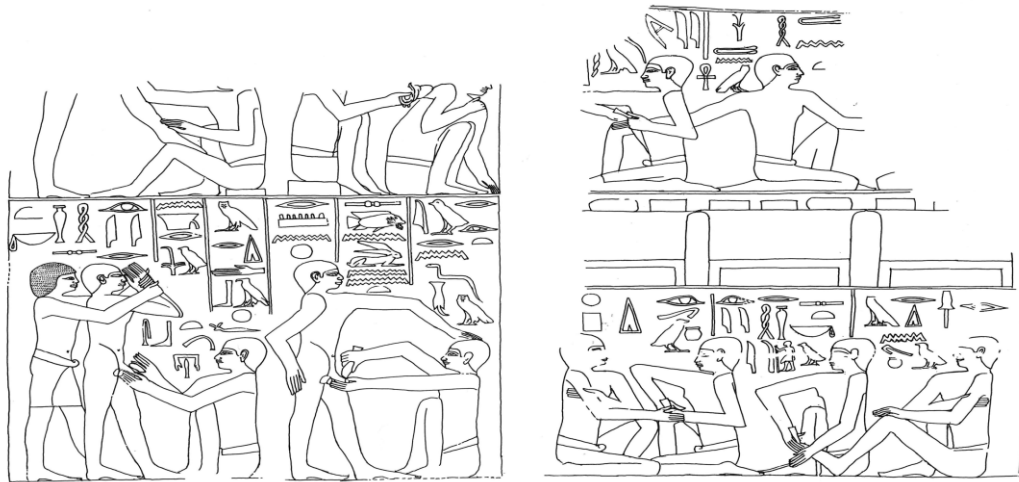
In contrast, Sasson (1966:476) argues that:

The Egyptian word for the term 'foreskin', *qrn.t*, is beyond doubt a phonetic rendering of the Semitic *grlt*, Hebrew *orlah*.

This in itself may be an indication that the concept of circumcision travelled from the north to the south, and not the other way around." (cf. Hall, 1992:1521).

Even though Doyle (2005) suggests that the Egyptians adopted circumcision from Sudan and Ethiopia, this does not suggest that these people were the originators of circumcision. There is no concrete evidence regarding Doyle's claim. In the light of Forshey's and Sasson's arguments, it is uncertain as to where circumcision originated. However, what is known is that the ancient Egyptians were circumcising from long ago. Megahed & Vymazolova (2011:156) argue:

Even though male circumcision was practised in Egypt from the predynastic times, very little direct evidence about the operation itself is available from the millennia of Egyptian history. The reliefs and statues showing both noble and lower classes of the society circumcised, and physical mummified remains from all periods of the Egyptian history indicate that circumcision was generally practised among the Egyptian population. Below is an image of how the Egyptians performed circumcision:



Ritual purification depicted in the tomb of Ankhmahor in Saqqara, Sixth Dynasty. After Badawy, 1978, Figures 27–28.

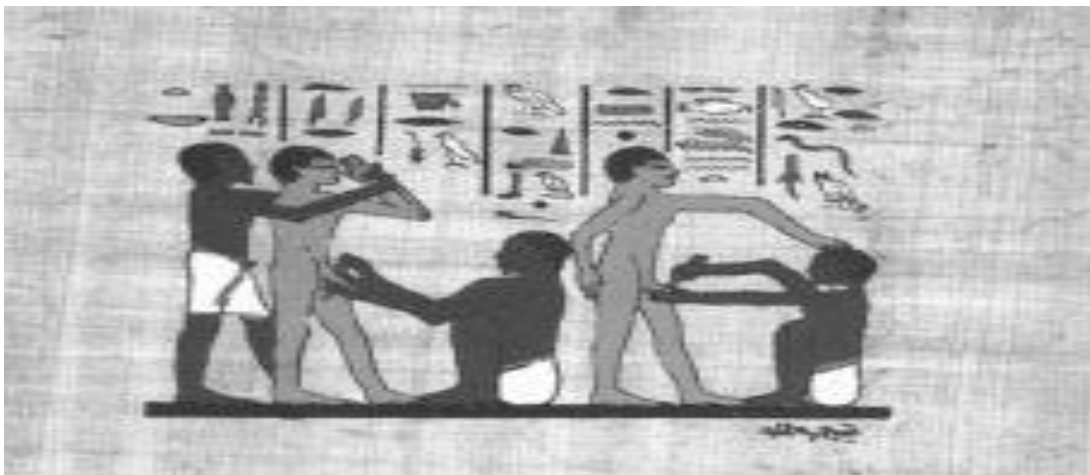


FIGURE 1 Drawing of a wall painting from Ankhmahor, Saqqarah, Egypt (2345–2182 BCE) showing adult circumcision.

According to Doyle (2005:280), “evidence exists that ritual circumcision was being performed by the Egyptians as early as 2300 BCE, confirmation of this being a wall painting from Ankhmahor, Saqqarah, Egypt (dated to the Eighth Dynasty, 2345 - 2182 BCE) clearly showing adult circumcision.” There was an adult who was circumcised in a standing position, with his arms held by another person while the circumciser was kneeling in front of him (Figure 1, above).

Newman’s (2016:51) estimation is close to Doyle’s date:

Egyptian circumcision dates back to at least 2400 BCE and was usually confined to the priesthood or the royal family. Its association with the Egyptians was also noted by Herodotos, who mentions "the obvious antiquity of the custom in Egypt" and the fact that "other peoples learned the practice through their contact with Egypt".

However, according to Cohen (2005:125), circumcision is an even older custom for the Egyptians than what Doyle said above:

Now, circumcision was already practised among the ancient Egyptians as early as 4000 BCE, as well as in many other Middle-Eastern societies. Wherever the operation is performed as a traditional rite it is done either before or at puberty, and sometimes, as among some Arabian peoples, immediately before marriage.

This is another discovery of Egyptian circumcision which is said to have been performed on adult males. Doyle's evidence now supports that the Egyptians practised circumcision long before the Israelites and therefore it may be possible that they are the originators of this practice, as Forshey suggested above.

As I have mentioned above that the Egyptians performed circumcision on boys in puberty or when adults, however, it is also suggested that this has later changed. Megahed & Vymazolova (2011:156) argue:

Discussions have taken place however concerning the age of the circumcised boys. According to generally accepted opinion the operation was performed at puberty in the Old Kingdom, but starting from the New Kingdom, infant circumcision is also attested.

In describing the Old Kingdom of Egypt, Roth (1991:3) suggests that it is the period from 2630 - 2250 BCE. Regarding the New Kingdom, Lichtheim (2006: x) suggests that this is the period from 1550 - 1080 BCE, from the Eighteenth Dynasty to the Twentieth Dynasty.

It is presumed that the practice could have changed over time, and the ages at which the operation was performed had a relatively wide range (Bailey, 1996: 25). What Bailey says clearly supports the fact that there were already three possible ages for Egyptian circumcision. Firstly, the above image (Figure 1) depicts an adult being

circumcised. Afterward it is said that circumcision was performed on boys in puberty, and lastly then it shifted to infants in the New Kingdom.

I have mentioned above that in order to understand circumcision within the Ancient Near Eastern region, Egypt will provide a better understanding, especially that there is a possibility that they are the originators of circumcision. Forshey mentioned that Israel adopted circumcision from the Egyptians, which makes Egypt very important in understanding this practice. In the next part I will move to the understanding of circumcision with its link to fertility.

2.3. Circumcision and Fertility.

In this part of this study, I will examine the possible connection between circumcision and fertility, especially for the people of the Ancient Near East and Old Testament pre-exilic period. Goldingay (2000:9) says this about circumcision and fertility:

According to the common view, 'circumcision was originally and essentially a fertility device associated with puberty and marriage'. If circumcision were administered at puberty, then in particular it might suggest the disciplining of sexuality (cf. Faust, 2015:273).

Goldingay (2000:7) says further:

The traditional rationales are that circumcision avoids infection, contributes to hygiene, symbolises the disciplining of the whole person's creativity and encourages fertility. Philo's additional suggestions are that it symbolises sexual discipline in particular, and cuts back human pride in the capacity to procreate. It is further interesting to be told that 'four interrelated themes are frequently embedded in African rites of circumcision: fertility, virility, maturity, and genealogy.'

Faust (2015:274) comments that many scholars conclude that circumcision in ancient Israel was a practice that signified fertility, initiation, and education. He says that Roland de Vaux for instance argues that circumcision was an initiation to marriage for it made men fit for sexual life. On the contrary, Wilson (2010:5) argues

that circumcision was not the initial plan for sexual pleasure in marriage, for God created male and female in a perfect image. God created them with sexual parts designed to fulfil the sexual ideal of love.

This perfect image Faust speaks about is the one in Genesis 1:27, and Genesis 1:28 brings about the procreation of human beings, however, circumcision was not commanded to human beings.

In his argument, Wilson (2010:5) makes his point that circumcision was not commanded during creation when human beings (male and female) were created, but this was commanded as the result of the fall of men. However, the text makes no link between sin and circumcision. If Wilson considers that chapter belonging to the Priestly text, he would not have made this argument. Based on Wilson's argument, the question is: in which era was circumcision instituted and became so meaningful in ancient Israel? To answer this question, I will look at Faust's (2015:277) statement when he says:

The fact that many groups in the Ancient Near East, including Israel's neighbours, practised circumcision, does not therefore mean that it could not serve as an ethnic marker. Rather, this fact directs us to the specific historical context in which circumcision could become ethnically meaningful - the interaction of the Israelites with the uncircumcised Philistines.

The fact that the Israelites boasted about their circumcision when interacting with other nations besides the Philistines, might mean that circumcision was practised by other nations, as mentioned above. Circumcision here is not mentioned as the sign of the covenant as in the post-exilic period. Rather it can be seen that it was important for them, especially as their rivals did not practise circumcision.

If circumcision was widely practised in the Ancient Near East, for what purpose were the people of this region practising circumcision? It seems like the nations in this region circumcised for different reasons and purposes, including the disciplining of procreation (Goldingay 2000:8). According to Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:142):

Ethnographic literature indicates that circumcision can be associated with the male's sexual and social maturation and, like other rites of passage, represents the change in an initiate's status as a symbolic death and birth.

Eilberg-Schwartz's argument here is not that of a biblical scholar but of the sociologist and anthropologist. Subsequently his interpretation is based on the social perspective, and the societies on which he is drawing circumcision's significance are that of the Ancient Near East, pre-exilic Israel and traditional Africa. The other issue I need to understand is that he is interpreting post-exilic text with the pre-exilic perspective.

In support of this, Doyle (2005:220) suggests that prior to infant circumcision in Israel, it was performed on adolescent boys or prior to marriage. Subsequently, if circumcision was performed prior to marriage in Israel, before the practice was changed to infant circumcision, it may suggest that it has something to do with fertility. Hall (1992:1522) suggests that:

Circumcision was a marriage or fertility rite. Israelites cannot marry Shechemites until Shechem circumcises himself and all his men (Genesis 34). Zipporah announces that circumcision has made someone a - bloody bridegroom to her (Exod. 4:25). Whatever her enigmatic phrase means; it implies connection between marriage and circumcision even if it loses that significance in the Exodus account. The story of Abraham presupposes a rationale for uniting a marriage with circumcision: Only after Abraham's circumcision can Sarah bear a child, or can Abraham have the right child who will be blessed by God. Circumcision is a fertility rite to ensure a goodly number of offspring blessed by God.

On this fertility matter, Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:147) employs a different interpretation from the familiar covenant marker interpretation of Genesis 17 when he says:

Since circumcision is described as a symbol between Abraham and God, one is led to the conclusion that the practice has an intimate connection with the content of the covenant. The centrepiece of this covenant is God's promise that Abraham will have a vast number of descendants. It should not be surprising that the Priestly writer treats fertility as a central issue in the covenant between Abraham and God. This writer is pre-eminently concerned with human reproduction and its implications.

The reason I mention that Eilberg-Schwartz employs a different interpretation of Genesis 17 is that, as will be seen in the next chapter, the usual interpretation

implies that circumcision was a covenant marker: a mark of covenant between God and Abraham. This different interpretation implies that fertility was a central theme of the Abrahamic covenant. What is evident to me is that Hall and Eilberg-Schwartz agree that circumcision in Genesis 17 has its ultimate focus on Abraham becoming fertile. The other text which seems to equate circumcision and fertility is Leviticus 19:23-25. Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:150) says:

By equating a juvenile fruit tree with an uncircumcised Israelite male, this passage presupposes a symbolic association between circumcision and fertility. The infertile tree is uncircumcised just as a child, who is not yet rooted in the covenant, cannot bear fruit. Moreover, if a circumcised tree is one that yields a full harvest, the removal of a male's foreskin prepares him for maximal yield. So, the metaphor between fruit tree and the penis is not unidirectional. Fruit from the juvenile fruit trees is proscribed like the male foreskin. By the same token, the uncircumcised male organ is like immature fruit trees in that it cannot produce fruit.

Cutting away the foreskin is like pruning a fruit tree. Both acts of cutting remove unwanted excess, and both increase the desired yield (Eilberg-Schwartz, 1990:156). As mentioned above, for Eilberg-Schwartz, fertility was central in the Priestly circumcision in Genesis 17, for the argument is the Abrahamic covenant had a promise that he will be father of nations. Before circumcision, Abraham did not receive this promise of being fruitful. Then, if the central theme of the Abrahamic covenant was fertility, what about infant circumcision? To answer this, Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:152) says:

One might say that when Israelites circumcise their male children, they are pruning the fruit trees of God.

On the contrary, Bernat (2009:51) disagrees with Eilberg-Shwartz. He says:

He fails to recognise, however, that circumcision in P is all but devoid of such symbols or ritualisation.

On the other hand, he seems to agree that circumcision may have a connotation of fertility. Bernat (2009:51) says further:

It is well-established that circumcision has fertility connotations in many cultures. Moreover, even if there is no available data to suggest it, circumcision may have been a fertility ritual in ancient Canaan or Israel. However, it definitively has no such significance in the Priestly literature.

What then can be said about this argument about Eilberg-Schwartz's interpretation of circumcision and fertility? Is he correct in interpreting the Priestly circumcision i.e., the infant circumcision in the light of preparing the infant for fertility? To answer this Meyer (2016:99) says:

It is important to understand that Eilberg-Schwartz offers an anthropology of ancient Israel religion and, when it comes to understanding circumcision, this means making use of comparative ethnographic material in order to argue "that Israel circumcision in fact carried many of the same meanings as circumcision rites practised in other societies."

Meyer (2016:102) notes further:

Eilberg-Schwartz's contribution lies in the fact that he helps to understand what circumcision might have meant in an older pre-exilic time for Israel and all its neighbours who practised it. Yet it seems that the Priestly authors actually wanted to move away from that ancient understanding of circumcision, as something which ensures fertility, to a far more theological understanding of the rite.

In my argument above I was trying to find out whether circumcision was a fertility tool. Due to the arguments made by different scholars on circumcision practised by Israel and its Canaanite neighbours, I would like to think that circumcision might have been practised for fertility in the pre-exilic period. I will further discuss Shechem's and Zipporah's narratives and fertility later when I conduct the analysis of the texts.

2.4. Circumcision in the Old Testament.

In the next part of this study, I will look at how circumcision was viewed in the Old Testament, especially in the pre-exilic period. According to Derouchie (2004:178):

The circumcision word-group in the MT (BHS) is made up of six Hebrew lexemes, together occurring 85 times: *מָלַךְ* "to circumcise" (31 x), *מָלַל* "to circumcise" (1x), *מִלְּחָה* "circumcision" (1x), *לָרַף* "to treat as one having foreskin" (2x), *עֶרְלָה* "foreskin" (15x), *עָרַל* "having foreskin" (35x). Forty instances are in the Pentateuch, 44 in the Prophets, and one in the Writings.

My intention in this part of the study is to explore circumcision within parts of the Pentateuch and Prophets. By doing so I will conduct a text analysis of three passages which are believed to be part of pre-exilic literature (Scheffler, 2000:87). These texts are Genesis 34:8-22, Exodus 4:24-26, and Joshua 5:2-8. Although the text from Joshua should probably be dated to the exilic period, I will also analyse the text in this part of the study (Scheffler, 2000:156).

2.4.1. Genesis 34:8 - 22

This is the first part of the text analysis, which is taken from Genesis 34:8 - 22. I have chosen this portion of the text since circumcision is the main focus here. In this passage Shechem of the nation of the Hivites fell in love with Dinah, Jacob's daughter, after he raped her. He then sends his father Hamor to Dinah's family to negotiate intermarriage between the two families. While Hamor and Jacob are negotiating, Jacob's sons take over the negotiations and bring up the subject of circumcision. They say that they cannot give their sister in marriage to Shechem's family unless every male is circumcised. Hamor accepts the request made by Jacob's sons, only to find out later that this was not a genuine request; rather it was a trap for them to avenge their sisters' rape.

English Translation (New International Version (NIV))	Hebrew Text
<p>⁸ But Hamor said to them, “My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. ⁹ Intermarry with us; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You can settle among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire property in it.”</p> <p>¹¹ Then Shechem said to Dinah’s father and brothers, “Let me find favour in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. ¹² Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I’ll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife.”</p> <p>¹³ Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob’s sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. ¹⁴ They said to them, “We can’t do such a thing; we can’t give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. ¹⁶ Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We’ll settle among you and become one people with you. ¹⁷ But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we’ll take our sister and go.”</p> <p>¹⁸ Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. ¹⁹ The young man,</p>	<p>8 וַיְדַבֵּר חַמּוֹר אֲתָם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנֵי חַשְׁקָה נָפְשׁוֹ בְּבַתְכֶם תִּנּוּ גַם אֶתְּהָ לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: 9 וַיְדַבֵּר חַמּוֹר אֲתָם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנֵי חַשְׁקָה נָפְשׁוֹ בְּבַתְכֶם תִּנּוּ גַם אֶתְּהָ לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: 10 וְאַתְּנּוּ תִשְׁבּוּ וְהֶאֱרַץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם שְׂבוּ וּסְחָרוּ וְהֶאֱחָזוּ בָּהּ: 11 וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֶם אֶל־אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אֶחָיו אֲמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֶן: 12 הֲרַבּוּ עָלַי מֵאֵל מֵהָר וּמִתֵּן וְאֶתְנֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וַתִּנּוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנְּעָרָה לְאִשָּׁה: 13 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיהֶם לֹא נוֹכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְתֵת אֶת־אֲחֹתֵנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לּוֹ עָרְלָה כִּי־חֲרֻפָּה הוּא לָנוּ: 14 אַךְ־בָּזָאת נָאוֹת לָכֶם אִם תִּהְיוּ כְּמֵנוּ לְהַמְלִל לָכֶם כָּל־זָכָר: 15 וְנִתְּנוּ אֶת־בָּתֵּינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵיכֶם נִקְחָ־לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁבְּנוּ אֶתְכֶם וְהִיָּינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד: 16 וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמְלוֹל וּלְקַחֲנוּ אֶת־בָּתֵּנוּ וְהִלְכֵנוּ: 17 וַיִּטְבּוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חַמּוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שְׁכֶם בֶּן־חַמּוֹר: 18 וְלֹא־אָחַר הִנְעִיר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בְּבַת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נִכְבָּד מִכָּל בֵּית אָבִיו: 19 וַיָּבֵא חַמּוֹר וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר: 20 הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלֵמִים הֵם אֲתָנוּ וַיִּשְׁבּוּ בְּאֶרֶץ יִסְחָרוּ אֹתָהּ וְהֶאֱרַץ הִנֵּה רַחֲבַת־יָדַיִם לְפָנֵיהֶם אֶת־בְּנֹתֵם־נִקְחָ־לָנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנֵינוּ נִתֵּן לָהֶם: 21 אַךְ־בָּזָאת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשָׁבֶת אֲתָנוּ לִהְיוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד בְּהַמּוֹל לָנוּ כָּל־זָכָר כַּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נְמַלִּים:</p>

who was the most honoured of all his father's family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob's daughter. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to the men of their city.

²¹ "These men are friendly toward us," they said. "Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. ²² But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are.

Genesis verses 8 - 12: After Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was raped by Shechem, son of Hamor, Shechem fell in love with the young lady and asked his father to go to her family and ask that they allow him to take her as a wife, when Hamor eventually arrived at Jacob's home to negotiate with him about his daughter. Cook (2017:123) says that:

Hamor ignores the moral question and focuses on the political and economic benefit to Jacob's family if Dinah is given to Shechem in marriage. Shechem then enters the conversation and offers to give whatever is appropriate, apparently acknowledging that his defilement of Dinah requires some sort of restitution.

Before continuing, it is worth finding out who these people are i.e., Shechem's family. According to Whybray (2001:59):

The Shechemites are here (v. 2) specified as Hivites, one of the tribes supposed to have constituted the Canaanite people.

To Whybray (2001:59), Hamor not only represents his son to Jacob's family. but he sees Hamor as the representative of the whole city, for he calls Hamor the "spokesperson".

As the negotiations were continuing, Jacob's sons became their father's spokespersons. As Brodie puts it (2001:340):

Initially the listening is to be done by Jacob (34:6), but by the time the discussion begins, the angry sons overshadow Jacob (34:7). Hamor, the other father, does speak, offering intermarriage, but his first words are "Shechem, my son" and when he is finished, he in turn is overshadowed by his son. Shechem, without introduction, interjects - repetitive, brief, brash, money-no-object. His focus is clear: whatever the money, just "give me the girl / young woman."

Arnold (1998:135) agrees with Brodie when he says:

Instead of Jacob taking charge in what was clearly a dangerous situation, he allowed Dinah's brothers to negotiate with the royal family of Shechem.

Clearly the marriage proposal was not accepted by Jacob's sons. Cook (2017:123 - 124) puts it this way:

Jacob's sons outwardly maintain their focus on the religious and ethical dimension of the situation; they object to their sister marrying an uncircumcised man. (cf. Arnold 1998:135)

Genesis verses 13 - 22: They feigned acceptance of Shechem's request for marriage, with one condition: all the males of the city must agree to become circumcised like the sons of Israel (Arnold, 1998:135). (Cook, 2017: 125) argues that "In fact, in making this assertion they show themselves as capable of deception like their father (v. 13)." Their intention was not to observe the religious custom; rather it was to set a trap for the Shechemites. Though Jacob's sons are trapping Hamor and all the men of his nation, Sarna (1989:236) still thinks that:

Although the institution of circumcision is here used as a device by which to immobilise the males, there can be no doubt that the stipulation reflects normative practice among the tribes of Israel.

Circumcision is "also the infliction of pain on what is in this case the offending organ" (Brodie, 2001:340). Jacob's sons seem to use circumcision as punishment for Shechem and his family for what he had done to their sister. On this, Sarna (1989:236) says:

The part of the body used by Shechem in his violent passion will itself become the source of his own punishment! (cf. Johnson, 2018:539).

At this point the subject matter, namely Dinah, is not with her family but with the Shechemites. Deceitfully, her brothers used circumcision as a pathway to build a relationship with the Shechemites. According to Peterson (2019:80):

On the other hand, verse 17 notes that Jacob's sons would "take" (תקח) Dinah and go if the Shechemites refused their offer of circumcision. Even if she was being held against her will, the agreement / covenant made between Jacob and the Shechemites in the matter of peaceful relations sealed by the rite of circumcision still would have made Jacob and his sons accountable for their oath and / or agreement.

On the matter of circumcision, Hughes (2004:414) notes:

The offer was plausible to the Shechemites because it reflected normal practice among the tribes of Israel. Genesis 17:9 - 14 installed circumcision as an indispensable rite of admittance into Israel. Likewise, some pagans used it as an initiation into marriage. But Jacob's sons had no intention of extending their religious influence, much less the knowledge of God, to the Shechemites.

However, in their (Jacob's sons') conditional acceptance of the Shechemites, they make no mention of the deeper meaning of circumcision (Brodie, 2001:340).

Contrary to what Hughes suggests in this passage of the text, circumcision is not linked with YHWH or a covenant between YHWH and Jacob's family or Shechem's family or admittance to Israel. On this, Johnson (2018:539) says:

The sons' requirement that the Hivites be circumcised makes no mention of God (Gen. 34:14 - 16). It does not appear that the sons are requiring that the Hivites worship YHWH at all, only that they be circumcised. We could say that, in this situation, the Hivite men, including Hamor and Shechem, submit themselves, specifically their masculinity, to the men of Jacob's family.

Upon what I have discovered here, I can suggest that circumcision in this passage of text is different in perspective to the one in Genesis 17. Hall (1992:1522) enquires about the understanding behind circumcision in this narrative, when he says:

Circumcision was a marriage or fertility rite. Israelites cannot marry Shechemites until Shechem circumcises himself and all his men.

Even though this is not clearly stated in the text, the fact that circumcision and marriage appear in the same context gives us a possibility that circumcision was a marriage rite. However, Von Rad (1972:332) gives a different purpose on circumcision, when he says:

The lack of circumcision, which is presented by Dinah's brothers as the great impediment to marriage, appears here simply as a custom to which the people of Jacob are obligated: the reader does not learn its actual significance. Israel gave various explanations of its origin (cf. Josh. 5.2 ff.; Gen. 17.10 ff.), but the custom goes back certainly into much earlier prehistoric times. Probably it was formerly a rite of puberty which only in the course of time was performed on new-born babies. Israel knew the rite only in this later form.

Walton et al. (2000:67), on the other hand, are not conclusive on the purpose of circumcision in this text. They broadly state that within the Ancient Near Eastern region circumcision was practised as a rite to puberty, fertility, and marriage and that it was not practised by all people, as can be seen in the case of the Shechemites, who did not practise circumcision.

As mentioned above in this Dinah saga, the text does not mention the purpose of circumcision which seems to be practised by Jacob's family, though Jacob's sons tricked the Hivites to avenge their sisters' rape. But Jacob's sons use circumcision as a condition to accept intermarriage between them and the Hivites. Kozar (2003:55) says:

Ancient societies were societies of blood. Blood relation through its rituals and manifestations constituted a mechanism of power. Such societies spoke through blood which was a reality that possessed symbolic power.

Circumcision both made visible and solidified kinship bonds. The ordeal of circumcision, with its spilling of blood, created a sort of blood brotherhood.

Israelite circumcision, likewise, may have originally constituted an initiation rite into marriage that established the male as fit for sexual relations (Kozar, 2003:56). Later, circumcision seems to be deceitfully used as the punishment by Jacob's sons to avenge their sister's rape. Collins (2004:99) puts it this way:

Circumcision becomes one of the distinctive ethnic marks of Judaism in the post-exilic period, but the custom was certainly older. Here it is used as a trick, so that sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, can attack the Shechemites "when they were still in pain."

On the fact that Shechem first raped Dinah, and later indecently proposed for marriage, Kozar (2003:59) says:

This burlesque of the rite of circumcision was the mirror of Shechem's indecent marriage proposal.

Dinah's and Shechem's narrative circumcision did not have a deeper theological meaning linking it to the deeds of YHWH. There is an element that seemed to link circumcision with marriage even though it is not quite clear because of the trickery used by Jacob's sons. Though it seems like Jacob's family practised circumcision, the text does not give clear details regarding why they practised it, and at what age they performed it on their males.

2.4.2. Exodus 4:24 - 26

The second text is Exodus 4 with a focus on verses 24 to 26. This narrative is about the circumcision of Moses' son by his wife Zipporah:

English Translation (NIV)	Hebrew Text
<p>²⁴ At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. ²⁵ But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's</p>	<p>24 וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בַּמַּלְאָךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַמֵּיתוֹ : 25 וַתִּקַּח זִפְּרָה צֶפֶרָה לָרֶצֶחַ וַתְּכַרֵּת אֶת-עֶרְלַת בְּנֶהּ וַתִּגַּע</p>

<p>foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said. ²⁶ So the LORD let him alone. (At that time, she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)</p>	<p>לְרַגְלָיו וְתָאמַר כִּי חֲתַן־דָּמִים אַתָּה לִּי: 26 וַיֵּרָף מִמֶּנּוּ אַז אָמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לְמוֹלֶת: פ</p>
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Verses 24 - 26: The text begins by mentioning that God met Moses at a lodging place and was about to kill him. According to Cohen (2005:121), God nearly killed Moses because Moses had sinned by neglecting the circumcision of his son. However, the text is not explicit about why God wanted to kill Moses. Cohen (2005:126) says further:

We may assume, therefore, that the delay in circumcising his first-born son was, as the Midrash suggests, prompted by Jethro's insistence that Midianite practice be observed, and that Gershom would eventually have been circumcised at puberty or as a prelude to marriage.

I will not focus too much on the first verse (v 24), but my focus will be on the subsequent verses which are about the subject matter of this study: "circumcision".

The most vexing of all stories about circumcision is that of Zipporah, her son, and the strange reference to a "bloody bridegroom" (Exod. 4:24 - 26). The many puzzles of this passage reduce to two: What does the phrase "bloody bridegroom" mean? (Hall 1992:1523). According to Kozar (2003:56):

In a rescue story in Exodus 4: 24 - 26, Zipporah takes a flint knife and cuts off the foreskin of her son and touches it to Moses' feet (= genitals?). God relents in the decision to kill Moses. This may echo a primitive Israelite ritual by which circumcision prepared the bridegroom's sexual organ for procreation in a premarital ritual.

Hall, above, asks a very important question which might help us to understand circumcision in this text. Even though Kozar already mentioned that circumcision may have been practised to prepare the bridegroom for procreation, I first need to answer Hall's question: "What does the phrase "bloody bridegroom" mean?" and to answer this question Propp (1993:496) says:

The word *hätän* properly means “relative by marriage” according to T C Mitchell, “The meaning of the noun *htn* in the Old Testament”, but most often it corresponds to the English term “son-in-law.” The translation “bridegroom” is usually preferred in our passage, however, because of the likelihood that Zipporah is addressing Moses even so, this rendering may be misleading. In English, a man is a bridegroom only on his wedding day, but, since *hätän* certainly denotes a life-long relationship with one’s father-in-law, it perhaps also denotes a life-long relationship with one’s wife, i.e., it may simply mean “husband.”

Propp (1999:219) says further:

Hätän etymologically means “male relative by marriage”. Most often, however, it connotes a son-in-law or bridegroom. The translation “bridegroom” is usually preferred for our passage, since it appears that Zipporah is addressing Moses. Even if this is correct, however, “bridegroom” is somewhat misleading. In English, a man is a “bridegroom” only on his wedding day. But *hätän* can denote, as here, a recently married husband, just as the counterpart *kallâ*, “daughter-in-law”, bride may be a young wife.

Hall (1992:1523) answers this question as follows:

The first puzzle stems from the ordinary meaning of the Hebrew word translated bridegroom (*hätän*). Since Moses and Zipporah have at least one child, “bridegroom” describes Moses poorly. Applying “bloody bridegroom” to Zipporah’s son fares even worse. In Arabic *hätän* can also denote one who is circumcised. Perhaps Zipporah declares, “You are a blood-circumcised one for me.” Whether or not the story presupposes the meaning of circumcised one, the last verse of the story shows how the final editor wants the reader to understand the phrase: She said *hätän dāmim* concerning circumcision (Exod. 4:26) as if to say do not worry about this puzzling phrase; Zipporah was talking about circumcision, nothing more, (cf. Cohen 2005:124 or Howell 2010:64).

Another explanation of the bridegroom of blood by Blumenthal (2007:259) is:

The expression *hätän damim* [bridegroom of blood] refers to the blood of circumcision which erases any preceding affiliation and allegorically seals the appointment of Moses to the leadership of his people.

Howell (2010:65) further expands, in his explanation of the term, when he says:

The Ugaritic, Syriac, and Jerusalem Aramaic roots all mean ‘to marry’ when used as verbs, and ‘son-in-law’ when used as nouns. The Akkadian root carries the idea of protection through a marital relationship. In Hebrew, the verb is used only as a *hithpael* and therefore carries the passive / reflexive idea of one who has become a *חתן*.

Howell (2010:65) notes:

In J. Morgenstern’s extensive study of the etymology and definition of *חתן דמים*, he concludes that the word *חתן* is rooted in the ancient idea of *beena* marriage². Although his starting point with the *beena* marriage system is flawed, he comes to similar conclusions as the lexical study above. He says: *חתן* means ‘to be related by blood, i.e. the blood of circumcision’. He is not referring to a blood relative by progeny, but one who is related through the rite of circumcision.

Based on the above answers it can now be understood that *hätän* means ‘the one who is related by marriage’. Since here Moses has already been married with children, I will accept that it means ‘husband’. The Arabic meaning of ‘the one who is circumcised’ gives more understanding of the word. But Kunin (1996:9) is of the notion that Zipporah’s statement was not referring to Moses. He says:

The final mytheme³ in the text is Zipporah’s statement, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood to me.’ As observed, this statement is ambiguous. It can refer to either Moses or their son. The ambiguity is significant. It suggests that the mytheme and the text as a whole, can refer to two generations at the same time and that the text can work on both a horizontal and vertical level simultaneously. It is likely that this mytheme is centred around a

² *Beena* marriage: a marriage in parts of India and Sri Lanka in which the husband enters the wife’s kinship group and has little authority in the household (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>)

³ Mytheme: is a fundamental generic unit structure (typically involving a relationship between a character and event, and a theme) from which myths are thought to be constructed. (<https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org>)

transformation either Moses or his son becomes (i.e., is transformed into) a bridegroom of blood.

The next question will be: “what is the significance of circumcision in this text?”, since Moses is the one who is said to be the “bridegroom of blood or the blood circumcised one”, but the child is the one who is circumcised. The text contains both a sacrificial and a murder element. The sacrificial element, that is, the circumcision, is tied to the vertical transformation of the unnamed son (Kunin, 1996:4). Kunin (1996:8) says further:

The type of transformation (symbolic death) is also significant where it is not clouded or omitted, the symbolic deaths usually contain elements of both types, murder and sacrifice. This aspect is clearly found in the ‘bridegroom of blood’. On the one hand, the aspect of murder is found in respect to ‘God’s attempt to kill Moses. On the other hand, the element of sacrifice is developed in the act of circumcision. From a structural perspective one would expect both types of transformation to mirror the dual structural role of the ambiguous figure.

At this stage it is unclear at what age circumcision was performed in Israel. What can be seen in the text is that Moses’ son was not circumcised. Moses’ boy or boys did not grow up in the Israelite community, therefore there is a possibility that they were not raised as Israelite boys. If I understand Zipporah’s act as not being the circumcision of an Israelite boy, but being a conversion rite, then I can also understand the obscure term used by Zipporah when she circumcised Gershom (Maller, 1993:98). Maller (1993:98) clarifies his statement when saying:

In the earlier period the children of a non-Israelite woman married to an Israelite were considered Israelites, as in the case of Joseph’s children. The exception is in the case of Gershom, who required the ceremony of *hätän damim* in order to make him a member of the tribe because Moses had taken an oath to devote him to paganism. When Zipporah touches Moses, the insider, with Gershom’s bloody foreskin it was possibly part of an initiation rite. Such rites are common in many tribes, and the mixing of blood or the transfer

of blood from one person to another is often a way of making men blood brothers.

Cohen (2005:124) however, brings a different understanding to that of Maller (1993). He says:

The lexicons elucidate the relatedness of these two meanings by explaining that “circumcision [is] performed on young men just prior to marriage.” Hence, the particular nuance of Zipporah’s condemnatory cry “*hātān damim attah li*: You should have been the circumciser for me! You should have done it, not me!”

One thing to notice in this text is that it is silent about the age of Moses’ sons. At least if there was some knowledge of their age, it could be said that he broke the covenant as stipulated in Genesis 17. Of course, Genesis 17 is a later text, as a matter of fact I cannot say that Moses broke or even violated that covenant. Zipporah does not circumcise his son to fulfil the Abrahamic covenant. In answer to the significance of circumcision in this text, I have discovered a couple of possibilities. Firstly, is that circumcision might have been practised as a preparatory tool prior to marriage. Second, I discovered that it had a sacrificial and death element. Thirdly, it was practised as a fertility rite and finally as a conversion rite since Moses’ sons did not grow up as Hebrew boys. But there is a strange discovery mentioned by Kunin (1996:10), which he puts as follows:

In that text the circumcision is coupled with a change in name. That text should be regarded as a symbolic rebirth with the circumcision in effect being the symbol of sacrifice and death, which led to rebirth and transformation. In other texts in which circumcision is performed, it is always performed by a male. Circumcision is also part of a more general pattern of denial of human fertility. As part of the transformation mytheme, human birth and sexuality are denied in favour of divine birth. Circumcision in this context can be seen as symbolic castration, the most extreme denial of male sexuality.

What Kunin is saying here is that circumcision was practised as a contraceptive to prevent human fertility. I do not understand how he came to compare circumcision and castration. Also, circumcision in this text seems to have a link to what was to

happen on the Passover. As mentioned above, that circumcision has a sacrificial element. For the Israelites to be exempted from death, a Passover lamb had to be sacrificed, and for Moses here to be saved from death, his son had to be circumcised. Therefore, it was the blood of circumcision for Gershom and the blood of the *paschal* sacrifice for Israel that caused Yahweh to withdraw from killing them (Howell, 2010:70). Frolov (1996:522) agrees with Howell when saying:

A new explanation of this expression was not long in appearing: it was found in the Passover story where elements B (violent death of first-born sons) and C (circumcision as a pass to the apotropaic Passover meal) are prominent. It is possible that an existing tradition was used: a narrative in which Moses' uncircumcised son is attacked by YHWH (who mistakes him for an Egyptian first-born) but saved by his mother's prompt action, could originally be an integral part of the Passover cycle (cf. Robinson, 1986:458 and Lehane, 1996:49).

Since the text is silent about the age of the circumcised boy, it is not easy to link the circumcision in this narrative to that of Genesis 17 (infant circumcision) or even to that of Genesis 34. It is Moses who is said to be the "bridegroom of blood", and not the circumcised. However, according to Robinson (1986:448):

Moses had not been circumcised, so Zipporah circumcised Gershom instead, and this vicarious act placated the angry deity. The story functioned as an aetiology to explain why circumcision, originally a puberty rite, was in Israel performed on infants.

What I am looking for in this text is what was the significance of circumcision, but instead I have come across various ideologies regarding why circumcision was practised. I have already mentioned those theories and the most convincing is circumcision linked to the Passover sacrifice as a remuneration for death. But as convincing as it is, it does not make this ideology correct for the Passover because circumcision is a post-exilic ideology. Or perhaps the post-exilic idea of Passover circumcision might have been drawn from the Exodus 4 circumcision narrative. However, circumcision as a preparatory tool prior to marriage might be the most accurate one in this context of the blood bridegroom.

2.4.3. Joshua 5:2 - 9

In this next text, as I did with the text that I analysed above, I will not look into all the details, but I will only try to discover the significance of circumcision, since my concern is to understand circumcision and why it was practised in the pre-exilic period in the Old Testament. As I have mentioned that this text is from the post-exilic period, Childs (1979:250) supports this statement thus:

the Deuteronomic editor of Joshua has assigned all the fragments of the earlier conquest account within the book of Joshua to the section which treats of the distribution of the land.” In this argument, Childs acknowledges that the book of Joshua belongs to the Deuteronomic history which is the post-exilic text.

English Translation (NIV)	Hebrew Text
<p>² At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” ³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth.</p> <p>⁴ Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt - all the men of military age - died in the wilderness on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the wilderness forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed the LORD. For the LORD had sworn to them that they would not see the land he had solemnly promised</p>	<p>2 בַּעַת הַהִיא אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הוֹשֵׁעַ עֲשֵׂה לְךָ חַרְבוֹת צָרִים וְשׁוּב מִלְּאֵת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנִיתִ: 3 וַיַּעַשׂ־לוֹ הוֹשֵׁעַ חַרְבוֹת צָרִים וַיִּמַּל אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־גִּבְעַת הָעֵרְלוֹת: 4 וַיְהִי הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר־מַל הוֹשֵׁעַ כֹּל־הָעָם הַיָּצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם הַזְּכָרִים כֹּל אֲנָשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה מֵתוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצִאתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם: 5 כִּי־מֵלִים הָיוּ כֹל־הָעָם הַיָּצֵאִים וְכֹל־הָעָם הַיִּלְדִים בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצִאתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם לֹא־מָלוּ: 6 כִּי אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה הָלְכוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּמִּדְבָּר עַד־תָּם כֹּל־הַגֹּיִם אֲנָשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה הַיָּצֵאִים מִמִּצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְהָם לְבָלְתִי הָרְאוֹתָם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לְאֲבוֹתָם לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: 7 וְאֵת־בְּנֵיהֶם הַקִּיָּים תִּחַתָּם אַתֶּם מַל הוֹשֵׁעַ כִּי־עֲרָלִים הָיוּ כִּי לֹא־מָלוּ אוֹתָם בְּדֶרֶךְ: 8 וַיְהִי כֹאֲשֶׁר־תָּמוּ כֹל־הַגֹּיִם הַהֵמּוֹל וַיִּשְׁבּוּ תַחְתָּם בְּמַחְנֵה עַד חַיֹּתָם: 9 פ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הוֹשֵׁעַ הַיּוֹם גִּלּוֹתִי אֶת־חַרְפַּת מִצְרַיִם מֵעַלְיֶכֶם וַיִּקְרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא גִלְגָּל עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:</p>

their ancestors to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.

Most scholars doubt the historicity of the book of Joshua. For example Dillard and Longman III (1994:125) say scholars found it difficult to accept accounts in the book of Joshua as actual history; Goldingay (2015:162-163) says:

Joshua is partly historical parable not direct fact (see 108-9). One reason why this understanding is reasonable is its incorporation of scatological humour (Josh. 2) and liturgical portrayal (Josh. 6), which don't suggest literal history. The stories are parabolic, concrete expressions of facts that we have noted in connection with the theology and ethics of Joshua.

With regard to the dating of the book of Joshua, Scheffler (2000) mentioned above that this is a post-exilic book, and it seems like Dozeman (2015:5) agrees with him. He says:

The summary of research will lay the foundation for my interpretation of Joshua as an independent book written during the post-exilic period from a northern point of view.

Childs (1979:249) says:

In my opinion, this feature of the book of Joshua is not to be dismissed as a variant historical tradition but understood as a unique theological perspective

of the Deuteronomic editor which the final canonical shape has preserved as normative. The Deuteronomic editor of Joshua fashioned his material into a highly theological pattern which not only disregarded strictly historical method, but which also shifted the emphasis to a different focal point from that ordinarily represented by the Deuteronomic tradition.

Due to what these scholars think of this book, I will treat it as a theological text rather than an historical text. Also, I want to understand the theological significance of circumcision in the text I am dealing with. Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:91) say that the book of Joshua and the tales preserved within the book are no more than etiological traditions:

that is to say, they were legends about how famous landmarks or natural curiosities came to be.

Though there are scholars who made their minds up about the book being a work of post-exilic material, there is Nelson (1997:7), who seems to disagree with this understanding. He says:

The individual narratives of chapters 2 - 11 are linked together in a way that is completely independent of any Deuteronomistic interest or language.

Verses 2 - 5: Here, the Lord commands Joshua to make flint knives, tools that seem to be useful to perform circumcision. Walton et al. (2000:216) explain it this way:

The earliest tools and weapons known from the Stone Age were flakes of stone produced by striking flint at the proper angles. The edges of these flakes were extremely sharp, easily accessible and reasonably durable. A flint flake was used for the process of circumcision in Israel and Egypt even after metal tools and weapons were readily available.

In this text from the book of Joshua, most scholars agree that during the wilderness period, circumcision among Israelites under Moses' leadership was suspended. This means that there were no circumcised Hebrews at this point, since those who had departed Egypt were now deceased and the rite had never been performed on their sons (Faley, 2017:405 cf. Meyers, 2004:472). However, according to Newman

(2016:51) the circumcision practised in the wilderness was not what the Israelites were required to do, but it was the Egyptian version of circumcision. He puts it this way:

The concept of abandoning Egyptian circumcision may appear in Joshua 5:2, where God commands Joshua to make flint knives and proceed with a second [*shenit*] circumcision of the Israelites (New Jewish Publication Society (NJPS)). The term *shenit* used in this verse suggests an alternative rendering: circumcise the Israelites a second time. We know that the Israelites and the Egyptians had differing surgical procedures for circumcision: The Israelites amputated the foreskin whereas the Egyptians made a dorsal incision of the prepuce. Accordingly, those Israelites who had been circumcised in the Egyptian manner (prior to the Exodus) needed a second operation. That is why, after the circumcisions were completed, God said, “today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” (Jos. 5:9) cf. Hall (1992:1524), Walton et al. (2000:217).

On the issue of the suspension of the circumcision in the wilderness, Dozeman (2015:268) has a totally different understanding of circumcision. He says that the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX) have a different version of the story. The MT says that all the males that left Egypt were circumcised but they all died in the wilderness because they disobeyed God. Then, the generation after them was not circumcised; this is the group that was circumcised by Joshua. However, the LXX says that there were two groups of circumcised males: the Exodus group and the ones born in the wilderness. The Exodus group did not all die in the wilderness but were a group of uncircumcised males who disobeyed God by not circumcising their sons.

Adeyemo et al. (2006:593-594) links circumcision here with the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17:

Some argue that the word ‘again’ may mean that they may have already been circumcised, according to either traditional Egyptian or Jewish rites. This is not clear from the text. What is explicit is that God wanted them circumcised according to the covenant.

This understanding by Adeyemo et al. is not appropriate for the fact that although he mentions the covenant, the text itself says nothing about the covenant. In this text, circumcision is not said to be an adherence to any covenant. There is also no age mentioned for those who are circumcised, whereas in Genesis 17 circumcision is that of an eight-day-old infant.

Verses 6 - 9: As mentioned above regarding the suspension of circumcision in the wilderness, with regard to the second circumcision at Gilgal, McConville (2001:163) argues that it shows that Joshua did not initiate circumcising Israel, but it was a tradition observed before Joshua's time. McConville (2001:162-163) says further that:

Circumcision was just a necessary precaution for the enablement of the Israelites to go into the promised land.

He says that they were unfit to inherit the land.

In addition to the above theory that the Israelites were circumcised in an Egyptian way but not in the Israelite way regarding the removal of "the reproach of Egypt", Carson et al. (1994:261) say:

This interpretation best explains the emphasis on flint knives and the reference to the reproach of Egypt (9). Flint knives, so abundant in Canaan in contrast to Egypt, were probably required because they were associated with the Israelite complete circumcision.

Calvin says (1509:64):

The disgrace of Egypt is expounded by some as meaning that the want of circumcision rendered them similar to the Egyptians, in other words, profane and marked with a stigma; as if it had been said that they were again made the peculiar property of God when they were stamped with this mark anew, to distinguish them from the nations that were unclean.

Howell, (2010:69) says: "Therefore, circumcision, being the unique, identifying mark of the covenant community, qualified one to participate in the Passover.

Furthermore, the connection between the Passover and circumcision involved more than just the foreigner.” (Howell, 2010:69) explains further:

Joshua required all of Israel to be circumcised before they could participate in the Passover. In Joshua 5:2 - 9, one reads that Joshua circumcised those who were born in the wilderness. After Joshua circumcised Israel “a second time”, the people of Israel 'kept the Passover' (Joshua. 5:2, 10, respectively). The implication is that even the blood relative of Israel had to be circumcised prior to participation in the Passover.

Collins (2018:203 - 204) says:

Here again the editor of the story seems to be more concerned with ritual propriety than with historical plausibility. Exodus 12:48 requires that all males be circumcised before celebrating Passover. Here again Joshua seems to presuppose an element in the Priestly tradition.

The link between circumcision and Passover seems to reappear in this text; the text does not clearly give us the reason for circumcision. Even Dozeman (2015:267) sees the same link:

This is the only story of circumcision associated with the exodus; there is no further account of the circumcision of the Israelites in Egypt as part of the events of the exodus. The Priestly author addresses the topic of circumcision in Exod. 12:43-49, as a postscript after the celebration of Passover in Egypt, stating that circumcision is a requirement for native Israelites and resident aliens who wish to participate in the Passover.

However, what I see is that just after circumcision has been performed on this new generation, the celebration of the Passover takes place. Could it be that Joshua circumcised this new generation because he was preparing them to participate in the coming Passover festival? The text again is silent about this. There is no specific answer as to why circumcision was practised in the pre-exilic period, however, Walton et al. (216-217) give us a more general answer:

The fact that blood is shed also signifies that this is a sacrificial ritual and may function as a substitution for the human sacrifice that was practised by other people. Circumcision can be seen as one of many cases where God transforms a common practice to a new (though not necessarily unrelated) purpose in revealing himself and relating to his people.

Although the infant circumcision practice of the Priestly text is not found in this text because the age of the circumcised is not mentioned, the elements of Priestly understanding of circumcision are evident. This text has parallels with the text in Exodus 12, whereby circumcision made one fit to participate in the Passover festival. In my search as to why Joshua circumcised the Israelites, the other factor that seems possible is that the text gives us a glimpse that before the exodus the Israelites practised circumcision. Dozeman (2015:268) notes:

In the MT, all the male warriors of the exodus generation were circumcised before leaving Egypt, but the males who were born in the wilderness were not circumcised (v. 5). Thus, the institution of circumcision ceased during the wilderness journey in the MT version of events, so the reinstatement of the rite becomes necessary.

Beside the preparation for Passover, this could be the other reason why the Israelites had to be circumcised, to reinstate the old rite or tradition that was practised by their forefathers. However, Nelson (1997:75) rejects this idea when saying:

There is no emphasis in the unrevised text that Joshua's circumcision was a repetition of an earlier practice.

Finally, Nelson (1997:77) says:

Circumcision also marks Israel's transition by setting aside the disgrace of the past. It is presented as a rite of passage from being an itinerant people "on the way" (vv. 5 and 7) to a people settled in the land. Once more readers have their national identity reinforced and energised.

2.5. Conclusion.

In this part of the study, I provided an overview of circumcision. I wanted to understand circumcision in general in terms of its definition. What I have discovered in the definition is that circumcision is the custom of cutting the foreskin of the male genitalia as a religious rite, though this did not reflect how circumcision was practised in other nations like Egypt. We also discovered that this was an ancient ritual which was practised widely in the Ancient Near East, except for the Philistines who were referred to as uncircumcised by the Israelites.

There is no certainty as to where this ritual originated. Some think that circumcision originated from Africa, either Egypt or Ethiopia, and then it was adopted by the Israelites as well as the Phoenicians through their influence by the Egyptians. But others like Sasson suggested that circumcision did not originate in Africa but in the north of Israel and spread down to the south.

The Egyptians seemed to be more of an interesting nation when studying circumcision. In Egypt, circumcision seems to have been practised on adolescent boys as the rite of passage to manhood. There are two contradicting theories regarding how the Egyptians practised their circumcision. The first one is that the Egyptians did not remove the prepuce completely. It is suggested that they made a small cut or a mark on the penis. The second was that the Egyptians removed the prepuce completely like the Hebrews did. In Egypt, circumcision was an old practice; it is said that it was practised as far back as 2400 or 2300 BCE, but Doyle says it is older than that and it dates from 4000 BCE. As I have studied circumcision in Egypt, I have discovered that circumcision changed from time to time or from kingdom to kingdom. At some time, it was practised on adolescent boys, and then changed to being performed on adult males, and then it moved back to being performed on infants.

Concerning circumcision and fertility, it is said that the removal of the foreskin enabled the penis to be fruitful by exposing the head of the penis. Circumcision prepared males for procreation. According to Eilberg-Schwartz in the Priestly

understanding of circumcision, fruitfulness is important. Before circumcision in Genesis 17, Abraham had no children and through circumcision, he was said to become father of the nations. I have not discussed Genesis 17 further for I will discuss the text in more detail in the next chapter. Subsequently, the fertility of Abraham depended on him being circumcised. The Priestly text equated circumcision with being fruitful in Leviticus 19, where an unpruned tree is said to be unfruitful like an uncircumcised male, but the circumcised fruit tree bears much fruit. Within the Ancient Near East, circumcision was used as the fertility tool or device which was associated with marriage and puberty.

After viewing circumcision from the Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian perspective, I then narrowed it to Israel and the Old Testament. In doing this I looked at the analysis on the three biblical texts which scholars agree are from pre-exilic literature. The texts are Genesis 34:8 - 22, Exodus 4:24 - 26, Joshua 5:2 - 9. In the Genesis text I found out that circumcision was a marriage device because Jacob's sons would not allow the Hivites to intermarry with them unless they circumcised their males. Circumcision was not in any way linked to Yahweh and the Abrahamic covenant. The other matter which is stated was that circumcision was a kinship device which solidified bonds between families.

In the Exodus 4 text, circumcision is seen as a marriage tool. Even though Moses had already been married to Zipporah, the fact that after she circumcises her son, she calls Moses a "bloody bridegroom", which links circumcision to marriage, for *hätän*, translated as "bridegroom", means the one who is related by marriage. In the Arabic language *hätän* means "the circumcised one". To elaborate on this, Howell (2010:65) mentioned that "the word *חתן* is rooted in the ancient idea of *beena* marriage. Although his starting point with the *beena* marriage system is flawed, he comes to a similar conclusion as the lexical study above." He says: *חתן* means "to be related by blood, i.e., the blood of circumcision". He is referring to someone who is related by the rite of circumcision and not to someone who is related by progeny. The other significance of circumcision was that circumcision was a conversion rite. This is seen because Moses grew up not as a Hebrew, so he was converted to Hebrewism through circumcision. However, this is not so convincing. Finally, circumcision was linked to the Passover. Since the death of the Passover lamb

caused God to relent from killing the Israelites, circumcision caused God to relent from killing Moses.

On the Joshua text I did not find any certain significance to circumcision. The only thing which seems to be common on the scholars' findings was that circumcision was preparing the Israelites for the coming Passover. The other is that the Israelites were not fit to enter the promised land, therefore circumcision was the tool which would have enabled them to possess the land. This is also a later text which probably already knew about P.

There are a few explanations with regard to circumcision in the Ancient Near East, Egypt and the Old Testament. The first is that circumcision was a marriage rite, and a puberty rite. Secondly, circumcision is linked to the Passover in two ways: in the Exodus text it was seen to have a parallel with the Passover lamb causing God to relent from killing; in the Joshua text it was used as tool which prepared the Israelites to participate in the Passover festival. Finally, it was used as a fertility rite which enabled the penis to procreate.

Chapter 3: Circumcision in the post-exilic period analysis of texts.

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show why scholars, especially historical-critical scholars, came to the conclusion that circumcision, as it is currently found in the Old Testament, is usually regarded as an exilic / post-exilic development. I will do the following: I will present a detailed analysis of the Priestly text (P). By doing so, I will engage with scholars who have studied circumcision in the post-exilic period from an historical-critical perspective.

When the Israelites were in Babylonian exile it seems like they were looking for some things that would give them a unique identity, and some things that would set them apart from other nations, especially the Babylonians. Circumcision seems to be one of the practices that they used as a sign that would set them apart from the people of other nations. Concerning the issue of Israel and the Babylonians on circumcision, Cook (2017:99) comments

The origins of this requirement, given in some detail, are puzzling to us, but were undoubtedly understood by ancient peoples. What we do know is that the people living in exile in Babylon during the sixth century BCE. looked upon circumcision as the sign of their identity as exiles from Judah, in contrast to the Babylonians, who did not practice it. In keeping with the theory that the Priestly writers and editors lived and worked in Babylon during their exile, it is quite possible that this became an important sign of identity at that time.

I will briefly examine the Israelite situation during the exilic period to try and understand their need to differentiate themselves from others. After presenting my understanding of this situation, I will begin to engage with the scholars who presented historical-critical work on circumcision.

After clarifying the separation and differentiation of Israel from other nations, I will conduct a text analysis on circumcision in the Old Testament text linked to the exilic / post-exilic period. The texts are Genesis 17:9 - 14, Exodus 12:43 - 50, and Leviticus

12:1 - 4. All these texts belong to the Priestly document, which most scholars agree is a product of the exilic / post-exilic period.

3.2. Exilic situation of Israel

According to Bright (2000:259):

The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of its people, mark the great watershed of Israel's history. At a stroke, her national existence was ended, together with all the institutions in which her corporate life had expressed itself. They would never be re-created in precisely the same form again.

After the Judeans left their destroyed land and were deported to Babylonia, it felt like they had lost their identity. Exile was a punishing experience, more effective than any symbol left in the homeland, which unavoidably reminded the Jews that they were conquered (Smith, 1989:31). During their stay in Babylon, they became divided, with one group accepting the situation they found themselves in and other groups failing to identify themselves with the life in Babylon (see Jeremiah 29). In this regard, Carr (2014:91) says:

Some exiles, unable to see a future as Judeans, assimilated into Babylonian culture. We may even have written records of such assimilated Jews in recently discovered legal contracts written by exiled Judeans in Babylon. The people in these contracts bear Judean names, but their legal documents are otherwise indistinguishable from the documents composed by native Babylonians. These records show how thoroughly some exiles had adapted to their Babylonian cultural context.

The fact that there were some Jews that decided to adapt to life in exile shows how successful the Babylonians were with their policy of exiling the conquered Judeans. Smith (1989:30) puts it this way:

It is clear that the purpose of taking whole families is to remove the major incentive to return to the homeland and thus encourage settlement. In the

case of those Judeans who stayed after restoration, this policy appears to have succeeded.

Carr (2014:91) argues that there are documents testifying to the fact that there were Judeans who adapted to the lifestyle in Babylon. According to the Second Book of Kings, the Judeans that were deported were those of the upper class; the king and his wives, the fighting men, the skilled men, and the artisans: (2 Kgs. 24:25 - 17). Smith (1989:21) says though the group that was deported first was small it was important for the Babylonians to deport this group. The reason for this importance was to remove the leadership to avoid the potential to revolt. Bright (2000:60) says:

The Jews living in Babylon represented the cream of their country's political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual leadership, which is why they were selected for deportation.

Though these Jews living in Babylon were the cream of society as Bright says, the situation they were living in was different. There was no Jerusalem, and the temple, the centre of their cult and faith, was also destroyed. The Jewish cult would never be the same as it was in their land. Bright (2000:262 - 263) says:

A new community did, in fact, begin to emerge, though the details are almost wholly obscure. It was no longer a national-cultic community, but one marked by adherence to tradition and law. Heightened stress on law is understandable among the exiles, for now that their nation and cult had ended there was little else to mark them as Jews.

In this new community and new cult, the new faith and new identity had to be redefined. That is why many scholars (e.g., Albertz, 2003:108, Gerstenberger, 2011:30, and Collins, 2004:114) believe that the new stress on Yahwism, the keeping of the Sabbath, and circumcision emerged during this period. Bright (2000:263) notes further: "Sabbath, circumcision, in particular, though both ancient institutions, began to receive stress as never before. Strict observance of the former became increasingly the mark of a loyal Judean." Bernat (2009:115) puts it this way:

The notion that circumcision gained significance during the Babylonian exile has long been an article of faith among many scholars. The standard

contention is that, since the Mesopotamians did not practice circumcision, the rite became a prime signifier of Israelite identity and faith in Babylon.

During the Babylonian exile the Judeans in their new community seemed to be looking for something that would strengthen their faith as well as distinguishing them from other people, especially the Babylonians. In this search for differentiation, Babylonians were found to be one of the nations that did not practice circumcision. As Bright (2000:263) says:

Circumcision, which had been practiced by Israel's ancient neighbours (except the Philistines) but not, apparently, by the Babylonians, likewise became a sign of the covenant (Gen. 17:9 - 14) and the mark of a Jew.

Therefore, in concluding this part of the study, Collins (2004:99) says:

Circumcision becomes one of the distinctive ethnic marks of Judaism in the post-exilic period, but the custom was certainly older.

If I am dealing with the post-exilic ideology or practice, I will now move on to explore the Priestly text, which is said to be a post-exilic document.

3.3. Circumcision in the Priestly Text

According to Milgrom (1991:2):

P in general are characterised by the term *tora* 'rituals, instructions'. The term refers to documents, probably stored in sanctuary archives, that constitute the special lore of the priesthood.

P is the repository of ancient materials but debate still rages concerning the date of its composition (Milgrom 1991:3). The P text is not a difficult text to recognise with the Pentateuch due to its characteristics which are mentioned above by Milgrom.

Carr (2011:109) says:

P - can be distinguished from surrounding material in the Diatessaron or Pentateuch respectively partly because the texts in these strata are saturated

with a variety of terminological and conceptual elements that are different from the surrounding material.

The Priestly text was, according to most scholars, produced during the Babylonian exilic period⁴. Regarding the emergence, Glick (2005:15) says:

P was the work of Priestly elegance that emerged into prominence in the late sixth century, after the exiles had returned from Babylonia. Also, a composite text consists of almost all of Leviticus and parts of Genesis (chapter 17 included), Exodus, and Numbers. All these texts were then combined into a unified Torah (as we know it today) in the fifth century BCE by an unknown author or authors, known as a Redactor. (cf. Bright, 2000:263).

I think it is important to explain what the Priestly text, also known as “P” is before understanding circumcision within the text. Blenkinsopp (1976:275) says:

I understand P to be the Priestly-scribal version of the founding events, generally dated in the sixth or fifth century BCE, into which has been inserted a great mass of legislative and ritual material much of which is of high antiquity.

Blenkinsopp (2009:225) became more specific about the composition of the P history when he says it was composed just after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and the deportation of the Judeans. However, Scheffler (2000:161) has a slightly different view on the composition of P, when he says:

The Priestly document (composed by one or more priests, hence called P), contains most of the Pentateuch. It consists of mostly old tales, laws, and cultic prescriptions. There is a close link between Ezekiel and the Priestly document, but P was probably composed a little later. Most likely, the recording of the Priestly text occurred towards the end of the exile and was incorporated into the Pentateuch after the exile had ended.

We now have two views with regard to when the Priestly text was composed; the one just after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (Blenkinsopp) and the other toward the end of exile (Scheffler). Von Rad (1972:25) agrees with Scheffler regarding the

⁴ See Scheffler (2000:162), Glick (2005:15)

composition of the Priestly document when he says its composition falls in the post-exilic period (538 - 450 BCE). He says that the datings of P should not be overestimated because they are just guessing, and that these datings only refer to the completion of the literary composition. Many years later Blenkinsopp (2009:230) made a turnaround on his statement about the Priestly composition just after the fall of Jerusalem. He says that as he had stated before, the huge essential settlement of the P records were composed just after the fall of Jerusalem and subsequent deportations. That the narrative shape pivots at the location of worship indicated a connection of a few types with the completion of the rebuild of the Jerusalem temple, in line with Ezra 6:15, within the sixth year of Darius, therefore he consequently places its composition in 516 / 515 BCE.

Therefore, due to this change of mind by Blenkinsopp I conclude that the Priestly document was composed in the late exilic and the post-exilic period (cf. Carr, 2011:297). It is on this conclusion that I would like to explore what Priestly is and the purpose for its composition.

Because of the trauma mentioned above by Carr regarding the fall of Judah, the exiles felt like they had lost their identity and their cult. They felt that as Judeans their community was damaged beyond reformation. Due to this matter, Scheffler (2000:163) suggests that the composition of P was to reform the Judean community when he says:

The Priestly authors worked towards the rebuilding and reformation of the community in the post-exilic period, which reminds of Ezekiel. This had to come about through a well-organised cult and the strict observance of legal prescriptions which would be especially mediated by the priests.

The Pentateuch is made up of different sources of which the P text is one. Collins (2004:57) notes that:

The Priestly document is the easiest source to recognise. The rather dry, formulaic style is familiar from the account of creation in Genesis 1. God said, "let there be light" and there was light. It is marked by a strong interest in genealogies, in dates (note the precise dating in the Priestly account of the flood), and in ritual observance (the Creator observes the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day). The book of Leviticus is quintessential Priestly material,

as is the description of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. In P, history is punctuated by a series of covenants with Noah, Abraham, and finally Moses. P has no angels, dreams, or talking animals, such as we find in other Pentateuchal narratives. There is little dispute about the identification of P, although its date remains very controversial.

Similarly, Von Rad (1972:27) says that the Priestly narrative is such a simple source to recognise within the Pentateuch that laymen can recognise it. He says that the document does not have the characteristics of a narrative in itself for it contains mostly laws and doctrine throughout.

The other characteristic to note on P is the theological emphasis on the matters they are addressing to their audience. One of these is noted by Blenkinsopp (1976:282) when saying:

We should note in passing that one of the most marked characteristics of P over the earlier sources is the tremendous theological emphasis placed on the primeval history.

The authors of the above-mentioned document are unknown, which is why they are called the Priestly authors. What is known is only the fact that they were priests, members of the elite class who assumed virtually complete social authority in the newly reconstituted Judean society that arose after the Babylonian exile (Glick, 2005:15). It is known that in this period the Judeans were no longer under the rulers of the Davidic dynasty; rather it appears that priests ruled their Judean communities, though initially the whole exilic group was under the authority of the Babylonian king and the post-exilic group was under the rule of the Persian king. This new community had to rediscover themselves or recover their identity. According to Bright (2000:262-263):

A new community did, in fact, begin to emerge, though the details are almost wholly obscure. It was no longer a national-cultic community, but one marked by adherence to tradition and law. Heightened stress on law is understandable among the exiles, for now that nation and cult had ended there was little else to mark them as Jews. Moreover, since the prophets had explained the calamity as a punishment for the breach of covenant law, it is

scarcely remarkable that sincere men should have felt a more earnest attention to this feature of their religion imperative.

The emphasis of this new community or rather in this new community was the “covenant”. Bernat (2009:27) explains it this way:

Throughout the canon *ברית* can represent a certain degree of mutuality that either indicates contingent obligations for both parties to the *ברית* or generally characterises a relationship between the parties. Moreover, some type of ritual or ceremony often accompanies the establishment, ratification, or renewal of a *ברית*

It was in this reconstituted society that male infant circumcision became a religiously mandated requirement, sanctioned by the single key text, Genesis 17 (Glick, 2000:16) (cf. Glick, 2000:17). Bernat (2009:29) says:

In the Priestly thought-world, *ברית* is unidirectional. The promises are made by God, and the obligations are imposed by God.

In this community that is constituted by keeping this covenant, circumcision became the mark of this covenant (Bernat, 2009:36). The issue that seems problematic here is that circumcision must be performed on male infants only and in this period, there is mention of circumcision being performed on adolescents and adults. We are uncertain how this transpired, however Glick (2000:18) suggests that:

The goal, shared by priests and ordinary men alike, was to maintain an ethnically exclusive patriarchy, dedicated to worship of Yahweh, and committed to sexual and marital restrictions to prevent reproductive contamination. What better way to accomplish this than by requiring that every male child be indelibly marked at birth?

Bernat (2009:33) has a similar suggestion when saying:

Circumcision in Gen. 17 is linked to a set of *ברית*-promises that served to distinguish Israel from other nations: the land and the special relationship to YHWH.

Here, I am not discussing the text in Genesis 17 but rather highlighting the first text to mention circumcision linked to the covenant.

It is clear by now that circumcision and covenant are intertwined or inseparable; this is the theological thinking of the Priestly authors. Circumcision though was not the only emphasis in the Priestly text and ideology gained much weight for it became the sign of Abrahamic covenant. On this, Gerstenberger (2011:171) says:

According to the Priestly tradents, the religious community of the later Judeans is already constituted in the patriarchal period. The “everlasting” covenant between Yahweh and the community of Israel is “set up,” “established,” by God in that distant prehistoric time. Following the Sabbath, established in the context of creation, circumcision becomes a second outward sacramental sign. By all available accounts, both identity markers had de facto only become important in the exilic to post-exilic period for the “people of Yahweh” that was being constituted.

Genesis 17 is the text that gives this kind of Priestly ideology, and on this Ska (2006:201) says:

However, the covenant vocabulary (“to cut” a covenant— *krt bérîṭ*) is not found in Exodus 19 but in Exod. 24:8, a late text. Furthermore, the Abrahamic Covenant is an isolated passage that corresponds to part of Genesis 17, a Priestly text.

In this part of this discussion my intentions were to give a view on what the Priestly text is, its composition, and a bit on circumcision. There is no certainty and precise date regarding the dating of the text. Scholars seem to agree that it might have been composed towards the end of the Babylonian exile through to the post-exilic period. Arnold (2009:172) argues:

Famously, it has been assumed for many decades that circumcision and the Sabbath law reflect exilic and post-exilic times and are therefore important for establishing the date of the Priestly materials devoted to these topics.

Regarding the characteristics of the Priestly text, it is said that the Priestly text consists of rituals and instructions, and that it has a dry formulaic style. The text is made up of the parts of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. For example, Genesis 17:9 - 14 forms a part of the Priestly text, which leads us to our next part, which is the analysis of Genesis 17:9 - 14.

3.4. Genesis 17:9 - 14

In this text, God seems to be addressing Abraham and telling Abraham to keep his covenant with all his descendants. The stipulations of keeping this covenant are that every male in Abraham's household must undergo circumcision. The circumcision they are to undergo is the sign of the covenant that Abraham and his descendants are to keep. This sign of circumcision is between God and Abraham. Most scholars agree that circumcision became a sign of the Abrahamic covenant during the exilic to post-exilic period. On this, Arnold (2009:172) says:

Thus, the appropriation of circumcision in Gen. 17 as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant imbued it with new religious significance because it linked future generations of Abraham's descendants with the promises of the ancestral covenant.

On the same note, Glick (2005:39) comments:

Genesis 17:9–14 has a patently atemporal quality. While the superficial context of the chapter is God's dialogue with Abraham, the circumcision injunction is intended for Israelites in future generations. Thus, commentators have noted that the passage reads as if it were taken directly from one of P's legal collections. Here, the author of Gen. 17 retrojected into the ancestral saga the obligation to a set of laws yet to be presented.

The specifications of this covenant sign are that every male aged eight days is to be circumcised. This applies to every male including the ones born in his household and also those bought by money as slaves or servants. In keeping this covenant between God and Abraham, Abraham has to ensure that every male is circumcised and every male who has not been circumcised will be cut off from his people.

Genesis 17:9 - 14" English translation (American Standard Version (ASV))	Hebrew text
[9] And God said unto Abraham: 'And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant, thou,	9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־אַבְרָהָם וְאַתָּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי תִשְׁמֹר אַתָּה וְזָרְעֶךָ אַחֲרָיִךְ לְדֹרֹתֶם: 10 זָאת

<p>and thy seed after thee throughout their generations. ^[10] This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee: every male among you shall be circumcised. ^[11] And ye shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of a covenant betwixt Me and you. ^[12] And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every male throughout your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any foreigner, that is not of thy seed. ^[13] He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ^[14] And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant.'</p>	<p>בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְרוּ בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם וּבֵין זָרְעֵךְ הַמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר: 11 וְנִמְלַתֶם אֶת בְּשָׂרְ עַרְלַתְכֶם וְהָיָה לְאוֹת בְּרִית בֵּינִי וּבֵינֵיכֶם: 12 וּבֶן- שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים יִמּוֹל לָכֶם כָּל-זָכָר לְדַרְתֵיכֶם יְלִיד בָּיִת וּמִקְנֵת-כֶּסֶף מִכָּל בֶּן-נְכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזְרַעְךָ הוּא: 13 הַמּוֹל אֶת יְלִיד בֵּיתְךָ וּמִקְנֵת כֶּסֶף וְהָיְתָה בְּרִיתִי בְּבִשְׂרְכֶם לְבְרִית עוֹלָם: 14 וְעָרַל אֶת זָכָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִמּוֹל אֶת-בְּשָׂרְ עַרְלָתוֹ וְנִקְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמִּיהָ אֶת-בְּרִיתִי הַפֶּר: 15</p>
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I have come to the part of the study where I will be conducting a text analysis on the passage which is the first in the Old Testament to mention circumcision. Glick (2005:15) says:

Genesis 17 is part of P, the last text to be composed but the first to mention circumcision.

As I am dealing with the post-exilic understanding of circumcision, Genesis 17 is one of the texts most scholars agree to be the product of this period. In analysing this passage of text, I will do a verse-to-verse commentary. I will only focus on verses 9 - 14, for they are the ones dealing with the subject matter of interest to me, i.e., circumcision.

Verses 9 - 10: God charges Abraham to keep his covenant throughout the generations. Moreover, the *ברית*-promises that predominate in the pericope are linked to the circumcision command (Bernat, 2000:35). In this passage, the covenant that

Abraham is to keep will be evidenced by circumcising every male. This seems like that is all that is expected from Abraham. Adeyemo et al. (2006:102) say:

What has been said so far deals with the Lord's responsibility under the covenant. Now, however, he turns to what Abraham is expected to do, introducing it with the words 'for you'.

This covenant that Abraham must keep is not for himself alone, but it extends to the generations to come. Though P narrates an event of a distant era, they bring it to their context by mentioning the future generations of Abraham.

Verses 11 - 12: So is circumcision the sign of the Abrahamic. It thus becomes a matter of the highest importance in Judaism (Levenson, 2004:38, Sarna, 1989:125). The covenant that Abraham now has to keep has a sign attached to it. The regulation is that every male who is eight days old should undergo circumcision. Cook (2017:99) interprets it this way:

The origins of this requirement, given in some detail, are puzzling to us, but were undoubtedly understood by ancient peoples. What we do know is that the people living in exile in Babylon during the sixth century BCE looked upon circumcision as the sign of their identity as exiles from Judah, in contrast to the Babylonians, who did not practice it.

As argued above, it is evident that circumcision was not a new practice. Most scholars agree that it was practiced throughout the Ancient Near East, except for the Philistines and the Babylonians in the era of the Priestly authors or the exilic / post-exilic period. In the post-exilic period, the Priestly authors seem to have given this practice a new meaning. This is better said by Arnold (1998:98):

But like nearly every other facet of ancient Israel, God transformed this social custom into a religiously significant act. Rather than instituting a totally new ritual to signify the covenant, he adapted and transformed an ancient and familiar custom, investing it with new meaning. (cf Brayford, 2007:307)

The questions with regard to this sign of the covenant are: is this sign for Abraham and his descendants, or is it YHWH's sign? Is this sign like the rainbow in the Noachic covenant where YHWH will see it and remember his promises? To answer these kinds of questions, Bernat (2000:38) suggests that:

Understanding *ברית* in 17:11 as the command type still does not address the tautological tension of *לאות ברית* as a “sign of itself,” that is, circumcision as a reminder of the command to circumcise (per 17:9–10). The logical discord, however, is resolved when *ברית* in Gen. 17:11 is read in light of the term’s clear connotation in Lev. 26:15: the obligation to follow the aggregation of God’s commands. *לאות ברית* then, should properly be interpreted as a sign of Israel’s commitment to observe the totality of YHWH’s dictates.

Von Rad (1972:201) has a similar understanding when he says:

This distinguishes this covenant from the covenant with Noah; it is for a definite circle of men and demands their obedience.

Then YHWH specifically instructs that this sign which is circumcision should be performed on males who are eight days old, and there is also inclusivity of foreigners. In this context there is a mention of Ishmael. Kidner (1967:153) puts it like this:

Notice that the covenant was open to Gentiles (12b, 13), but they must wholly belong to the community. (cf. Exod. 12:45).

The instruction seems to have been two-fold here, because first the covenant was for Abraham and his descendants, and it also includes foreigners. Secondly it was not compulsory to be circumcised, however the uncircumcised could not be part of the Abrahamic community. They are to be cut off from the community of God. In verse 12 Abraham gets a clear instruction to circumcise every male who is eight days old in his household. On this, Blenkinsopp (2009:237) says that this requirement of eighth day circumcision is an exilic or post-exilic ideology and not an older one. The eight days’ circumcision is questionable. Why is eight days the age for the performance of circumcision? Walton et al. (2000:49) speculate as follows:

Waiting until the eighth day to perform this ritual may reflect the high infant mortality rate and the desire to determine if the child was viable.

A very interesting comment is that of Brayford (2007:307) when he says:

Although circumcision was not exclusive to Israel, what made the ordinance as described in this story unusual was God’s command that it occur when a

male infant was only eight days old. Most other cultures considered circumcision as a rite of passage that transpired either at puberty or as part of a prenuptial ritual. That Israel made such a significant change enabled “circumcision to be invested with an entirely new and original meaning” and to be disassociated with other pagan rites.

In doing so, this means that the exile brought this new meaning to their own practice of circumcision in order to make theirs as different as possible to other peoples. However, Avalos (2015:272) has a different opinion on what circumcision as a mark or sign stands for. He describes:

Exodus 12:44 and at least parts of Genesis 17 and Leviticus 25 may share views of circumcision as a slave mark. The Passover meal was part of the ritual signifying submission to Yahweh, and slaves also had to swear their submission to Yahweh with this loyalty test. A slave mark also explains the variety of ages at which this ritual was required. As mentioned, those who became slaves late in life (e.g., Abraham) were circumcised at the time they became servants of Yahweh.

Since circumcision was not uniquely Israelite or Judean, the exiles seem to have been wanting to totally do away with how other nations practised circumcision. Sarna (1989:385) says in the exilic period it was discovered that their oppressors which were the Babylonians had different cultural practices, especially circumcision, and that worked to their advantage to fully distinguish themselves to the Babylonians by putting an emphasis on circumcision. This emphasis is on circumcision being the mark of the covenant between God and Abraham and his offspring, and that excludes their counterparts, which in this context are the Babylonians. Brayford (2007:307) puts it this way:

In this context, the requirement indeed is external. All males are to be circumcised on the flesh of their foreskin as a sign of the covenant. Of all Abraham’s offspring, only those so marked could claim the land as an eternal possession. However, historically speaking, most Egyptian and Semite men (excluding Babylonians and Assyrians) also practiced circumcision. Thus, it would be difficult to use the mark of circumcision to prove one’s legitimate

right to the land. In this context, therefore, the purpose of circumcision would indicate one's willing obedience more than one's right of occupancy.

What I learned in this passage about circumcision is that it is the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, but I do not get the significance of this sign. Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:146) argues that the actual Hebrew word does not mean a 'sign', but rather it means a 'symbol'. In his argument, he goes on to say that:

A symbol differs from a sign in that it has properties that makes it appropriate for the content which it signifies.

Regarding the content that circumcision signifies, Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:147) argues that circumcision signifies fertility when he says:

The centrepiece of this covenant is God's promise that Abraham will have vast numbers of descendants. It should not be surprising that the Priestly writer treats fertility as a central issue in the covenant between Abraham and God.

Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:147) goes on to say that the fact that Abraham laughed when God was giving this promise of being father of the nations and having multitudes of descendants (Gen. 17:17) shows that even Abraham realised that fertility was the central theme of this covenant.

However, Sarna (1989:125) has a different opinion about the eighth day for infant circumcision. He notes:

The radical reinterpretation of the common practice of circumcision from pubertal or nuptial rite to covenantal rite is reinforced by the unique shift of the operation to the eighth day after birth. The incidental result, noted in a Midrash, is that the rite becomes more humane because it avoids the physical and psychological effects attendant upon the performance of circumcision at a more mature age. The eighth day is particularly significant because the newborn has completed a seven-day unit of time corresponding to the process of Creation.

Avalos (2015:260) looks at circumcision from a modern perspective and in a negative way when he says:

Child circumcision certainly imposes a power differential upon a child, as it is not the result of a mutual decision between parent and child.

I have three suggestions regarding the eight days for infant circumcision, but the most convincing is Brayford's, especially when assessing the exiles' situation of trying to maintain the identity of their new community. I am not saying that Brayford's interpretation is accurate concerning what really happened in this period; however, the exile brought new meaning to their practice of circumcision. There have been many theories about why cultic regulations were of such concern to the exile compilers of the Priestly material, but most of them are theological (Smith, 1989:144). According to Smith, what the Priestly authors did was to give theological meaning to their Israelite regulations. That is, to link their regulations with being devoted to their God, and it might be possible that this is what they did to the practice of circumcision as the mark of covenant between their God and Abraham, their father.

Verses 13-14: In these last two verses circumcision is not given to Abraham and his descendants, but it is extended also to every male in his household. Even those who are not Abraham's family by blood are to be circumcised. Brayford (2007:307) notes:

Just as unusual was God's requirement that even foreign-born servants who are bought by one of Abraham's offspring must also be circumcised.

Regarding verse 13, Watts (1994:62) says:

This verse underlines that all male members of the household, whatever their origin, must submit to circumcision.

Brueggemann (1991:57) goes even further to speculate who these outsiders are who are also included in this covenant. He says:

The most striking dimension of this sacramental institution is that the "born" and the "bought" are both included (vs. 12-13). The born are the blood descendants of the line of Abraham. The bought are outsiders to the bloodline. Perhaps they are prisoners of war or purchased slaves in the work force. The text assures that they are full members of the covenant community, even outside the blood line (cf. Isa. 56:6-7).

I will not discuss the matter of the outsiders here, but will reserve it for the discussion in the next text, which will be Exodus 12.

The consequences of not adhering to the covenant are pronounced. Watts (1994:62-63) puts it as follows:

Adults may, of course, be reluctant to undergo circumcision, and a warning of the consequences is appended. "An uncircumcised male shall be cut off from his relations." This sentence is often invoked against offences that tend to be committed in secret, where the threat of divine punishment would be the main deterrent. Though it has been supposed to involve excommunication from the community, to be "cut off" seems more likely to be divine punishment resulting in the offender's untimely death. "The threat of being 'cut off' by the hand of God, in His own time, hovers over the offender constantly and inescapably; he is not unlike the patient who is told by his doctors that his disease is incurable and that he might die any day."

Watts suggests that being cut off means a death sentence. That is, one who disobeys the circumcision command is to be put to death. Gerstenberger (2011:398) notes:

As can be gathered from other post-exilic texts, for the Judean community circumcision had the character of a confessional status (see Exod. 12:48–50; Lev. 12:3; Ezek. 32:17–32). The Priestly traditions provide the sign of the covenant, to be applied to every single (male) adherent of Yahweh, with an older legitimation going back beyond the period of Moses and protect the practice by threatening death in the case of noncompliance.

Von Rad (1972:201) has a different comment regarding the meaning of being cut off, when he says:

This scarcely means the death penalty, which is expressed by P in a different way, but rather exclusion from the sacred community, a kind of excommunication, which also meant ruin for the one concerned.

On his argument on circumcision signifying fertility, Eilberg-Schwartz (1990:148) brings a different meaning to being cut off:

It is also relevant to note the penalty that is prescribed for males who are not circumcised. Such a person “shall be cut off from his people” (Gen. 17:14). This may mean, as commentators suggest, that he is ostracised from his people or that God takes his life. But in light of ethnographic studies of circumcision, a new understanding is also possible. We have seen that failure to perform circumcision is sometimes equated with impotence or infertility. “Being cut off from one’s people,” therefore might mean that the offender shall have no offspring and thus have no descendants to perpetuate his name in Israel, an interpretation suggested by medieval Jewish commentators. One who is not circumcised becomes infertile.

Another way of looking at the matter of circumcision being a sign, or a symbol, is that of Derouchie (2004:185) when he says:

Because the rite was performed "in the flesh" of the male covenant member (Gen. 17:11, 13-14) and because human failure to observe circumcision would result in being cut off from the community (Gen. 17:14), circumcision appears to function as a reminder primarily to Abraham and his offspring rather than to God. Specifically, the sign reminded the human parties of the Lord's demand to "walk before me and (so) be blameless" (Gen. 17:1) (c.f. Brueggemann 1991:57).

Both arguments by Eilberg-Schwartz and Derouchie sound convincing but I would agree more with Derouchie that circumcision was a constant reminder to Abraham and his offspring of their devotion and obedience to the Lord's demand. Therefore, one who disobeys the Lord's demand is to be cut off from the community for his lack of devotion and obedience.

Derouchie (2004:186) goes further to say that circumcision was a sign used in Israel as a marker which was used for those who were non-Israelite. This to me sounds like he interprets this issue of a marker as the modern way farmers use to mark the livestock for identity. This kind of interpretation is very shallow.

He also touches on the issue of being “cut off” for those who fail to be circumcised. I am not so convinced though that circumcision was a reminder that when Abraham and his descendants will look at the mark on their penises and remember the

command to walk blamelessly before the Lord. This is an interesting interpretation, though.

Three opinions regarding the meaning of being “cut off”, include firstly the death sentence; the second being ex-communication from the community; and the third is becoming infertile. Hence there are three meanings attached to the phrase. I will not take any of them as the correctly translated word. Rather, I am inclined to go with Enns’s (2013:440) comment when he says:

Intentional violation brought more serious consequences, even being “cut off” from the community. Although it is unclear exactly what it meant to be cut off, perhaps excommunication, capital punishment, vulnerability to an untimely death, loss of progeny, or separation from one’s ancestors after death, the threat was ominous.

The seriousness of being cut off from the community is the consequence that one must face for not abiding by the covenant regulation. Circumcision in this community is a binding contract that every male must adhere to. Failure to adhere meant that the binding regulations of the covenant are violated and therefore such person must face the consequences thereof.

Enns (2013:440) does not give certainty to the meaning of the word; but rather he stresses the fact that the threat of being “cut off” was ominous. Nevertheless, it is also possible that infertility may be the correct interpretation in terms of excommunication, loss of progeny and death, since after all these the offender may not have descendants in Israel. What I have discovered from this text is Abraham and all his descendants received a clear instruction to keep the covenant. Keeping this covenant is linked to every male being circumcised. Furthermore, Abraham is given a clear and concrete consequence for those who would not keep the covenant. However, the covenant that he is given was not a totally exclusive covenant to him and his family; it was extended to all the males whether bought by money or born in the family. Outsiders would be accepted only on the condition that they are circumcised. In the following text, “Exodus 12:43 - 50”, I will explore this concept even further.

3.5. Exodus 12:43 - 50

In the previous text, I showed circumcision to be the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, and this should be performed on every male of eight days old. Continuing with trying to understand this practice of circumcision within the exilic / post-exilic Israel community, in this text I am going to explore the significance of circumcision with its link to the Passover. In this instance, circumcision seems like a prerequisite to participating and partaking in the Passover.

Exodus 12:43 - 50 English translation (ASV)	Hebrew text
<p>[43] And then Jehovah said unto Moses and Aaron: 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: there shall be no foreigner eat thereof; [44] but every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. [45] A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof. [46] In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. [47] All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. [48] And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land; but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. [49] One law shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.' [50] Thus did all the children of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.</p>	<p>43 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח כֹּל־בֶּן־נֹכַר לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ: 44 וְכֹל־עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְנֵת־כֶּסֶף וּמִלֶּתָה אֹתוֹ אֲזַיֹּאכַל בּוֹ: 45 תוֹשֵׁב וְשִׂכָר לֹא־יֹאכַל־בּוֹ: 46 בְּבַיִת אֶחָד יֹאכַל לֹא תוֹצִיא מִן־הַבַּיִת מִן־הַבֶּשֶׂר חוּצָה וְעֶצֶם לֹא תִשְׁבְּרוּ־בּוֹ: 47 כֹּל־עֵדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ: 48 וְכִי־יִגֹּר אִתְּךָ גֵר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה הַמּוֹלֵל לוֹ כֹּל־זֶכֶר וְאֵז יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ וְהָיָה פְּאִזְרַח הָאָרֶץ וְכֹל־עַרְל לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ: 49 תוֹרָה אֶחָת יְהִי לַאֲזַרְחָ וְלַגֵּר הֹגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם: 50 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֹל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן כִּן עָשׂוּ: 50</p>

Continuing with the circumcision in the post-exilic period and the analysis of the Priestly text, Exodus 12:43 - 50 is part of the text on which I will now be conducting my next verse-by-verse analysis. As I mentioned above, the subject matter is circumcision; I will not be focusing on the whole Exodus 12 text, but only on the passage that deals with or mentions circumcision.

Verses 43 - 45: In this part of the text, I get the regulations for those who may observe the Passover festival and partake in the Passover meal, since the Israelites expressed their exclusiveness over other peoples or nations which were non-Israelite (Lev. 20:23 - 26; Ezra 9 - 10; Neh. 13). The inclusivity sounds like there is an inconsistency in Israel's ideology. Kelly (2013:161 - 162) puts it nicely when he says:

Whatever historical circumstances result in the presence of the גֵר among the Israelites, it creates a cultic and moral dilemma for a people whose self-identity is frequently maintained throughout the Hebrew Bible over and against other nations and peoples (e.g., Lev. 20:23 - 26; Ezra 9 - 10; Neh. 13). From this perspective, the move to incorporate the גֵר into the cultic life of Israel as an expression of divine liberation is one of great significance.

Since the idea of total exclusion of outsiders (foreigners) is not expressed, I will not dwell further on it. Rather, I will focus on the fact that there is a condition for their inclusion, which is circumcision. These foreigners are known as the "Gēr". Meyer (2015:100) defines them as follows:

The *gēr* is someone who comes from outside Israel or Judah and eventually settles there.

Those foreigners who are circumcised are considered as part of those Israelites who may observe and partake in the Passover meal. Kelly (2013:160) says that:

The distinctions exist between the Israelites and the "mixed multitude" (עַרְבֵי רַבָּ) v. 33) who accompany them, the distinction between the גֵר and the אֲזָרָה would more appropriately distinguish Egyptians from Israelites, not Israelites from those who reside among them.

Kelly (2013:160) goes on to say that multitudes that resided among the Israelites were distinguished in this way: “the son of a foreigner” (בְּכֵן), “the slave” (עֶבֶד), “the sojourner”, (תּוֹשֵׁב) “the day-labourer” (שָׂכִיר), and the גֵר.

On this note, Coogan (2010:100) says:

A slave who is purchased is circumcised and considered part of the household.

Smith (2017:181) describes this matter as follows:

Ancient Israelite households could include non-Israelites (specifically servants), and the Priestly tradition here clarifies who is eligible to participate in the Passover.

Nevertheless, Walton et al. (2000:88) bring a different perspective to the passage. They suggest that in verse 38, Israel was joined by foreigners. Therefore, these foreigners became part of Israel. In this suggestion I get the point that was mentioned in verse 43. There were also slaves bought by money which were to be included in the participation of Passover. On the same note, Childs (1974:202) says:

The present position following the exodus narrative may have arisen from the redactor's concern to specify at this point the qualifications for participation in the future feast, mentioned in v. 42. Moreover, the exodus of a large mixed multitude with Israel (v. 38), who had presumably not participated in the first Passover, but now joined Israel would have made the issue of the non-Israelite role an acute one.

In explaining Walton et al. (2000:88)'s as well as Childs' statements, Dozeman (2009:285) says:

The majority of 12:43 - 49 provides commentary on the notice in the Non-P History that the departure out of Egypt included both Israelites and a "mixed group" (12:38). The clarification concerning participants is offered as a divine speech to Moses and Aaron, a common literary feature in the P History. The perspective of the divine speech is from the Israelites' life in the promised land, not their present state as homeless pilgrims. The P writer delineates the nature of the mixed group, sorting out those who may participate in the

Passover. The Passover is a family ritual in the P History. Thus, by clarifying who is allowed to participate in the ritual of Passover, the section also states who might be included in the family or "congregation." The communal nature of the festival is underscored in v. 47 with the command that "the whole congregation of the Israelites" must celebrate the Passover. Circumcision is key to participation in the Passover and to entry into the congregation.

I am fascinated by the fact that the outsiders are categorised into: first, "the Servants bought by money", who when circumcised, can participate in the Passover. Secondly "the sojourners" who are not allowed to participate, and thirdly "the hired slaves" who are also not allowed to participate in the Passover and partake in the Passover meal. Though there are different categories of non-Israelites in this text, the distinction is unified by circumcision. Circumcision is the platform that brings them into being one and the same people or qualifies them to observe this Israelite ritual and festival. In this text, circumcision seems like this powerful entity that is able to totally change the nature of people. Without circumcision an outsider is alienated but with circumcision his alienated nature is totally changed, and he is accepted to participate as an Israelite. I am not going to elaborate further on the issue of the distinction between the non-Israelites. My argument was to highlight on which of the outsiders, or the non-Israelites, were allowed to participate in the Passover and circumcision.

Verses 46 - 48: The animal that is slaughtered had to be eaten in a particular manner and in a specified position. The regulations are specified as "the bones need not to be broken" and "the flesh is not to be taken outside" rather it should be eaten inside the house. All those sharing the same lamb were to eat it together and to remain indoors (Tigay, 2004:131). Regarding the breaking of the bones, Ndjerareou (2016:247) suggest that:

The purpose of these instructions of not breaking the bones of the animal being sacrificed could also be to make sure that the animal's skeleton remains whole as a reminder that it absolutely was an ideal sacrifice, with no defect, offered on their behalf.

Walton et al. (2000:88) interpret it this way:

First, only those who have been circumcised may participate. This indicates that it is a festival only for the community of Israel. Second, is the command

that none of the meat be taken outside the house, and third, is that no bones be broken. Both of these concern ways that the meal might be shared with other non-community members, which is disallowed. The lamb must be cooked whole, in the house.

These regulations and instructions are to be kept by the whole congregation of Israel. The congregation of Israel or the community may contain non-Israelites (cf. Smith, 2017:181). Propp (1999:437) puts it more profoundly:

Moreover, the verb *higgîa`*, connoting the application of the paschal blood to the Hebrews' door frames and the blood of circumcision to Moses' penis (4:25), also describes the purification (*kipper*) of Isaiah's mouth by fire (Isa. 6:7). In the Exodus account, then, the paschal blood may not avert the Destroyer by its own virtue. Rather, it may create a zone of ritual purity attractive to Yahweh's presence.

It is intriguing that the strangers or non-Israelites are not obligated to participate in the Passover. It sounds like they can participate if they want to. Therefore, the males who are willing to participate, have to be circumcised. After being circumcised these outsiders are to be treated in the same manner as an Israelite. Tigay (2004:131) puts it this way:

Resident aliens, though they must abstain from leaven (v. 19), are not obligated to offer a *pesah* sacrifice but may do so voluntarily. They must first undergo circumcision. Then they may make the offering and become "as a citizen of the country," at least for purposes of this offering. This is not a full religious conversion; the stranger's motivation is to make a *pesah* offering, not to become an Israelite-but since circumcision is a sign of the covenant, and the sacrifice celebrates the exodus, he must first become a quasi-Israelite in order to identify with Israel's defining national experience.

Dozeman (1996:122) says:

All of the congregation of Israel (כל-עַרְוֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) must participate in Passover, while any purchased slave (עַבְד) and resident alien (גֵר) may also participate in Passover, if having undergone circumcision. Furthermore, if a resident alien (גֵר) undergoes circumcision, that person must be treated as a native (אֲזֵרָת).

Verses 49 - 50: At this point the Israelites as well as the non-Israelites are to adhere to the same regulations. Indeed, the prohibition against participation by the uncircumcised in v. 48b and the concluding formula in v. 49 emphasise the importance of circumcision for all who participate, both stranger and native (Coats, 1999:93).

Circumcision is the common ground that brings the Israelite and non-Israelite into unison. Once every male is circumcised, whether an Israelite, a sojourner, a hired slave, or a servant bought by money, they may all participate in the Passover. But all who are not circumcised are not allowed to participate in the Passover. Finally, on all these Passover regulations, the people respond with complete obedience to the instructions that God gave to Moses. Their new freedom is a freedom to listen to and obey the commands of God. (Ndjerareou, 2016:247)

This is thus the perspective of Exodus regarding circumcision, and circumcision in this text is linked to the Passover. It sounds like circumcision is the rite of passage to participating in the Passover and partaking in the Passover meal. Propp (1999:420) puts it this way:

The requirement to circumcise slaves before admitting them to the *Pesah* should rarely have been invoked, since slaves were supposed to already be circumcised. The same would be true for the "sojourner". This is the essence of the "*Pesah* Rule": all men, whether free Israelite, slave, or sojourner, must be circumcised to celebrate the *Pesah*.

On the rite of circumcision and its relation to the *Pesah*, Coats (1999:92 - 93) says:

The ORDER for eating the Passover, set in the middle of the unit (w. 46 - 47), introduces incidental requirements, not noted in 12:1 – 11, and then emphasises the importance of keeping the festival. The unique item in this ordinance, then, is the emphasis on circumcision as a preparation for the Passover by slaves and strangers. Indeed, the PROHIBITION against participation by the uncircumcised in v. 48b and the concluding formula in v. 49 emphasise the importance of circumcision for all who participate, both stranger and native.

In the above text, the writer mentions that in order for one to keep the Passover, one has to undergo circumcision. This circumcision requirement is inclusive for it allows non-Israelites to participate in Passover. Though Walton et al. (2000:88) interpret the text literally, Dozeman (1996:122) mentions that the part of Exodus he is dealing with is part of the Priestly text and if so, the text cannot be interpreted literally, because the text was probably composed during the exilic period through to the post-exilic period, long after the events which are recorded in the text.

This leads us to the other approach with regard to circumcision which is in Leviticus 12:1-4.

3.6. Leviticus 12:1 - 4

English translation (ASV)	Hebrew text
<p>And the Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, ^[2] Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman conceives seed, and bears a man-child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of the impurity of her sickness shall she be unclean. ^[3] And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. ^[4] And she shall continue in the blood of purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification be fulfilled.</p>	<p>1 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 2 דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדַת דָּוְתָהּ תִטְמָא: 3 וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשָׂר עַרְלָתוֹ: 4 וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדַמֵּי טְהָרָה בְּכָל-קֹדֶשׁ לֹא-תִגַּע וְאֶל-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תָבֹא עַד-מִלֵּאת יְמֵי טְהָרָה:</p>

Although this text talks about the purification of a woman after birth, I will not focus on this issue of uncleanness and purification, since my focus is on the circumcision of the male infant.

Verses 1 - 2: According to this passage a woman becomes unclean after giving birth, but no reason is given.

The text itself does not provide a hint; it merely states that the condition makes the mother temporarily inadmissible to worship. It is thus a ritual condition and not a moral one (Bailey 2005:156). Nevertheless Gane (2012:27) suggests that:

This impurity arises from the genital flow of blood that normally follows birth.

Hartley (1992:167) has a similar understanding when saying:

The laws of ritual purity alter the bearing of a child, each due to its critical position in human life and due to uncleanness from physical secretions; e.g., menstruation renders a lady unclean for seven days (15:19). The afterbirth, the ongoing discharge of blood, and the mother's bodily weak spot are ominous factors of parturition. A mother of a son is unclean for seven days, while a mother of a daughter is unclean for fourteen days. Seven is a prominent number, symbolising perfection. The reason for the greater length of uncleanness for bearing a girl is not stated. Some suppose that the ancients thought that giving birth to a girl was fraught with greater danger.

Owens (2017:240) puts it in a more profound manner:

The blood of menstruation and childbirth ultimately bespeaks holiness, not displeasure or rejection. The emphasis is not on defilement but purification and restoration. Blood "defilement" here is a condition that must be set aright to bring healing and harmony to the family and community.

Verses 3 - 4: After giving birth to a son, a new mother was ceremonially unclean for seven days (12:2). On the eighth day after birth, the baby boy was to be circumcised in obedience with Genesis 17:12 (Rooker, 2000:302). Rooker here suggests that the eighth day circumcision in this text is a direct adherence of the command in Genesis. However, Glick (2005:36) has a different explanation as to why circumcision should take place on the eighth day when he says:

On the eighth day, when the child has been free of contact with female blood for a full week, he is in a ritually neutral state and eligible for the first time for initiation into the world of males. Thus, the infant is the hope of his father's

patrilineage, a promise of future reproduction and continuity is retrieved, or redeemed, as it were, from the ill effects of contact with his mother's blood. We see now that the ultimate meaning of circumcision resides not just in foreskin removal but in shedding of blood.

When reasoning the infant circumcision in the Leviticus text Glick (2005:36) says:

For the first seven days he is in a state of impurity because he has been in such intimate contact with his mother's body and blood.

These two suggestions as to why "eighth-day circumcision", are both convincing. Therefore, since these are part of the Priestly text, I believe there is a common understanding regarding this practice of circumcision. As Rooker and Glick just have different interpretations of the text, and since the text itself does not give us a reason for infant circumcision, it is difficult to give a certain answer to the question at hand. Glick (2005:22) has another speculation regarding infant circumcision for Israelites. He notes that since circumcision is a form of sacrifice, or an illustration of sacrifice, would it be possible if it were instituted as a substitution or alternative for infant sacrifice? Although this sounds unlikely, the reality is that infant sacrifice changed into being extensively practiced in historical Canaan, and there may be no appropriate cause to count on that the Israelites differed in this regard from their neighbours.

About the purification of a mother after birth and the circumcision of the infant boy in verse 4, Milgrom (1991:746 - 747) argues:

This verse, which switches from the mother to the boy, is clearly an editorial parenthesis that interrupts the prescriptive ritual for the mother. Nor can it be claimed that the circumcision is a purificatory rite for the boy and thus comparable to the purificatory rites enjoined upon his mother, for there is no equivalent rite for a newly born girl. The purpose of this interpolation is to emphasise the uniqueness of this rite; not the rite itself, which was practiced ubiquitously by Israel's Semitic neighbours, but the timing of the rite, which in Israel alone was performed in infancy and, precisely, on the eighth day.

Since it is unclear as to why the Israelites instituted infant circumcision, and is known is when infant circumcision was instituted, I think Glick tried to give us a picture of

what happened. Not to say that he is accurate in this, rather he has somehow given us a direction to look to. On the issue of circumcision replacing child sacrifice, Glick (2005:24) suggests that:

Finally, on this subject: Child sacrifice probably disappeared from Israelite religion, once and for all, during the sixth century BCE: the very time when the Priestly class authors of the P text, redactors of the Torah, creators of the equivalence between circumcision and covenant were establishing their theocracy. Thus, in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, active in the years just before and after 600 BCE, we find Yahweh not only condemning child sacrifice but denying that he had ever favoured such a practice.

In this, Glick suggests that child sacrifice was once practised by the Israelites and disappeared during the period of the authorship of the Priestly text, which is what makes him think that infant circumcision might have replaced that kind of practice.

Finally, after the male infant has been circumcised, the mother remains unclean for thirty-three days. In all, the days of her uncleanness amounts to forty days. However, for a female infant it is longer: a total of 66 days. This text does not say much about circumcision except that the male infant is to be circumcised on the eighth day. Rather, it focuses on the purification of the mother after giving birth. We need not look at this purification ritual negatively or whether she sinned by giving birth, even though she is treated as if she sinned. On this, Glick (2005:36) notes that:

We learn in the same chapter 12 of Leviticus that the mother herself was treated much as though she had sinned. She was required to undergo a period of purification, after which she brought to the Temple a lamb as a “burnt offering” and a pigeon as a “sin offering,” both sacrificed “to make expiation on her behalf.” She was then “clean from her flow of blood.”

I do not agree with Glick when he says that the infant’s mother is treated as a sinner for there is no sin or sinner mentioned in this passage of the text. However, she is regarded as impure or rather, unclean, which has nothing to do with sin. Whitekettle (1995:394-395) says “the fact that the discharge is the result of the act of parturition, and involves the female reproductive system, was apparently regarded as extraneous”. The approach to the problem of Leviticus 12 is justified by the impression that Levitical understanding believed all bodily discharges are defiling.

However, Gane (2012:27) brings a positive view when saying:

A female's need for purification does not devalue her as a human being. She is the source of precious new life, but through no fault of her own it is mortal life. So, she needs only cleansing from her impurity (12:7–8), not forgiveness.

In this text, though my focus was to find the significance for circumcision, the focus of the text is not necessarily on infant circumcision. Rather, it focuses more on the purification of the mother. This purification is to be performed days after giving birth, and it is the giving of birth that causes the mother to be unclean. Gane explained it nicely above that she does not need forgiveness, rather she needs cleansing, for she is not regarded as a sinner.

3.7. Conclusion

Dealing with ancient literature is not a simple exercise because there are a couple of barriers. Firstly, the language that was used by the ancient people was not like the language used in modern times. There are some words that were used by the ancient people that are not easy to translate into our language, and there are concepts which were understood in ancient times that are difficult for us to even grasp. Secondly, the scholars of today are not the primary audiences for whom the ancient writings were written, thus one cannot fully understand most of the things that are addressed in the writings of the ancient people.

Regarding circumcision in this chapter, I have discovered that though this practice was not new in the exilic / post-exilic period, it was given a new meaning within this period. After the Judeans were deported to Babylonia they felt like they lost their identity, for their identity was based on their temple in Jerusalem and their leadership which was the Davidic dynasty, even though these were the only institutions in Israel, they were the key institutions.

During the exilic / post-exilic periods there were groups; those who were left behind (the poor) and those that were deported (the nobles of Judah). Within the deported group there were two groups; those that Carr (2011) says they assimilated the

Babylonian into the culture, and those who seemed to refuse becoming like the rest of the nations. Out of this whole situation a new community began to emerge which was not like the Old Judeans' community and their cult had to be given a different meaning.

It was in this reconstituted society that male infant circumcision became a religiously mandated requirement. Circumcision became one of the tools that this new community used to identify themselves. Though the Judeans were not the only people who practised circumcision, they seemed to have found theirs unique from the other nations, especially since the Babylonians were said to have not practised circumcision, their emphasis on circumcision made them obviously different from the Babylonians.

One of the groups of authors of the exilic / post- exilic period is known as the Priestly authors, hence one of the documents produced in this period is known as the Priestly text, or perhaps these authors are the editors of the old traditions of Israel's history? With regard to the texts on which I have conducted analysis in this study, most scholars agree that they belong to the Priestly text.

On the analysis of Genesis 17:9 - 14 regarding circumcision, I have discovered that: the (covenant) *ברית*-promises that predominate in the pericope are clearly linked to the circumcision command, as Bernat (2009) says. Also, this covenant that Abraham has to keep is for himself alone, but it extends to the generations to come. It is in this text that circumcision appears to be the Abrahamic sign. Most scholars agree that this practice was actually new in the post-exilic period. However, it is in this period that the practice was given a new meaning. The exile brought about a realisation that there was a need for a new meaning to their own practice of circumcision to make theirs as different as possible from that of other peoples. They did not only give a new meaning, rather they gave circumcision a theological meaning.

Regarding the eighth day of circumcision, scholars have different views as to why. However, Brayford (2007:307) and Arnold (1998:98) give a very convincing answer when they say:

The exile brought this new meaning to their own practice of circumcision in order to make theirs as different as possible to other peoples.

In Exodus 12:43 - 50, circumcision is understood as a sort of licence to participate in the Passover festival. In the text it is clear that no one is allowed to take part in this festival unless they are circumcised. The fascinating thing is the fact that the outsiders are categorised into first “the servants bought by money”, who when circumcised, can participate in the Passover. Secondly, “the sojourners” who are not allowed to participate. Thirdly, “the hired slaves” who are also not allowed to participate in the Passover and partake in the Passover meal. The strangers or non-Israelites however are not obligated to participate in the Passover. It sounds like they must participate out of their own willingness. Therefore, the males who are willing to participate must be circumcised.

Circumcision in this text is the common ground that brings the Israelite and non-Israelite into unison. Once every male is circumcised, whether an Israelite, a sojourner, a hired slave, or a slave bought by money, they may participate in the Passover, meaning that all who are not circumcised are not allowed to participate in the Passover.

Finally, in Leviticus 12:1 – 4, circumcision is said to be performed on infant boys of eight days old. There are a couple of speculations as to why this command came about. Rooker (2000) suggests that the infant boy of eight days old is to be circumcised as obedience to the command in Genesis 17. Glick (2005) says that the boy infant on the eighth day is in a ritually neutral state and eligible for the first time for initiation into the world of males. He says further that the infant circumcision may be the replacement for the infant sacrifice.

The text itself does not give any clue as to why circumcision should be performed on infant boys. Subsequently, there is quite a lot of uncertainty regarding the suggestions that Rooker (2000) and Glick (2005) give in this matter. To support his suggestion, Glick (2005) says that:

Child sacrifice probably disappeared from Israelite religion, once and for all, during the sixth century BCE, the very time when the Priestly class authors of the P text, redactors of the Torah, creators of the equivalence between circumcision and covenant, were establishing their theocracy.

It is unclear whether the infant circumcision in this text is an adherence to the command in Genesis 17, or the substitution or replacement of child sacrifices. What I

have noticed is that the text's emphasis is on the purification of the mother after giving birth.

Finally, in this part of the study, the answers to the significance of circumcision is that it is a mark or a sign of Abrahamic covenant according to Genesis 17. According to Exodus 12, circumcision is a pre-requisite for participation in the Passover festival and meal. Lastly In Genesis 17 and in Leviticus, circumcision must be performed on eight-day-old infant boys, while in Exodus 12, no age is mentioned for circumcision.

Chapter 4: Review of literature on the Xhosa practice of circumcision.

4.1. Introduction

For this part of the study, I will look at the amaXhosa perspective on circumcision. By doing this, I want to understand the ideas behind their circumcision practice.

Conversely, before I explore the circumcision practice of the amaXhosa people I think it is important to know something about these people. Who are these people and in which part of South Africa do they reside?

The amaXhosa people are a group of clans residing in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. According to Transkei and Ciskei (1987:142):

The Xhosa-speakers are a subgroup of the Cape Nguni, the southernmost representatives of the Bantu-speaking family of peoples who are preponderant in Africa south of the equator.

The amaXhosa tribe is one of South Africa's largest tribal communities and makes up approximately 18 percent of a national population estimated at 51 million (in 2015) (James 2015:31). On the same note Kugara et al. (2020:170) say that:

The Xhosa tribe have their own identity, and this makes them unique from other tribes. Their values, norms and rituals like initiation schools give Xhosas a sense of belonging together as the Xhosas because the values, norms as well as customs have a meaning attached to them and it is how they are identified as a social group.

The amaXhosa are known for the clicking sounds in their language which is called isiXhosa, according to Nyamende (2019:202):

isiXhosa is the mainstream indigenous language in the Cape Province (including Ciskei and Transkei), the aforementioned variants are found in restricted areas in the Eastern Cape.

The Cape Province that Nyamende is talking about is the current Eastern Cape province. The structural make-up of these people is made of clans. The clanship

among the isiXhosa-speaking people seems to be of utmost importance. Jonas (1986:58) explains the importance of clanship among the isiXhosa-speaking people as follows:

Clans among the Xhosa may be described as patrilineal, exogamous, dispersed units of people claiming descent from a common ancestor, characterised by a common clan name, reciprocal use of kinship terms among clansmen, and behaviour according to kinship relations, while they do not form groups with organised solidarity in respect of economic, political, and religious activities. From the analysis it appears that clanship among the Xhosa is primarily significant in connection with aspects of thought categories that directly concern human beings and the relations between them, i.e., the Self, society as a domain of the Other, interpersonal relations, and classification of people, while its relevance for other worldview components is less explicit.

The amaXhosa clans live in their homesteads arranged to accommodate the whole family clan. The arrangement of the homestead is described by Perry (2013:117) as follows:

The *umzi*, or homestead, can be characterised as having several huts (or residential sites), a garden plot adjacent to the huts, a cattle kraal and livestock, tools and equipment, agricultural storage huts, other implements for farming, and / or (an) agricultural field(s).

Since the history of this group of people was not recorded or written down, there is no certainty as to when this amaXhosa tribe emerged. I am not sure whether before the amaXhosa people emerged they were ruled by a king, or whether they had any leadership structure for that matter.

Nevertheless, Peires (2012:336) has some understanding as to when the amaXhosa royalty emerged. He says that the royalty of the amaXhosa began when Tshawe rebelled against his older brother Cirha and overthrew him. From there he established the amaTshawe as amaXhosa's royal clan (cf. Peires, 1976:7). The amaXhosa narratives were passed from generation to generation orally, they were not recorded in writing when these events took place. Peires (1976:10) describes them as follows:

There are three types of Xhosa oral traditions directly related to history: genealogies (*iminombo*), praises (*izibongo*) and tales (*amabali*, singular *ibali*). The genealogy is today the most highly esteemed and politically relevant of these.

Peires (1976:12) says further:

The most important historical vehicle in Xhosa oral tradition is the *ibali*, or tale. *Amabali* may be remembered because they explain how certain present circumstances came to exist. The story of Tshawe, for instance, tells how the amaTshawe came to be the royal house.

This probably took place in the eighth or ninth generation before King Hintsa was born, maybe around 1550, as the genealogies of both Cirha and Tshawe indicates but there is absolutely no clear indication of this event; this is just an estimation (Peires, 2012:336). This sounds as if before Tshawe, the amaXhosa people had no well-established royalty. Transkei and Ciskei (1987:142) says:

The original Xhosa had settled in Transkei during the seventeenth century. By 1700 their vanguard tribes had crossed the Great Kei and settled among the Khoisan groups in present-day Ciskei. These early migrants were followed by Rarabe and his people after Rarabe and his brother Gcaleka had fought over the chieftainship of the Tshawe (the senior Xhosa tribe), thereby splitting the tribe into two groups - a division persisting to this day. The Transkei Xhosa are sometimes referred to as the Gcaleka (pronounced Galeka) and those in Ciskei as the Rarabe (pronounced Gagabe), after their eighteenth-century leaders.

On the matter of immigration, the new areas into which the amaXhosa moved were not empty and the indigenous population was not expelled but incorporated into the amaXhosa polity. It cannot be said that the amaXhosa political system led to underutilisation of ecological resources (Peires, 1976:8). As isiXhosa has developed into a written language through amaXhosa contact with nineteenth-century missionaries, it supplanted the dialects of other Nguni groups in Transkei such as the Bomvana, Mpondo, Mpondomise, Mfengu, Thembu, etc (Transkei and Ciskei, 1987:142). In light of this information, it appears as though these were the tribes

which were incorporated into the amaXhosa policy. It would also appear that the policy is one of including other Nguni groups into becoming one with them.

I will not conduct a thorough investigation on the history of the amaXhosa people, for this study is not intended for their history, rather for the part of their cultural practice of circumcision and tradition. This was just a brief clarity about the amaXhosa people, which I believe is important in understanding who these people are before I can engage on the purpose of this part of the study.

The actual purpose of this part of the study is to engage in the understanding and the perspective of the amaXhosa people on circumcision. For this is one of the practices that is identified with them, or they identify themselves with this practice, as Vincent (2008:77) puts it:

The South African Xhosa ethnic group, the majority of whom live in the country's Eastern Cape province, are one of several ethnic groups in southern Africa that practise the ritual of circumcision as part of a rite admitting boys to manhood.

Conversely, they are not the only tribe in South Africa to practise circumcision but for this study I will focus on them. The reason for this is that I am Xhosa and that this part of the study is of interest in studying their way of practising circumcision.

By doing so I want to understand how they define circumcision in their context and what it meant to them. Finally, what are their objectives for practising circumcision i.e., what do they want to achieve when an individual undergoes circumcision?

It is understood that male circumcision for the amaXhosa is one of the most important practices. (Froneman & Kapp, 2017:1) says:

Significant stigma is attached both to failed initiates and uninitiated people. Boys must be successfully initiated to marry, inherit property or participate in cultural activities such as offering sacrifices and community discussions.

Vincent (2008:432) puts it clearly when he says that "Ritual male circumcision is among the most secretive and sacred of rites practised by the Xhosa of South Africa."

4.2. Definition of terms

To understand circumcision in the amaXhosa context, culture, and tradition, I must first understand how they define it. In doing this I will look at the terminologies they used to describe circumcision. These terminologies will help me to understand the meaning of the amaXhosa circumcision practice.

For the amaXhosa, circumcision is just a part of a broad custom which is their initiation into manhood (cf. Meel, 2005:58) and they call this *isiko lolwaluko* (custom of initiation). The isiXhosa words *isiko lokwaluka* (which are difficult to translate directly into English without losing some of the concept's meaning) better describe the initiation custom as a process with strong social and religious implications (Ntombana, 2011:633). Ntozini and Abdullahi (2016:190-191) note:

Ulwaluko is usually celebrated ceremoniously. It is conducted outside the domain of modern medicine and handled by traditional practitioners known as *ingcibi* (traditional surgeon) and *ikhankatha* (traditional nurse or initiate's caretaker).

To clearly understand the terms mentioned above in a broad manner I need to understand the definition of the term *Isiko*. Ntombana (2011:633) explains it as follows: "*Isiko* (custom or rite) is a very religious and spiritual practice, which connects African people to God and the ancestors.", while "*ulwaluko*" is translated as 'initiation' in English (c.f Ngumbela, 2021:194). Based on this definition I now understand that to the amaXhosa, the custom of initiation is as much spiritual as it is a physical practice. On this, Venter (2011:568) mentions that: "The connectedness between individual, the environment and the spiritual world is a unifying aspect among the amaXhosa."

The other term is *ukwaluka* which Nkosi (2008:142) explains as follows:

Ukwaluka is a Xhosa word implying the 'cutting' of flesh, which refers to the customary practice of male circumcision. The practice entails the ritualised process of cutting a specific section of the foreskin.

Ukwaluka in the amaXhosa understanding, is similar to the scientific definition of circumcision. On this definition, Rugwiji (2014:239) says: “In scientific terms, circumcision is described as the surgical removal of the foreskin (prepuce) from the human penis.”

Above, I have given a general understanding on the circumcision in an initiation context. Conversely, initiation and circumcision are two different things. Circumcision on its own is a part of some initiation rites within the amaXhosa community. To make things a little clearer, I will give some separate definitions of both initiation and circumcision. Twala (2007:24) gives us a clear and simple definition of initiation:

Initiation is a step whereby the initiates are incorporated into, and acquire the various statuses, rights and privileges vested in a discrete group of individuals who co-operate in certain activities, share common property and are conscious of their existence as an organised body.

Kugara et al. (2020:168) say:

Initiation rites are transition rites which raise a person from a lower position in community to a higher position. Nearly the majority of these communities are of the view that initiation rites mark the transition from one stage of life to another. Initiation rites indicate a responsibility to monitor the youth from the childhood phase to the adulthood phase.

Regarding circumcision, Twala (2007:24) says:

Circumcision is one of the activities performed by traditional surgeons (*ingcibi*) in an initiation school, and it entails cutting an initiate’s foreskin.

To understand the initiation, it should not be thought that it has something to do with gender, however, it should be understood that it has something to do with institutions or groups. For example, if someone joins a certain group or institution, that individual must be initiated into the group in order to have a clear knowledge with regard to that group. In this case, initiation is in a cultural context, i.e., an individual initiated into the culture to be taught certain aspects of that particular culture. To think that initiation is only about circumcision, and that circumcision and initiation are one thing, might be confusing for one to understand these two different entities. However, generally these are two different entities but in the isiXhosa language these are inseparable.

You cannot talk of initiation without circumcision, and you cannot talk of circumcision separately to initiation. Twala (2007:24) gives a rather broad understanding of initiation:

Rites associated with birth, puberty, marriage and death, stress change of individual status rather than change of group membership. These rites are usually performed separately for each individual at the appropriate moment in the life cycle. Initiation, by contrast, normally takes place at a set interval for a number of candidates simultaneously. The failure to make a clear distinction between puberty rites and initiation is a result of the fact that initiation is performed at about the age of puberty. One of the primary functions of the rites is to emphasise the social distinction between adult men and women, which is why they are likely to be performed at the age at which the differences between the sexes become most apparent.

So, for the purpose of this study I will use the following definition of initiation: it is a rite whereby an individual (adolescent boy in this case) is initiated to undergo circumcision. Circumcision refers to the actual removal of the foreskin or prepuce from the male organ of that individual. These two terms in the amaXhosa communities are sometimes used interchangeably depending on the context at a particular time. Ngumbela (2021:196) explains it this way:

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs concludes that circumcision can be best explained as initiation rather than as circumcision.

Based on this conclusion I will now look at the overview of the amaXhosa circumcision and initiation.

4.3. Xhosa overview of circumcision and initiation

According to Twala (2007:26) “An initiation school is open to young males who have reached puberty, but in some cases adults, married or unmarried, with or without children, can also attend such a school.” This option is for some individuals who

have not yet received a chance to attend the initiation school while they were still young. The traditional initiation and circumcision are widely practised by the amaXhosa tribe throughout South Africa. This is an ancient practice or rite of initiation into manhood (Ngumbela, 2021:194).

In different societies there is a view that a person has different stages of development, and therefore there are certain processes that a particular individual undergoes. These processes are known as the rites of passage. When I speak of rites of passage, I am implicitly invoking the spatial metaphor. The image is that of a person passing between two adjacent places (Grimes, 2000:104). According to Birx (2006:2013):

Rituals called rites of passage mark one's transition through the various stages in life, from as early as conception throughout life until death, and even afterwards. They mediate and signify changes in individuals' lives, conferring on them identity and status in their communities, taking them from one state of physical and social being to a greater one. At the same time, these rituals validate the traditions, values, and hierarchy of the culture.

These rites are used in order to differentiate individuals at different stages of life. For example, an infant is distinguished from an adolescent. Van Gennep (1960:2-3) puts it this way:

The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another.

As I have mentioned before, in amaXhosa communities for an adolescent boy to be transitioned to the next stage, he must undergo initiation and circumcision.

Regarding rituals, Birx (2006:2013) says:

Prior to the puberty ritual, young boys and girls are viewed as children; they generally have few responsibilities or powers and relatively few distinctions.

Though there are distinctions between people, tribes, age groupings and / or organisations, the rites of passage are a common ground which brings all the distinctions into unison. Rubin (2004:6) suggests that:

Inasmuch as 'the mundane order' is always one of conflict and competition - power inequality based on age, gender, ethnicity - ritual should also be the arena for dramatisation of conflict.

Bossard and Boll (1948:247) put it better this way:

Passage from one stage to another involves corresponding changes in the individual's habitual interaction system. To facilitate such passages and to restore equilibrium after the more critical ones, various peoples develop group techniques which take the form of commemorative ceremonial rites. Such rites are commonly designated as Rites of Passage,

The rites of passage are meant for someone or perhaps a group to be initiated into a different path. With this understanding I can get that such an individual or group has to be transitioned into a whole new situation. If this is the case, I will understand that the rites of passage have different stages. There are three stages into which all rites of passage are divided: rites of separation (from the old situation); rites of transition; and rites of assimilation (into the new situation) (Bossard & Boll, 1948:247). Grimes (2000:104-105) comments about Van Gennep's understanding of rites:

In some of Van Gennep's examples, social passage is not only like territorial passage but requires it, literally. If a boy does not 'go to the bush', he cannot return a man. In other examples it does not seem that Van Gennep believed that separation is necessarily geographical; it may be purely symbolic. Thus, his fundamental point is not so much that one must go away to make a change but that a rite of passage is a phased process of transition making, a "movement" from one social "space" to another: from girl to woman, boy to man, layperson to clergy, outsider to insider.

Regarding the rites of passage, especially the rites of passage for puberty, Bossard and Boll (1948: 252) say:

They are, in a way, as selective as the processes in primitive puberty rituals which train a specific individual for whatever adult role, he seems equipped, in that these begin to reveal the particular niche into which each debutante will fit.

In the amaXhosa communities throughout South Africa, a male who is not initiated and circumcised is not taken seriously and is often referred to as a boy. Ngumbela (2021:194) notes that:

An uninitiated male, irrespective of his age, is commonly referred to as *inkwenkwe* (boy) and is not permitted to take part in any adult male activities such as tribal meetings. (cf. Gwata, 2009:12).

On the same note, Ntombana (2011:635) says:

Expressions such as '*inkwekwe yinja*' (the boy is a dog) heard in Xhosa communities imply that anyone who is not circumcised is not regarded as a human being in the community; the person who has not gone through initiation, has no moral standards.

This is because in an amaXhosa community, initiation is regarded as an institution whereby the initiates are taught about morals, and therefore, they are expected to have high moral standards. Magodyo et al. (2016:6) suggest that it is the older amaXhosa men who have authority to teach moral values and provide mentorship to younger men during and after the ritual.

A 'boy' in this instance has nothing to do with age; rather, it has everything to do with a male individual who has not undergone initiation and circumcision. A clear distinction is made between the one who has not been circumcised (*inkwenkwe*) and the one who has been circumcised (*indoda*) (Ntombana, 2011:635). Vincent (2008:432) says that:

Xhosa boys are aware from a young age that initiation is regarded as an inevitable part of life. In Xhosa custom, ritual circumcision is performed most commonly on men ranging between the ages of 15 and 25.

These are the age groups that are supposed to undergo the practice of initiation and circumcision. Nevertheless, as mentioned above there are those individuals who would undergo it at a later stage. Initiation is understood as a learning institution among the amaXhosa people as they describe their initiates as *abakhwetha* (*aba* means a community, and *kwetha* means learning). A single male is recognised as an *umkhwetha* in the party (Ngumbela, 2021:194). Regarding circumcision, Vincent (2008:79) says:

Traditionally, the circumcision ritual is a complex one involving a number of different stages, each with its own closely policed regulations and requirements.

For the amaXhosa people, when someone goes through initiation it is like someone who goes through a learning process. On this, James (2015:31) mentions that:

Their most significant traditional rite is the process which a young boy must go through to become a man - known as *Ulwaluko*. This rite includes a period of living in seclusion (normally in an isolated area, under adverse conditions), circumcision and cultural orientation. This process includes the teaching of knowledge, sentiments, skills, and values of the culture through a system of “tough love” or what could be called “positive practices”, which reputedly will provide the boys with the resources they will need in their adult lives.

The amaXhosa initiation traditional rite which is known as *Ulwaluko*, whereby boys are initiated into becoming men. This process is not about being circumcised, rather it is where these boys are taught a lot of things and skills they need as men of the amaXhosa society.

4.4. The meaning of Circumcision for the amaXhosa

Just like in any other culture, the different practices that are performed have meaning and history. For instance, in Genesis 17, circumcision is portrayed as the mark of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Though I have explained above that initiation and circumcision are two different entities, for this part of the study, I will not separate the two because it is not an easy thing to speak of circumcision without speaking of initiation. For that matter, in the amaXhosa culture these two are never separated. The two phrases or words are used interchangeably. For when one speaks of *isiko lolwaluko* (initiation custom) it literally means circumcision.

This traditional initiation and circumcision are very important in such a way that if an individual did not attend the traditional amaXhosa initiation he is regarded as someone who is not circumcised. The uncircumcised male and a male who is

circumcised in a way other than the traditional way have the same status in society. Froneman and Kapp (2017:4) puts it accurately:

An initiate who had had an incomplete transition into manhood was called by his name and not '*bhuti*' (brother). Often names like 'coward' or '*inkwenkwe*' (boy) were used, even by children in the community. Men who had not completed the traditional initiation were not allowed to socialise or stay with the successful initiates when they came back and were excluded from traditional ceremonies.

For the amaXhosa, initiation and circumcision are very private matters; the information regarding what happens at the initiation schools is accessible to only those who went through the process. Gwata (2009:13) puts it this way:

Male circumcision is said to be the most secretive and sacred of rituals practised by the amaXhosa. Access to knowledge regarding the initiation process is particularly limited especially for women.

The amaXhosa societies do not by any means involve women in matters regarding initiation and circumcision; this is mainly a men's institution.

Regarding the amaXhosa initiation and circumcision, there are two ways in which an individual can undergo it. It is either traditional or medical circumcision. Medical circumcision is rejected by the amaXhosa communities, especially by men and even most uncircumcised young boys. However, females would prefer men to have medical circumcision, but they do not have a say in such matters. Ndawule (2020:293) puts it this way:

Most of the mothers expressed their rejection of traditional circumcision but felt powerless to prohibit their sons who would prefer Traditional Male Circumcision as a way of earning community respect.

Though females, especially mothers, choose medical circumcision, their sons would prefer the opposite due to the status and the stigma placed on medical circumcision in amaXhosa communities. Traditional circumcision is opposed in so many ways by the public and the media due to fatalities experienced during this practice.

Nevertheless, traditional male circumcision has been preserved to date. Gwata (2009:25) says:

Unlike some African societies which have succumbed to acculturation and have consequently abandoned the practice of traditional male circumcision (Botswana for example, and parts of Zambia and Zimbabwe) the Xhosa have managed to preserve this traditional rite of passage. The reason for this preservation as it would seem is that traditional circumcision is deemed a “total package.” It provides the socialisation necessary for the transition to manhood - an element which is missing from the medical option. It also provides the pain and physical privation which medical circumcision largely circumvents and yet appears to be regarded these days as central to the transition to manhood. Thirdly, the stigma attached to medical circumcision contributes to the longevity of traditional circumcision.

The males who went through medical circumcision are given a name, “*Ilulwane*” or “*amalulwane*”, which is a label of humiliation. Ndawule (2020:293) gives us an understanding of what this means:

Amalulwane is an isiXhosa word for a bat which is a flying mammal with features of both rat and bird. The popular term ‘*amalulwane*’ among initiates of school-going age, is used to tease and ridicule those who opt for medical male circumcision. Figuratively, this means that those who have undergone Medical Male Circumcision are neither boys nor men. This stigma is deduced from their unwillingness to endure pain as they are branded as cowards who have betrayed the old tradition.

Traditional male circumcision is not just a procedure to remove the foreskin of the male organ, rather it means more than that in the amaXhosa communities. During this ritual manhood is tested and for one to endure such a test would mean that individual is man enough to tolerate anything in life. Froneman and Kapp (2017:2) describe that:

The ritual is a test of manhood, and pain and bravery are essential components of this test. Seeking medical help is considered taboo and results in failed initiation. The community perception is that death during initiation is a way for the ancestors to point out who would never have been real men anyway.

About the difficulty associated with amaXhosa traditional circumcision, Venter (2013:142-143) says:

When suffering is explained as a means to become a part of a higher purpose, individuals who are in pursuit of acceptance by their group may accept and even welcome physical or emotional deprivation. According to Xhosa custom, some rituals are believed to have a higher purpose. It is believed that initiation connects the Xhosa boy with his ancestors.

The amaXhosa community, especially men, believe that: “it is the undergoing of hardships and bearing of pain (*ukunyamazela*) that are necessary to becoming a man. If a boy undergoes those, then his manhood is not disparaged.” (Vincent 2008:82).

Venter (2011:567) concurs with Froneman and Kapp when he says: “If the boy has to seek medical help he may be rejected as someone who could not prove his masculinity.”

Failing traditional male circumcision due to seeking medical help is a humiliation to the individual, his parents, and to the whole community. When an individual fails to complete traditional male circumcision, their parents would feel like they had failed to raise their children with good values. They would be concerned about who would take care of the family when they became old and died (Froneman & Kapp, 2017:4). Before a boy ‘goes to the mountain’, which is the other phrase for undergoing circumcision, there will be a discussion between him and his parents, especially the father. This discussion will mostly be about the choice of circumcision he is willing to undergo. Though this is a discussion to a certain extent, parents are willing to go to great lengths to force their children to undergo a traditional circumcision, including the use of coercion and even physical force (Froneman & Kapp, 2017:4).

If in these discussions, the boy chooses medical male circumcision instead of traditional male circumcision, that will be the beginning of a very miserable life for that particular individual. Some boys would be banished from their parent’s house and left to ‘see for themselves’ for choosing a medical circumcision (Froneman & Kapp, 2017:4). In the amaXhosa communities (Froneman & Kapp, 2017:4) it is believed that if a younger brother goes through traditional male circumcision before an older brother, the younger brother now takes the status of being an older brother, and the older brother should give him the respect he would give to an older brother.

If a boy turns his back and rejects the traditional male circumcision and chooses medical male circumcision, the whole community will treat him in the same way. In this way the communities, including some members of his family, especially men, will turn against him. Life for someone who chose medical male circumcision will never be the same as those who chose traditional male circumcision. There is no way an individual can change their decision perhaps by going for the traditional male circumcision after going for medical male circumcision. The social status of that particular individual will never change.

On the contrary, once a boy chooses to undergo the traditional way, he is regarded as someone who respects his culture. If he completes the traditional procedure of initiation he will be accepted by the community and can therefore participate in the matters of society. Venter (2011:567) says:

For the Xhosa boy it is initiation, which serves as a passport to acceptance and respect in his community. An uninitiated man is an object of ridicule. An uncircumcised boy is regarded as unclean and as a person of whom no good can be expected. In the event that such a person marries, his marriage will remain stigmatised.

Based on this knowledge in amaXhosa communities, an individual male who went for medical male circumcision other than traditional male circumcision, or a boy or male who seeks medical help during initiation, are not given the same status as someone who completed traditional male circumcision (cf. Ntozini & Abdullahi, 2016:191). Traditional male circumcision also determines the social status of men in the amaXhosa communities. Gwata (2009:26-27) says:

manhood is understood as being determined primarily by one's journey 'to the mountain' and not by age or physical development.

The other important fact that causes amaXhosa males to choose traditional male circumcision over medical male circumcision is the spiritual importance of this choice. Froneman and Kapp (2017:4) say:

Traditional circumcision is seen as an obligation to the ancestors that needed to be fulfilled by all Xhosa boys. Parents whose children refused to undergo the traditional rituals had to apologise to the ancestors.

For the amaXhosa people, traditional initiation and circumcision is the only rite of passage to manhood. This is also the practice they follow to please their ancestors. As I have noted above, the parents of the boys who have not been circumcised have to make an apology to the ancestors for their failure. This leads me to the next part, which is the objectives of circumcision in the amaXhosa perspective.

4.5. Objectives for Xhosa circumcision

Circumcision is but one activity performed in an initiation school. It would therefore be short-sighted and illogical to propose the divorce of the two, i.e., circumcision and the initiation school (Twala 2007:30 cf. Kugara et al., 2020:175). This is how the amaXhosa communities perceive their custom of circumcision; they don't see circumcision taking place in any place other than the initiation school. To them, any form of circumcision outside the initiation school is not legitimate circumcision at all. Ntombana (2011:635) says "The initiation practice is not an individual practice, but a communal practice that must be understood in the historical context of an *ubuntu* culture, where the identity of each person is respected equally." As I have discussed above, as to what the traditional male circumcision means to the amaXhosa people and in their communities, I have found out that this practice is not some practice that is done just for the removal of the foreskin of a male organ. Vincent (2008:435) says:

Initiation traditionally involved not simply the circumcision operation itself but also an accompanying process of instruction. (cf. Ntombana, 2011:635).

Rather, it means more than that, Ntozini and Abdullahi (2016:198) say:

Ulwaluko was perceived as a cultural measure put in place to "correct" or check the excesses of young boys and over the years this practice has "helped to root out ill-mannered boys." More importantly, *ulwaluko* was perceived as a vehicle for character building that the amaXhosa have depended on to shape the character of their male children. The observed change in behaviour after *ulwaluko* is usually attributed to the teachings acquired during the training in the bush.

Before the initiation practice, a boy lives a careless life of his own with no responsibilities. After initiation, he becomes a man with moral expectations bestowed upon him (Ntombana, 2011:635). This belief among the amaXhosa communities compels the boy to have a transitional phase from boyhood to manhood, and that in order for a boy to become a man he has to undergo some kind of training. The vehicle for this training is initiation and circumcision at the initiation schools. The fact that the whole procedure of the traditional male circumcision takes place in the initiation school really shows that there is learning done in some kind of institution. In amaXhosa culture the circumcision lodge traditionally acts as a school, which gives a substance to this anticipated transformation in the character of the individual (Vincent, 2008:435). Therefore, in any institution there are some objectives to be reached. From birth until adolescence, a Xhosa male child is regarded as someone who has not gone through formal training and learning. Initiation is that bridge whereby formal training and learning take place for an adolescent to transition to adulthood. Vincent (2008:433) puts it this way:

Male circumcision rites are symbolically saturated: the enhancement of masculine virility, the performative enactment of the separation between men and women, preparation for marriage and adult sexuality and the hardening of boys for warfare. (cf. Gwata, 2009:10)

To emphasise this, Vincent (2008:436) says:

Sexual instruction and guidance concerning married life commonly forms part of the training, as does instruction in the history, traditions and beliefs of the initiate's people.

Rankhotha (2004:83) concurs with Vincent about circumcision being a vehicle to prepare boys for warfare when he says:

To a certain degree, one could argue that circumcision was intended to instil in men, the noble ideals of the past, such as self-control and respect for others. Above all, it was important that young men were prepared for adverse conditions of the time, such as tribal wars. Similarly, as a result of tribal wars, which occurred before and during colonialism, it was imperative that the different groups could assert themselves and defend their territories. Rituals

and initiation rites assured that one's identity was rigorously assigned to a particular society or ethnic group.

The hardening part of war is an historical understanding of circumcision whereby boys needed to be prepared for tribal warfare. Conversely in these days, there is not much war. For the amaXhosa communities, manhood and adulthood are institutes that require a responsible individual. According to Nkosi (2008:144):

As traditional male circumcision symbolises manhood, and manhood accords social status in the community, a circumcised man gains power and a voice in the deliberations of his community. Initiates have to undergo pain endurance in the bush during the process of circumcision, as a sign of manhood; whoever fails to pass this 'test' is regarded a failure for the rest of his life and is subject to societal sanctions (cf. Buso & Meissner, 2007:372).

Gogela (2020:202) says that responsibility is believed to be something that can be taught from generation to generation. In other words, this is a generational impartation of knowledge that is aimed at transforming these boys into men who become responsible members of society. Gogela (2020:202) explains:

Ulwaluko is thus performed in the belief that it will transform boys into accountable and responsible men, as well as citizens of the society who are not only independent adults but also those who are fully committed and dedicated to the tenets and standards of nation building in the country. Achieving the manhood status earns one an improved social position, as well as privileges determined through the norms and values of the custom.

This learning process or procedure does not have a standard duration, but it differs from family to family, nevertheless the sequence of the event remains similar. There is an initial phase whereby a family would select a traditional surgeon to perform the actual circumcision. Mogotlane (2004:57) says this about the traditional surgeon:

It is usually performed by a traditional surgeon (*ingcibi*) (who could also be a traditional healer or if not, the surgeon is under the leadership of a traditional healer) to boys aged between 18 and 25 years of age.

Ramphela (2022:57) explains this even further:

The ritual is ideally conducted with young men of eighteen years or older. They are regarded as both physically and emotionally mature enough to both endure and benefit from the experience.

During this phase, the boy would be separated from his familiar surroundings to a remote place where he is circumcised by the surgeon. After the actual circumcision he is known as *umkhwetha*, a fully flagged initiate (Gogela, 2020:203, cf. Ngumbela, 2021:194).

In this isolation, he is placed in the temporary shelter known as *ibhoma* and a traditional nurse known as *ikhankatha* is selected by either the family or the community to take care of the initiate(s). Peltzer and Kanta (2009:85) says:

Pre-ritual preparations involve the appointment of a host, the *usosuthu*, the building of the lodge, the *itonto*, and the appointment of the functionaries: the *ingcibi* (the surgeon) and the *ikhankata* (the traditional nurse).

The *ibhoma* (the temporary shelter) is where all the teaching and learning takes place. The role of the *ikhankatha* (the traditional nurse) is not only to take care of the initiate, but also to install teachings, for he is selected for this duty due to his experience and knowledge regarding traditional matters. Though other elderly men would frequently come for teachings and checking the progress of the initiates, the initial teacher and trainer is the *ikhankatha*. The *amakhankatha* play a pivotal role in the teaching system of the initiation process (Ntombana, 2009:79) cf. (Ramphela, 2002:578). Buso and Meissner (2007:372) say this about this phase of initiation:

During the circumcision period the initiate(s) are tutored by the elders on cultural and health issues such as taking care of genitals, sex education, and information on the dangers of promiscuity. Secrecy is imperative during the entire procedure and must be strictly maintained. It is taboo to ask questions about male initiation lodges, to discuss these in public, or to disclose the secrets of men's initiation to an uninitiated person cf. (Gogela, 2020:203) (Venter 2011:563-664).

Regarding the matter of schooling in the initiation schools, Kugara et al. (2020:176) explain this in a very profound way when they say:

The traditional initiation school is a school that teaches boys how to behave like men. It is indeed a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. Male initiation school resembles some other schools, it is an organisation that is formally organised and sorted out with the end goal of accepting the child into his general public. Initiation schools make a setting in which the immature can be cheerful but tested. They are spots to create ideal individual and relational characteristics and, in that capacity, augment the individual's capacity to add to society, male members say - they stay in the 'circumcision school' for up to three months cf. Carstens (1982:510), Vincent (2008:435).

Finally, initiation is seen as the formal incorporation of males into amaXhosa religious life and tribal life, and before circumcision, a male cannot marry, start a family, or inherit possessions (Magodyo et al., 2016:3 cf. Buso & Meissner, 2007:372). In this whole learning process during this stage these young men must be taught a certain language or a way of talking which they use to help them to legitimise their manhood when with men who have undergone *ulwaluko*. This language is called *isidoda* (Mdedetyana, 2018:7).

Carstens as well as Vincent above, mentioned that this whole process takes up to three months, conversely these days this may not take three months, but has a shorter duration. James (2015:33) says:

Boys remain at the initiation schools for a period of around three weeks.

Regarding the discrepancy between the three months and the three weeks for the period that the initiated spend at the initiation schools, I do not think that either of them is wrong. Mogotlane (2004:58) gives a valid reason for this difference in duration when saying:

Nowadays, the period is also appropriate and convenient to accommodate those boys that attend school (cf. Kugara et al., 2020:177 and Ntombana, 2009:82).

The reason for the initiates to remain at the temporary shelter or lodge which is called *ibhuma* or *ithonto* is not only for teaching or learning. Venter (2011:89) gives another reason when saying:

The boys are taken care of in the lodge or hut until the wounds have healed.

Once the wound is fully healed and the initiate is believed to have completed the initiation period the next phase takes place. Henda (2021:5) describes this phase as the incorporation phase and she says:

The incorporation phase is characterised by “leave and cleave” phenomenon, i.e., the initiate leaves the old life behind and is “re-incorporated,” into society - which signifies embracing new life, and new ways of doing things. The incorporation phase is characterised by different ceremonies that occur in stages but for only one purpose, i.e., “incorporation “of the new man called *ikrwala*, (graduate) back into the community. The ceremony for the occasion is called *umphumo* (the coming out).

Ntombana (2009:75) comments about this incorporation phase:

The last phase, incorporation, takes place when the participant is formally admitted into the new role. In the initiation process, one of the important elements of a ritual is the graduation ceremony which celebrates the successful outcome of a long and often painful learning process and the launching of a new breadwinner. It may further involve their eating, drinking and smoking together, being attached to each other, being covered together or sitting together on the same seat. In Xhosa initiation the new man (*ikrwala*) is given new gifts, new clothes and a new name – all of which are a symbol of a new life.

The incorporation phase of the initiation has two stages which are: the preparation of the initiate to be taken back to society, and the actual celebration of the initiate’s success in the initiation during the isolation phase. For the preparation, the *ibhoma* and the belongings, including the clothes, of the initiate are burned. This symbolises a new physical look that must be taken on by the initiate (Ngumbela, 2021:194). The initiate’s belongings include the blankets that he was using during his stay at the *ibhoma*, though in some areas the blankets are offered to the younger boys. Also, everything he was utilising are totally burned to ashes. Then the initiate is taken to the river to wash off the white clay he had been applying on his body. Crowley and Kesner (1990:318) describe this as follows:

Finally, the boys are taken to a fast-flowing stream where the paint is washed away. They return to the hut naked, where they are smeared with butter,

given a new blanket and presented with a black unpeeled stick (cf. Mhlahlo, 2009:115).

Carstens (1982:510) notes “After they are washed, their bodies are anointed with oil or with melted butter. They are then given their new blankets and long black sticks, and they are led single file back to the village.” As the initiates are taken back to the village, the temporary lodge is still burning, and this is the symbol which means that their past goes up in flames. Ntombana (2009:79) says:

When the initiates have gone through the initiation they are released back to their families as *amakrwala*. It is the duty of the family to encourage and guide the new men into their new life full of responsibilities.

Meel (2005:58) puts it this way:

At the end of this period, usually four to six weeks, the initiate is released, usually in early afternoon, and not allowed to look back. Young boys then burn the seclusion hut. On returning home, the initiate is given new clothes after bathing in a river.

Twala (2007:28) concurs with Meel by saying:

After completion of the training period, the initiates leave all their clothing behind in the lodge, which is then set alight by the instructors. The young men then run ahead without looking back at their childhood, which has symbolically ended with the burning of the lodge. Smearred with red ochre, they march to the village, covered in blankets, surrounded by men and elders, where they are given a new set of clothes. A large feast is then held where each newly initiated man is given an opportunity to verbalise his own self-composed praise poem in which he defines his new adult identity and takes a new name.

The day of the initiates' release from their isolation phase at *entabeni* (in the mountain) or *ebhumeri* or *ethontweni* is a day of great celebration. The celebration is based on the fact that there is a new man in the family or new men in the society as well as to celebrate that these young men have endured the hardship and difficulty, and that they proved themselves to be men who can stand any situation in this lifetime. This is what Gill (2005:8) says about the sequence of the day:

After the smearing of butter, the boy is covered with a white *ingcawa* (blanket). The *ingcawa* symbolises victory over childhood and its hardship, while the colour symbolises the cleansing of the heart. The white *ingcawa* has a black line running through it, indicating the difficult times and hardships of manhood. Even as his life becomes difficult and the road to success may at times be invisible, the amaXhosa man is expected to persevere, recalling how the black line is so small in proportion to the rest of the white blanket; he knows that problems will come, but they will go as well.

In this phase the young men are no longer called *abakhwetha* (the initiates) but are now called *amakrwala*. Since the old blankets have been burnt with the rest of the things they were using at the mountain, a new blanket is obtained by each initiate who is now called *ikrwala* (singular, which means new man) or *amakrwala* (plural, new men) (Ngumbela, 2021:194).

About the day, Gogela (2020:203) says:

On the set day, the initiate is welcomed home through a celebratory ceremony known as *umgidi* or *umphumo* (home-coming). The initiated person is reintegrated back into society where he assimilates the newly acquired status into the self. This phase is also known as reaggregation or reincorporation. The man is now referred to as *ikrwala* or a graduate from initiation school. He has acquired an obligation to behave according to the masculinity norms he has been inducted to.

According to Connor (2010:101) “An *umgidi* is a significant celebration that requires the attendance of both male and female relatives of the initiate. It only occurs twice - after actual circumcision and when the ritual is complete (during 'coming out').” This is finalised by the feast which is held on the final day of each of these two phases of initiation. The greater feast of the two usually occurs at the 'coming out' of the male initiate. As mentioned above, the *umphumo* is a day of great celebration. In the amaXhosa communities, celebrations are marked by singing songs that are significant to the situation being celebrated. Connor (2010:107) says this about the singing:

This *umphumo* was marked by the women's singing and dancing. Unlike the earlier songs, however, those sung in the coming out ceremony did not centre

on the aggression of maternal relatives towards the *ingcibi*, or their concern for the physical well-being of the initiate, but on a shared awareness of the difficulties experienced by adults and the challenges that awaited the initiate as a young adult.

The *uphuma* (coming out) day is not only celebrated by the young men's family but by the whole community. For the young men, this is a day of great joy of receiving gifts from all who came to celebrate this day with him and his family. During the graduation ceremony, elderly and mature men are given time while giving their gifts to do *ukuyala* which means giving words of wisdom to the *ikrwala* (singular) or *amakrwala* (plural) concerning new life as a man or men (Ntombana, 2009:79).

The *ukuyala* of these new men, takes place at the family cattle kraal and this part only involves men. Only elderly men are allowed to give words of wisdom and gifts to the young men at this moment. Nkosi (2008:147) says:

In Xhosa society, performance of the ritual in the traditional way includes ululation by women in the *esigcawini*, an important and respected place between the cattle kraal and the homestead, where cultural functions are performed, to raise the spirits of *amadlozi* (the ancestors) during the celebration party known as *umgidi*. Without *umgidi*, a young man will never achieve the status of 'man' and will forever remain a 'boy' in societal life. Conversely, *umgidi* takes place in *isibaya*, the cattle kraal. During *umgidi*, *isibaya* is occupied only by traditionally circumcised men; no women are allowed to enter cf. Ntombana, 2011:635).

Among the gifts that the young men are given in this *ubukrwala* stage is the stick that they have to carry in their hand for the whole duration of *ubukrwala*. Mhlahlo (2009:74) puts it this way:

A graduated initiate gains the power to start his own family. This refers to him getting married and building his homestead. During the coming out ceremony the initiate is given a black stick (*umnqay*). This stick is a token of authority which implies that this young man may start his family. It is given to initiates as a sign of manhood.

Conversely, women are not excluded from giving words of wisdom to these young men; they are given their chance at a later stage. Ramphele (2002:60) says:

Women are also given a space in this male ritual. The women led by the mother of the young man (*izibazana*) are given a chance later in the day to celebrate with him and present him with gifts. The old and new mix comfortably as the women sing – each holding two bottles of brandy to symbolise the breasts which fed the young man as a baby and that now produce alcohol to celebrate his manhood. It is a moment for the mother and son who see each other for the first time after his weeks spent in the bush.

Ukuyala happens on the day of *umphumo* and this is where these young men are given some instructions regarding how they should conduct themselves now that they are on a new level of life. Ntombana (2009:81) says:

Regarding teaching moral values in the initiation school, to these new men they are the same as those of the initiates, except that during graduation they were given words of wisdom by mature men who cover issues about behavioural change and how to handle themselves as men, treat their families and provide for their families as men.

About *ukuyala* Ntombana (2009:81) says that:

During the graduation, old and mature men were given an opportunity to offer words of wisdom about behavioural change to the *amakrwala*. While the *amakrwala* were given the words of wisdom, they were seated quietly before the elders with their bodies covered by the blankets. Only their eyes were uncovered to show attention to the elders.

Connor (2010:108) “The whole setting of *umgidi* enabled workers to affirm their commitment to the collective, and their connection to ancestral values and lands in the region, but analysis of women's roles at the feasts reveals 'contradictions'.” The more prominent part is played by women in the planning and execution of the events, and one would normally expect only males would be involved in this male-orientated rite like circumcision.

As I have mentioned above that with the *umgidi* there are some teaching or words of wisdom given to the young man, this shows that the circumcision ceremony in all the

phases is a teaching and learning institution. That is why the young man must undergo the whole procedure in order for him to be fully declared as a man in the amaXhosa communities. Without this celebration of *umgidi* he will never receive the status of becoming a man. At this stage, these young men are not yet called men but as mentioned above they are called *amakrwala* and in a stage known as *ubukrwala*. About *ubukrwala*, Kheswa et al. (2014:2789) say:

Ubukrwala (being a graduated initiate) is regarded as the crucial stage in the initiation ritual among the Xhosa speakers and at this stage an initiate is presented to society with a new status, new clothes, new rights, duties, and responsibilities. The transition from boyhood to manhood is featured by an initiate's adoption of specific behaviour, dress code, and a new name. All these would be appropriate to the initiate's newly acquired stage.

This *ubukrwala* stage is not a one-day event; rather it is a continuation for a certain period and the teaching for these young men is a continuous exercise. From the day of the coming out (*umphumo*) these young men continue wearing their new clothes and continue being taught for about six months. Gwata (2009:10) puts it this way:

Upon returning to the community, initiates announce their newly acquired status through a new dress code. It is mandatory for the recent graduate to wear a cap and blazer for a six months' period following initiation. More than just being an indication that one has been 'to the mountain' the new clothes signify that the circumcised man is re-entering society as a new, transformed individual who will be expected to fulfil new roles in society.

Kheswa et al. (2014:2789) concur with Gwata when saying:

After the initiates return home, they are guided through a six-months' protocol. During this period, they are traditionally called "*amakrwala*" (graduated initiates).

In these six months these young men will not be fully incorporated to participate in the societal matters of the community, rather they are still under a learning and guiding process by elderly men. This is the period whereby they share among themselves the teachings they learned from the initiation school until now. They practice the speaking of their new way of talking or language known as *isidoda*.

Once this six months' period has lapsed, these young men change from wearing the *amakrwala* attire and they can wear their clothes like other men of the community. At this time, they are fully regarded as men, and they can participate as normal in the matters of the society and attend to matters that are attended by the men of the community. This is the point where these young men are said to be ready to start their own families and take wives for themselves. They have been taught all matters regarding manhood, even though in the amaXhosa community it is believed that manhood is a lifetime learning institution. There is a saying in isiXhosa that says "*indoda ifa ifunda*" meaning "a man will die learning". Therefore, they will learn other matters of manhood as they grow and gain experience. Even though at this point they are ready to start their household or families they are not under obligation to do so; this will depend on an individuals' readiness to marry.

So, what does this all mean? To the amaXhosa communities and societies in order for a male to receive the status of manhood as well as adulthood, he should undergo their way of traditional circumcision. Allegritti and Gray (2005:4) says:

In amaXhosa culture circumcision provides a cultural medium in which young men leave behind their previous notions of adolescent selfhood and learn to take on an adult identity based on notions of responsibility and some discipline. It also gives them an adult status within their families and communities.

Circumcision to the amaXhosa people is one of the rituals that marks their uniqueness and peculiarity. Though they acknowledge other peoples' circumcision however, their traditional male circumcision is what makes every male into a man. They believe that the teachings they give to their initiates are not like any other circumcision programme, which makes them reject anyone who is circumcised and initiated in ways other than the amaXhosa way as being men. The fact that they have a certain language (*isidoda*) they teach in their initiation schools makes them reject anyone who cannot speak their language.

4.6. Conclusion

In this part of the study my intentions were to discuss circumcision according to the amaXhosa perspective. In discussing this I initially thought that it is of much importance to look at who these people are.

I now know that the amaXhosa people are a group of the Nguni tribe that resides in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. I have found out that these people cover about 18 percent of the population of more or less 51 million people of South Africa (as at 2015).

The amaXhosa have an identity that makes them unique from other people because of the cultural norms and values that they keep. The structural make-up of these peoples' groupings consists of clans. The clanship among the isiXhosa-speaking people seems to be of the utmost importance. Though there is no certainty regarding when this tribal group emerged, there is some information about when the current royal clan started its rulership. The Kingdom of the amaXhosa tribe began when Tshawe rebelled against his older brother Cirha and overthrew him. From there he established amaTshawe as amaXhosa's royal clan. Peires says that this probably took place in the eighth or ninth generation before King Hintsa was born (c.1785), maybe around 1550.

This is the tribe that is known for practising circumcision, which is what this study is about (see. Rugwiji, 2014:240). To understand circumcision from an amaXhosa perspective, I looked at their definition of what circumcision is. Initially I found out that in isiXhosa this is known as *isiko lolwaluko* of which *isiko* is said to be a custom. Therefore, *isiko lolwaluko* is the custom of initiation. This custom is not only about circumcision, which is the removal of the foreskin, but it is an incorporation and combination of various procedures which include circumcision. Then the actual cutting and removal of the foreskin from the male organ or penis is known as *ukwaluka*.

Though initiation and circumcision are not one and the same thing, these two cannot be separated and sometimes they are used interchangeably. In the amaXhosa communities, when one talks of circumcision and initiation, the understanding is that

they are of the same concept. It is the context in which each word is used that determines the meaning at that particular moment.

Initiation in amaXhosa communities is the rite of passage that is the transitioning of boys into becoming men. A boy in amaXhosa culture is not necessarily a young male in terms of age, rather it is a label of someone who is not circumcised, irrespective of their age. Initiation is actually meant for boys aged between 18 and 25 years. This is to prepare these boys to become men and responsible members of society. In amaXhosa communities, boys are regarded as irresponsible and individuals who live a reckless life with no morals. In order to transform the lives of these boys, they have to undergo initiation. Initiation in the amaXhosa communities is the platform for teaching and learning, for this is where boys are taught many aspects of adult life. These aspects include being a responsible member of society, how to be a man, and also their preparation for marriage. Even though initiation is a way of teaching and learning, it is also a religious ritual practice, for it is regarded as *isiko* (a custom) which validates its religiosity. *Isiko* is regarded as that which connects the people and God or their ancestors. Subsequently this also validates the spirituality of circumcision in amaXhosa communities. During circumcision in the amaXhosa communities the boys or initiates are believed to fulfil the obligation required by the ancestors.

Once the boys go 'to the mountain', they are to be isolated for a period of three months which now is said to have been reduced to approximately a month. This is because the initiates are mostly school children. In this isolation they are to be taught or transitioned into manhood. During this period, they are not to seek any medical attention as that is forbidden. Once an individual does so he will not receive the status of being a man. Even those who choose a medical route from the onset do not receive manhood status, for medical male circumcision is not accepted as a method that will make one a man. In 'the mountain' or 'bush' i.e., what the initiation school is called, the initiates are to endure all the pains and sufferings, then learn the *isidoda* language, which is said to strengthen them and prepare them for any life challenge they might face in life as men.

Once this initiation or isolation period is over and the initiates have completed all that is required of them, they are to be incorporated back into society. The day of

incorporation is a day of great joy and celebration for the whole community, for these are new members of the society. The families of the initiates conduct a celebration known as *umgidi* or *umphumo* (the coming out) to welcome the new men back into their homes and into the society. In this stage (up to about six months) they are known as *amakrwala*. The *ubukrwala* stage is the final stage of initiation and once these young men complete these stages, they are regarded as men. They are then required to be responsible members of the community. Then young men can start families of their own and be heads of their own homes, because they have been prepared for this kind of responsibility.

Chapter 5: Synthesis, Methodology and conclusion.

5.1. Introduction

In this study I deal with circumcision based on two different perspectives, one is that of the Old Testament and Ancient Near East, and the other is that of the amaXhosa. It will be a comparative study of both the Old Testament and Ancient Near East, and the amaXhosa perspectives. In the last three chapters, I have already dealt with the above-mentioned understanding of circumcision.

In this chapter I will look at the comparative study method and its approach as a discipline. What I intend to do is to look at how scholars deal with this discipline; how they approach a comparative study. Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998:13) describes Comparative Literature as follows:

In principle, the discipline of Comparative Literature is *in toto* a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and / or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc.

This study is not about Comparative Literature but about comparing two different perspectives of circumcision custom. Comparative Literature is not a discipline that I am familiar with and I have not been trained in it. However, what Comparative Literature helps us with is some insights on how to deal with two different entities in one study. In this part of the study, I want to understand comparative studies, what is it all about, how it is applied as an approach in comparing different disciplines, as I am doing with this study of the custom of circumcision from the Old Testament and amaXhosa perspectives. Sangia (2018:2) says:

What scholars in Comparative Literature share is a desire to study literature beyond national boundaries and an interest in languages so that they can read foreign texts in their original form. Many comparatists also share the

desire to integrate literary experience with other cultural phenomena such as historical change, philosophical concepts, and social movements.

Thereafter, I want to look at the pitfalls of this comparative approach, i.e., weaknesses as well as the disadvantages thereof. I understand if there is a comparison of different things there will be pitfalls, especially as described by Sangia (2018:2), that this literature goes beyond the boundaries. Based on Sangia's (2018:2) statement that comparative study goes beyond boundaries, it is likely that one would go beyond their speciality into a field with which one is not familiar. Therefore, there are some pitfalls that will become evident in doing so. Pitfalls of the comparative studies will be discussed in this part of the study. I will be exploring the historical context of the comparative approach, and these pitfalls and potentials will be based on the comparison between the Old Testament and the African cultures, or the Old Testament and Social Sciences. Holter (2011:381) points out that a comparative approach is often part of African biblical studies:

Old Testament studies focusing on African experiences and concerns as interpretative resources. The development of what has been called a "comparative paradigm," that is an interpretative paradigm letting the two entities "Africa" and the "Old Testament" encounter and being explicitly compared, can be seen from the 1960s and till today.

For the potentials of the comparative approach, I want to find out what makes it so advantageous. Finally, I will be presenting the findings of the whole study.

5.2. Comparative Studies

Comparison must be recognised as an interpretive exercise in which scholars are profoundly and personally involved (Strawn 2009:125). According to Sangia (2018:1):

Comparative Literature is an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners study literature across national borders, time periods, languages, genres, boundaries between literature and the other arts (music, painting, dance, film,

etc.), and disciplines (literature and psychology, philosophy, science, history, architecture, sociology, politics, etc.), (cf. Kosmutzky, 2018:1).

In describing what comparative studies is, Sangia has given us an understanding that:

in Comparative Literature we can go beyond the border of any other literature in comparing it to different literature or discipline. It is through this combination of comparative literary studies and transcultural studies that researchers may be better able to distance themselves from the perspective that focuses too strictly (tightly) on national literature, which represents an entrapment in the national paradigm (Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1999: 6).

Bassnett (1993:2) outlines how Benedetto Croce defined Comparative Literature. She says:

He discussed the definition of Comparative Literature as the exploration of the vicissitudes, alterations, developments, and reciprocal differences of themes and literary ideas across literatures, and concludes that there is no study more arid than researches of this sort.

Kosmutzky (2018:1) defines comparative studies this way:

Typically, studies that compare research objects in two or more social entities are seen as the “truly” or “genuinely” comparative studies. Comparative research can, however, also be comparative over time as well as cross-sectional. In fact, many studies are comparative without being internationally comparative in nature. They compare, for example, organisations within one higher education system, groups of students, types of higher education institutions, academic disciplines, or developments in different time periods.

It would appear that it is possible that most people engage in comparative studies without even realising or labelling their work as comparative. The moment one deals with two different entities in their work, they will somehow have to compare the two, which is why Kosmutzky (2018:1) says:

We sometimes unintentionally deal with comparative research.

To elaborate this understanding of comparative approach, Sangia (2018:8) says:

The transnational and interdisciplinary nature of Comparative Literature is that of comparing the products of different national literatures, between literatures and other subjects, and sorting out the common aesthetic values and the universal laws in literature and literary development.

To define comparative studies, Tötösy de Zepetnek (1998:30) gives a simple definition:

The basic definition of Comparative Literature includes – apart from the traditional and historical approach to “compare” literary texts from different languages and cultures - the study of the literary text in / as its relationship with extra-literary areas; (e.g., sociology, history, economics, the publishing industry, the history of the book, geography, biology, medicine. etc.), the other arts, etc.

Comparison is, therefore, “by no means an innocent endeavour” but rather “a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge (Strawn 2009:126). At this point, using the knowledge I now have I can understand briefly what comparative studies entail. The definitions I have, have given me enough understanding of the approach. I will now move to the next part of this portion of this study which is to find out what the pitfalls of comparative studies are.

This study is about comparative studies or Comparative Literature, however as mentioned above, I want to understand the insights that these give to the study, and how I can apply such insights as I am comparing the Old Testament to the amaXhosa custom of circumcision.

5.3. Pitfalls of the comparative approach

In trying to define comparative studies or approaches I have discovered that it is all about comparing two different entities which belong to different categories of disciplines. Therefore, if the entities that are being compared are from different categories of disciplines, there is a possibility of pitfalls or weaknesses that might be encountered. Considering the history and the current situation of Comparative

Literature, it appears that there is consensus about its problematic nature and in some aspects, this problematic situation appears to be very acute (Tötösy de Zepetnek, 1998:14). The first challenge of conducting comparative studies is outlined by Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee (2013:3) as follows:

In and about the discipline of Comparative Literature it remains a recurrent view that it is lacking definition, has no or only a partial framework of theory and / or methodology, and that for these reasons the discipline remains with a history and presence of insecurity.

A major pitfall of comparative studies is outlined by Cao (2013:xxi) when saying:

The major theoretical defect of the contemporary theories of Comparative Literature lies in the following fact: the issue of the heterogeneity of the comparison is completely ignored. It is quite common for a person without theoretical training of Comparative Literature to believe that both homogeneity and heterogeneity of different literatures are to be sought in the study of Comparative Literature; the comparison is to discover the differences out of similarities and the similarities out of the differences of various literatures.

The challenge when conducting comparative studies is outlined as Cao (2013:xxi) mentioned, is if the person who is dealing with this kind of discipline may not have adequate training. Another issue is if the person is only knowledgeable in one of the disciplines they are doing comparison on and not on the other. In this comparative approach I am looking for similarities as well as differences of the two concepts I am dealing with. On this, Strawn (2009:120) says:

Scholars who have continued to engage in comparative analyses have tended to fall into one of two camps: those who (over)emphasise similarity, or those who (over)emphasise difference.

In trying to differentiate or find similarities, one might go to an extent where what is being researched may not be found. In my case, I am trained in the Old Testament studies and not in Social Scientific studies and Anthropology. However, in terms of knowledge about circumcision custom, I have better knowledge and understanding because I grew up in the amaXhosa culture. Kosmutzky (2018:3) says:

However, comparative research also has a particularly challenging and complex research design with an additional methodological dimension compared to noncomparative research. What makes international comparisons more challenging methodologically is, first, the comparative intellectual operation: the assertion of a (partial) sameness and simultaneous difference of research objects. Second, this research design is more complex methodologically because the analysis usually proceeds simultaneously on at least two levels.

The fascinating thing about this discipline is that “Comparative Literature is not literary comparison” (Cao, 2013:33). In elaborating this statement about Comparative Literature not being a simple comparison, Cao (2013:33) says:

If the study is not based on precise textual criticism, but on simple comparison, the conclusion would descend into generalities and would not help the development of Comparative Literature.

Subsequently, this study is not based on textual criticism or conducted in a manner of comparing or doing comparison; rather, textual criticism is comparative in its nature. Cao implies that in comparative studies one is not doing simple comparison. Comparison depends on “sufficient resemblance” (Strawn, 2009:128). Strawn (2009:127) agrees with Cao when saying:

Hence, while in practice literary comparison is too frequently limited in execution, truly Comparative Literature “involves something more than comparing two great German poets, and something different from a Chinese studying French literature or a Russian studying Italian literature”.

In terms of the Old Testament studies in comparison with Anthropology, Wilson (2009:506) says:

At the same time that sociological theories were having an impact on biblical scholarship, anthropologists at the end of the nineteenth century were collecting ethnographic information, much of it from so-called primitive societies that were thought to be comparable to ancient Israel. Much of this

material was not systematically collected, and its relevance to Israelite society was not always clear.

One might take this as a shallow approach which is used to compare two different entities. Instead of understanding Comparative Literature as a tool just to do comparison, which it is not, it is necessary to understand this discipline in a broader sense. Comparison is a deeply hermeneutical enterprise (Strawn, 2009:123). According to Strawn (2009:122):

Comparison can be seen, not simply as one more additional or optional method that scholars may choose to employ here or there with this or that text.

African interpreters see Comparative Literature more as a tool that enables the interpreter to interact with questions arising from the current historical and sociological context (Holter, 2011:283). Sangia (2018:9) explains it this way:

Comparative Literature shows the relationship between the two texts or two authors.

On the basis of textual comparison, Cao (2013:35) argues:

Only with the attitude of positivism can the researchers stick to seeking truth in the study of Comparative Literature rather than jumping to a conclusion without textual research and solid argumentation. At the same time, the researchers should adopt an aesthetic attitude to look at the procedure of literary communication.

When one engages in a comparative approach, they need to focus on finding the truth about what they are comparing instead of recklessly concluding their findings. This will be achieved when one has a positive attitude. The researcher's positive attitude will help them to conduct a thorough comparative approach.

Holter (2011:383) explains it this way:

The major approach is a comparative methodology that facilitates a parallel interpretation of certain Old Testament texts or motifs and supposed African parallels, letting the two illuminate one another in various ways.

African Old Testament studies have utilised comparative methodology in trying to interpret some challenges that are faced by African society. Their major methodological characteristic is that they approach the Old Testament texts from African comparative perspectives. In some cases, “Africa” is used to interpret “the Old Testament” (Holter, 2011:384) (cf. Lang, 1985:7). What Holter is mentioning in Africa interpreting the Old Testament in Social Sciences is called participant observation. Lang (1985:2) explains it this way:

Anthropologists call this method of research “participation observation”. The term observation implies that the scholar should actually witness what he or she is writing about rather than rely on second-hand information received from travellers or untrained native informants (cf. Lang, 1985:14).

The literature that I used for chapter four might have been produced in the light of this method of “participation observation”. Therefore, since this was also a tool for the interpretation of the Old Testament text, biblical scholars in the nineteenth century made use of it. Wilson (2009:507) says:

Nineteenth-century biblical scholars sometimes also made use of the overarching theoretical frameworks into which the Social Sciences set their collected data.

Wilson (2009:507) says further:

Early social-scientific research exhibited some methodological weaknesses, which were soon recognised by social scientists themselves and which tainted the use that biblical scholars made of this research.

In essence, the challenge one might face when dealing with comparative studies or literature is that we are equipped to be specialists in one field of study, and in the case mentioned by Wilson, Social Sciences, and not specialising in the other discipline that they are comparing with. Therefore, one might take the other for

granted due to our lack of training in that other field and therefore introduce errors in interpretation. In trying to understand the Old Testament text, Social Sciences is the discipline which was applied to interpret the text. According to Lang (1985:1-2):

Social scientists, especially sociologists and anthropologists, have become aware of the Bible as a storehouse of ethnographic data about an interesting non-Western culture - one that in fact is incorporated into our own history.

In our lack of training in this discipline one might not use the necessary tools to engage thoroughly with whatever they want to use this comparative study for. In terms of the use of this discipline in the theological field, Holter (2011:381-382) says:

The use of comparative analysis reflects two parallel sets of perspectives; either comparisons with a contemporary focus on Africa, using the Old Testament as a tool to interpret traditional, or modern African experiences and concerns, or comparisons with a more historical focus on the Old Testament, using African experiences as tools to interpret the texts exegetically.

As I am dealing with the pitfalls of the comparative approach, especially in terms of Social Sciences being used as a tool to interpret biblical texts, though this manner of interpretation has been used successfully, there is a negative side to this. On this, Wilson (2009:510) says:

However, on the negative side, by using social-anthropological data for comparative purposes and for model building, biblical scholars also often unwittingly inherited social anthropology's tendency to overlook the importance of studying social development over time.

Finally, biblical scholars began to realise that Social Scientists sometimes took comparative material out of its original context and set it in theoretical frameworks that in fact were not well supported by the data (Wilson, 2009:507).

Pertaining to the pitfalls of the comparative approach one can see Social Sciences is one of the interpretative approaches to the Old Testament, however this is not something that has always thrived. It can be seen, as mentioned above, that there are some weaknesses to this approach.

5.4. Historical Context

In this part of the study, I will be discussing the historical context of the comparative studies. It seems like from the beginning, comparative studies was not recognised as a discipline. According to Bassnett (1993:2):

Comparative Literature as a term seems to arouse strong passions, both for and against. As early as 1903, Benedetto Creco argued that Comparative Literature as a non-subject, contemptuously dismissing the suggestion that it might be seen as a separate discipline.

Though it was never regarded as a discipline, it managed to gain popularity. Now as a discipline, Comparative Critical Studies seeks to advance methodological (self) reflection on the nature of Comparative Literature as a discipline (Adiyia & Ashton, 2017:7). Kosmutzky (2018:3) says:

Comparative research is historically rooted in the birth of modern disciplinary science of the late nineteenth century. Its emergence coincides with the intensification of cultural contacts and cultural comparison in European modernity and in the era of nation-states. The comparative methodology of the natural sciences, e.g., the classifications of comparative botany, zoology, palaeontology, and anatomy, became a model for comparisons in the humanities and the later emerging social sciences.

In support of this statement and elaborating how Comparative Literature emerged, Sangia (2018:7) says:

Comparative Literature has been a subject of concerns, for the primary excitement, after its proposition by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Abel Francois Villemain, and Matthew Arnold by the mid-1850s after its brief history of six decades, was replaced by questioning of the various terminology, nature, and functions of Comparative Literature.

Comparative studies emerged in Europe and America and obviously they differed in their approach to the discipline of the Comparative Literature approach. Sangia (2018:7) outlines the different approaches to the discipline:

By considering development of Comparative Literature in terms of its Schools, it is possible not only to comprehend its past but also to anticipate its future on the basis of the developments in the past. The French school focused on influence or reception with its basis on positivism. The British School studied in 'placing' in which 'placing' of texts leads to shared enlightenment of scripts. The American school of Comparative Literature questioned the dominance of the French school and its principal practice in the post-World War II period with focus on interdisciplinary approach.

Further explanation of how the French school dealt with this kind of approach, Dominguez et al. (2015:88) says:

At the nineteenth-century French origins of Comparative Literature as a discipline, some of its practitioners advocated calling it the "comparative history of literatures.

Cao (2013:30) says:

The French comparatist, points out, "historical method must be joined with the spirit of criticism, material research must be combined with textual interpretation, and the prudence of socialists must be associated with boldness of aestheticians. Only in this way can we endow significant topics and some appropriate approaches in our discipline."

In the African context, the comparative studies approach seems to be mainly used in the theological field, especially in Old Testament studies. Holter (2011:382) says:

The comparative paradigm is in many ways the major characteristics of African Old Testament studies, whether one approaches the guild from chronological, geographical, hermeneutical or thematic perspectives.

Though Sangia (2018:8) mentioned British and French understanding within the European comparatists, there is also a Russian perspective to the study or discipline, which he mentions:

The Russian comparatist sees that this theory is derived from the idea of similarities in humanity's social and historical evolution, which means harmony in the process of literary development. There are similarities between the literatures of different peoples whose social evolution is analogous, irrespective of existence of mutual influence or direct relation between them found in study of parallelism.

We can see that the discipline of comparative studies is not a common or familiar discipline within the scholarly world. Only in Europe and America can it be seen that the comparative approach has been adopted as a scholarly discipline. We have seen above that in Africa it is just an interpretative tool used in the Old Testament studies. However, as mentioned above, most scholars engage in this discipline without even being aware. Only in those mentioned regions, is one aware that they intentionally engage in comparative studies. Perhaps the reason for this is because “The perspective of comparison in scholarship has been (and continues to be) widely employed in various disciplines” (Tötösy de Zepetnek & Mukherjee, 2013:3). According to Strawn (2009:126):

Comparison requires the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting (rather than tautological) and a methodical manipulation of difference, a playing across the ‘gap’ in the service of some useful end.

In Africa, Old Testament comparative studies have been used in interpreting biblical text, though the tool that is normally used to interpret the biblical text is the historical-critical methodology. According to Nissinen (2009:480):

Historical methodology has been a matter of controversy also in recent discussions concerning the possibility of reconstruction of past events using the biblical text as a historical source.

I have mentioned briefly above that some African Old Testament scholars reject historical-critical methodology as an inadequate approach (Holter, 2011:385), but if

one conducts a comparative study, this method cannot be rejected. Historical criticism is the only method that provides us with access to ancient Israel.

5.5. Potential of the comparative approach

In this part of the chapter, as I have looked at the pitfalls of the Comparative Literature approach, I also want to look for the potentials of this discipline. According to Kosmutzky (2018:2):

There is a broad consensus that international comparative research has many benefits. International comparative perspectives are important in order to deconstruct narrow and often parochial national perspectives by illuminating intriguing differences and similarities among higher education systems, practices, and policies throughout the world. They provide the opportunity to reflect upon phenomena within a higher education system through the lens of other systems. Based on similarities and differences, international comparisons might also make more general patterns and regularities of phenomena visible on which theoretical assumptions can be built.

The fact that in this discipline one needs to explore other disciplines and get to understand what is happening in the worlds other than theirs. For example, an Old Testament critic can use the Social Sciences as an external discipline to perform a comparison with what they are doing as a theologian. By doing that, they get to understand how the Social Scientists are able to deal with the same subject. Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee (2013:208) puts it this way:

All of these individual phenomena can, of course, be studied from a monomedial perspective, but they gain relevance when studied from a comparative media point of view. This even produces benefits for the literary scholar since looking at one's own medium not only from the inside but also from the outside can reveal new aspects.

Engaging in Comparative Literature or studies as mentioned above, one is not simply conducting comparison but rather engaging in a critical comparison of different disciplines. In doing simple comparison, Strawn (2009) says:

There is nothing systematic to such comparisons, they lack any basis, and so, in the end, they strike us as uninteresting, petty, and unrevealing.

Though it is said that one is engaging in textual criticism, one cannot completely do away with comparison. In a broader sense, comparison is a method for highlighting the key features of literary works with the help of parallels and contrasts (Dominguez et al. 2015:88). When engaging in comparative studies one is not trying to liken two different disciplines, however, one is making use of one discipline to highlight a different perspective from another discipline. Dominguez et al. (2015:90) explain this statement as follows:

“History cannot be a science,” said the French sociologist Émile Durkheim in 1898, “unless it provides explanations, and it cannot provide explanations unless it makes comparisons.”

One of the contributions that comparative studies brought into the scholarly field and will always bring impact is outlined by Bassnett (1993:10):

Another rapidly expanding development in literary studies, and one which has profound implications for the future of the Comparative Literature, is translating studies.

According to the quote above, Comparative Literature had been a useful tool in translating studies, textual criticism is the perfect example of the use of comparative studies for translating. Comparison is probably the best type, but it, too, has significant problems, especially when erroneously combined with evolutionary comparative approaches (Strawn, 2009:125). The major potential of engaging in Comparative Literature or studies is that it moves scholars from their comfortable discipline to search further from other disciplines. This discipline removes the stereotyped perspectives from individual scholars; it subsequently helps researchers to gain different perspectives from different fields of studies. Engaging in this kind of discipline helps a scholar to learn how other scholars from different disciplines have

dealt with and analysed the same issue he is trying to analyse. The goal of Comparative Literature is to seek homogeneity in two or three literatures by studying the “passing route” which consists of three parts: “the beginning” (emitter), “the ending” (recipient), and “the media” (transmitter), along which “influence” took place (Cao, 2013:90). To clarify my point, Dominguez et al. (2015:90) say:

As for the uses of comparison, on one hand, one may compare societies that are far removed from one another in time and / or space, as was often done in the nineteenth century.

Strawn (2009:129) agrees with Cao when saying:

Ideally, the best comparisons are intercultural, which means they include historically unrelated and / or noncontinuous cultural and / or linguistic traditions.

Bringing this to the context of this study whereby I am comparing the Old Testament and Social Sciences, Lang (1985:8) says:

Comparative ethnography tries to elucidate biblical texts by comparing them to what is known from other non-industrial societies.

In terms of literature, Strawn (2009:122) says:

Comparative study has revealed the political nature of much ancient literature. But studying the history of scholarly comparison reveals that comparative method itself is fraught with politics.

A good example of what Dominguez et al. is saying is: this whole study is compares the perspectives of the amaXhosa and Old Testament on the subject of male circumcision. To me those are societies that are far removed from one another. In comparing two different societies that are far removed from one another may not be a simple thing to do. On this, Strawn (2009:129) says:

The great gain from intercultural comparative study is that it avoids taking the local for the universal, the momentary for the constant and, above all, the familiar for the inevitable.

According to Lang (1985:3):

Happily enough, however, anthropologists have been interested in the Bible as well as other ancient literatures, and biblical scholars as well as classicists have looked to anthropology for insights. Both sides discovered that ancient cultures share certain characteristics with some of the societies studied by anthropologists.

The most important thing in both these disciplines is if they continue to work hand in hand, they can achieve a lot. According to Lang (1985:17):

Anthropologists who continue their interest in the OT will no doubt pay more attention to results of biblical scholarship. Some biblical scholars, on the other hand, will take anthropology as their guiding and inspiring model of research and explanation.

As I was dealing with the potentials of the comparative studies or approach, I can now understand that Social Sciences helped a lot in unlocking some biblical texts. Social Sciences, especially Anthropologists, contributed some of their insights to help in understanding complicated texts.

5.6. Findings

From the beginning of this dissertation, I have outlined that this study will engage in a comparison between the perspectives of the Old Testament and ancient Israel, the Ancient Near East and that of the amaXhosa people on the subject of male circumcision. By conducting this comparison I expected to find common ground in their understanding of circumcision. What is interesting about this study is that though it is an Old Testament study, it did not strictly focus on the Old Testament; rather it made use of Anthropology, Social studies as well as Comparative Literature.

In chapter two, this study dealt with circumcision in pre-exilic Israel and the Ancient Near East. It was shown that in order for us to understand circumcision in Israel

there is a need to also understand it in the context of the Ancient Near East, even though I have not found much on this subject in other nations except for the Egyptians in the Ancient Near East.

Regarding the Egyptian practice of circumcision, I have discovered that circumcision was not a constant practice, rather it changed from kingdom to kingdom. In the Old Kingdom, circumcision in Egypt was performed on adults, then it shifted to be performed during puberty. This was practised either as a rite of passage to manhood or prior to marriage. It was later performed on infants in the New Kingdom. There is another understanding of circumcision of the Egyptians which is said that they did not completely remove the foreskin in their circumcision. But the images available from that era show something different from this understanding.

Regarding pre-exilic Israel there are three texts that I focused on, which give me some understanding of circumcision in this period. These texts are Genesis 34:8-22, Exodus 4:22-26, and Joshua 5:2-9. In Genesis 34 there is no stipulation regarding why circumcision is practised by the Israelites or by Jacob's family. When the Hivites wanted to intermarry with them after their son Shechem raped Jacob's daughter, they were given a condition for their request. This condition was that if all their males are circumcised, they can intermarry with the Israelites. Therefore, it is believed that in that era circumcision was practised before marriage, even though the text does not give a precise answer for this. I also found that there is no age specification for the person who is to be circumcised.

In the Exodus 4 narrative of Moses and Zipporah, Zipporah circumcised her son when God wanted to kill Moses. After circumcising her son, she took the foreskin and cast it at her husband's feet, and then she said: "you are blood bridegroom to me". These are the words that make scholars link circumcision with marriage. But the interesting interpretation of the text is its link to the Passover lamb. As the circumcision of Moses' son made God relent from killing, so did the Passover lamb make God relent from killing the Israelites.

The Joshua text was analysed in this part of the pre-exilic understanding of circumcision though it is a post-exilic text. The discussion in this text is not much on the significance of circumcision, rather on Joshua circumcising the Israelites for a

second time. The issue is why the second time? The speculation is they were circumcised the first time, but this was done by the Egyptian practice of not completely removing the prepuce. However, the clear significance of circumcision in this text is that it was preparing the Israelites to partake in the Passover.

In chapter three I moved to the post-exilic era to find out what was the understanding of circumcision. What I discovered in this era was emphasised more especially by the Priestly authors. This is the era where infant circumcision was instituted and circumcision became the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

In this chapter I analysed three biblical texts, Genesis 17, Exodus 12, and Leviticus 12. In Genesis 17:9 - 14 God orders Abraham and his descendants to keep his covenant. This covenant that Abraham has to keep is that all males have to be circumcised, and those who will not be circumcised will be cut off from their congregation.

Circumcision was not a new institution in Israel. In this post-exilic period, it is said circumcision was not uniquely Israelite, rather only the Babylonians were not circumcising. For this reason, the Israelites' circumcision was then changed to infant circumcision so that theirs may be as unique as possible. Circumcision in this chapter was to be an adherence to the covenant between God and Abraham, and it was necessary for one to be circumcised in order to partake in the Passover in Exodus 12. Finally, in Leviticus 12, circumcision is performed on the eighth day after birth, and scholars agree that this might be the adherence to the command in Genesis 17. Scholars tend to agree that infant circumcision was practised for the first time in the post-exilic period when these Priestly texts were written.

In chapter four I moved from the Old Testament to circumcision of the amaXhosa people. This chapter was a literature review of scholarly material from Social Studies and Anthropology. I learned that circumcision for the amaXhosa people is practised as a rite of passage to manhood. Their traditional circumcision takes place in their initiation schools, where the initiates are taught to be men. Circumcision from the amaXhosa perspective is an obligation to the ancestor's boys: get circumcised to fulfil this obligation. The amaXhosa people regard their traditional circumcision in high esteem and therefore, they reject any other form of circumcision or initiation.

Anyone who is not circumcised or who went through initiation in a non-Xhosa way is not regarded as a man. Once one has completed the initiation process in the amaXhosa communities, they are regarded as ready for marriage. In the initiation school they have learned about sexual matters and marriage. Therefore, a circumcised male in this community is expected to start his own family and he is taught the matters of marriage at the initiation school.

This study not only compares the Old Testament and amaXhosa, it also compares the Old Testament and Egypt, and P text and non-P text. What I discovered when conducting this study is that the comparative approach is the method that is most used by the Old Testament scholars. For example, historical-critical methodology is comparative in their approach.

The research question of this study was, “What does the cultural practice of circumcision amongst the amaXhosa have in common with the Old Testament view of circumcision?” The question would also be how these two cultures differ on circumcision. To answer these two questions, I will look at first the similarities, and then the differences. On the similarities and parallels my findings are as follows:

1. In the pre-exilic period, circumcision was practised prior to getting married and therefore it could have been seen as a ritual that enhances fertility. In the amaXhosa perspective, there is no clear indication that circumcision was practised prior to marriage, however, when one is circumcised, he is said to be ready for marriage and can start his own family. In fact, Vincent (2008:436) pointed out that “sexual instruction and guidance concerning married life commonly forms part of the training in the initiation schools.”
2. In the post-exilic period, circumcision is the mark of the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham. In this case it is adherence to the command of the divine. Whoever is not circumcised cannot be part of the community of Israel. The circumcision of the post-exilic community is very unique and not like the other nations that also practised circumcision. On the amaXhosa perspective, circumcision is an obligation to the ancestors, which means they adhere to the divine obligation. *Isiko* (a custom) in Xhosa understanding connects people with God or the gods. We know that circumcision is a custom and therefore this custom is spiritual as it is to the Israelites in the post-exilic period. They

also regard their circumcision as unique to other people who also practice circumcision. So, in both cases it is about “boundary maintenance”.

3. In the post-exilic period, uncircumcised men are cut off from their community and also, they cannot participate or partake in the Passover. Uncircumcised men in the amaXhosa community are not regarded as men; they have no status and cannot participate in any matter in the community. Also, in the pre-exilic period there is an element of alienating those who have not been circumcised, for example in Genesis 34:8-22. In this passage Jacob’s sons would not agree that Shechem can marry their sister if he is not circumcised.
4. On the Egyptian perspective, circumcision and particularly in the Old Kingdom was practised as the rite of passage to manhood. The amaXhosa people practice circumcision as the rite of passage to manhood. This means the one who is circumcised becomes a man.

The differences in perspective for these two on circumcision are that the Old Testament did not have a unified view of circumcision. The pre-exilic and post-exilic periods have different views of circumcision. In the pre-exilic period circumcision is not so much a religious practice; rather it is a cultural practice. In the post-exilic period it is more a religious practice, and it has theological meaning to the post-exilic community.

Regarding the amaXhosa view of circumcision it was not clear that it had changed or had a different meaning in the past. Their circumcision is a rite of passage to manhood, which means when one is circumcised, he then becomes a man. In the Old Testament this kind of understanding of circumcision is not evident.

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