

NINA E. LIVESEY

Circumcision as a Malleable Symbol

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
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Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This monograph is a revision of my 2007 Ph.D. dissertation, submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Dedman College at Southern Methodist University. The present work differs from the dissertation in that an entire chapter on Justin's treatments of circumcision has been removed, and a brief history of the interpretation of circumcision (chapter five) inserted in its stead.

Chapter five, while omitted from the dissertation is the result of research begun during my year-long research trip to Paris, France (2005-2006). It represents work undertaken at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF), the Bibliothèque Augustinienne and the Bibliothèque Saulchoir. I am convinced that the concentration on the ancient and medieval exegetes would not have been considered had I not been surrounded by a still visible medieval culture in Paris. Not only were the ancient and medieval textual sources readily available, but so also was the darker side of the history between Christians and Jews still visible. Perhaps I need only cite the example of the well-known female statues that frame the main and western entrance to Notre Dame cathedral. On the right stands the erect Ecclesia, standing proud, a halo framing her head, with a cup in her left hand and a tall cross-affixed shaft in her right; and on the left is the dejected and defeated Sinagoga, hips to the left and shoulders to the right, a rigid band covering her eyes blinding her, holding a broken shaft, with her crown on its side on the ground and the tablets of the law pointing downward and nearly falling from her right hand. It is my hope that the present monograph ameliorates in a small way the false and damaging image of Jews and Judaism, exemplified by these medieval statues, but that still lingers in the Christian imagination.

I owe my supervising director, the now Emeritus Professor Jouette M. Basler, my deepest gratitude for the extensive time and care she took in reviewing each and every chapter of my dissertation. The present revisions were made without her consultation and careful oversight, so that errors and omissions that remain are solely my own. I am also grateful for the many helpful comments of my two internal examiners at Southern Methodist University, Professors Jamie Clark-Soles and Valerie Karras and for the help of Professor Bruce Marshall in unpacking the writings of Augustine and Aquinas. In addition, my outside examiner Professor Bernard B. Scott, provided invaluable suggestions regarding the dissertation's overall focus and direction. This revision incorporates many of his helpful suggestions. Again, errors and omis-

sions that remain are entirely my own doing. I owe a special thanks to Professor Mark D. Nanos, who read through an earlier draft of this monograph and offered several valuable comments. Mark's extensive work on Paul has been a steady source of inspiration to me. He, perhaps more than any other modern Pauline scholar I know, has challenged the strongly entrenched anti-Judaic interpretations within the field of Pauline studies. I would also like to thank those in my midst at the University of Oklahoma including Dean Paul Bell, Dr. Trent Gabert, Professor Charles Kimball, and Dean James Pappas for their encouragement and support. Beth McCoy, IT Specialist, has assisted me many times with the technical aspects of bringing this monograph to publication. Finally, I am most grateful to the series editor, Professor Jörg Frey without whose recommendation this monograph would not have come to publication and to the editorial staff at Mohr Siebeck, especially Tanja Mix. Much thanks is due especially to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, who took time to meet with me on numerous occasions at various meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature. It was his willingness to review my revised dissertation that provided the necessary encouragement and motivation to complete the revisions.

Last, but certainly not least, I owe my greatest debt of gratitude to my companion, Professor Steven J. Livesey. Steve has been my model of a dedicated scholar and a steady source of support and encouragement of my scholarly interests from their inception. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have such a companion in life. This book is dedicated to him.

Norman, 7 October 2010

Nina E. Livesey

Table of Contents

Preface	V
Table of Contents	VII
Abbreviations	X
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Circumcision in 1 Maccabees, <i>Jubilees</i> , 2 and 4 Maccabees	9
A. 1 Maccabees: Circumcision as a mark of allegiance to Hasmonean rule	10
B. <i>Jubilees</i> : Circumcision as a mark of allegiance to a strict legal code and the identification as a “son of the covenant”	16
C. 2 Maccabees: Circumcision as a mark of pious sacrifice	22
D. 4 Maccabees: Circumcision as a mark of the use of pious reason over the passions	27
Conclusions	32
Chapter 2: Circumcision in Josephus	34
Circumcision as commitment to Judaism	35
Conclusions	40
Chapter 3: Circumcision in Philo	41
Introduction	41
A. <i>De specialibus legibus</i> 1: The mark of circumcision as the promotion of health, life and well-being	46
B. <i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesis</i> 3: The mark of circumcision draws the mind closer to God	58

C. <i>De migratione Abrahami</i> : The mark of circumcision benefits the mind and gains the respect of fellow Jews	69
D. Conclusions	74
 Chapter 4: Circumcision in Paul's Letters	 77
A. Circumcision in Galatians	79
I. "The circumcision" are Jews who uphold the Jewish law	80
II. The mark of circumcision confers a slave-like condition on Gentiles ...	87
B. Philippians: "The circumcision" are those concerned for the heavenly realm	94
C. 1 Corinthians: The mark of circumcision means nothing for those called heavenward	100
D. Circumcision in Romans	104
I. Circumcision as a metaphor for someone who follows God's statutes	107
II. Circumcision as an allegory for the righteousness of faithfulness	113
Conclusions	120
 Chapter 5: A Brief History of the Interpretation of Circumcision	 123
A. Ancient and Medieval Interpreters of Circumcision	124
I. Circumcision in the writings of Justin	124
II. Circumcision in the writings of Augustine	131
III. Circumcision in the writings of Aquinas	135
IV. Circumcision in the writings of Luther	139
B. Modern Interpreters of Circumcision	143
I. Circumcision in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann	144
II. Circumcision in the writings of Ernst Käsemann	145
III. Circumcision as a work of law that does not bring about salvation	146
IV. Circumcision as an indication of achievement and boasting	147
V. Circumcision as a badge of distinction	148
VI. Circumcision as representative of an ineffectual religion or lifestyle	149
VII. Circumcision as the sign of a Jew	150
Conclusions	153

Conclusion	155
Bibliography	159
Index of Ancient and Other Sources	181
Index of Modern Authors	194
Index of Subjects	197

Abbreviations

Abbreviations and citation conventions for ancient literature and modern scholarship follow *SBL* (1999) and *IATG* (1992) wherever possible.

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992.
BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by F. W. Danker. 3rd. ed. Chicago, 2000 [Based on editions by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich]
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Peabody, Mass., 1999
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series latina. Turnhout, 1953–
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993
<i>ER</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i> . Edited by M. Eliade. 16 vols. New York, 1987
<i>IATG</i>	<i>Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete</i> . S. Schwertner. 2nd ed. Berlin, 1992
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S., Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
LXX	<i>Septuaginta</i> , ed. A. Ralfs. 2 vols. in 1. Stuttgart, 1979
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>ODCC</i>	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church</i> . Edited by F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone. 3rd ed. Oxford, 2005
PL	Patrologia latina [= Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
SBL	<i>The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient and Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies</i> . Edited by P. H. Alexander et al. Peabody, Mass., 1999
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976
<i>TLNT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i> . C. Spicq. Translated and edited by J. D. Ernest. 2nd ed. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1996
<i>TRE</i>	<i>Theologische Realenzyklopädie</i> . Edited by G. Krause and G. Müller. Berlin, 1977–
WA	Luther, Martin: Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. [Weimarer Ausgabe]
WSA	<i>The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century</i> . Edited by J. E. Rotelle. 20 vols. Brooklyn, 1990–

Introduction

Circumcision is the bodily mark created by cutting off the genital foreskin, more commonly done on males but also occasionally performed on females.¹ As one might imagine, it is a delicate and no doubt painful procedure requiring a certain amount of surgical finesse. My interest in this topic, however, does not involve aspects of the surgical practice, but instead the meaning that has been attributed to the Jewish religious/ethnic practice. As I demonstrate, the Jewish practice of circumcision, as treated in texts from the second century BCE to the first century CE, the time period to which interpreters turn for its definition of this rite, has no single monovalent meaning. One might assume, for example, that treatments of circumcision would reflect its significance as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham as defined in the Hebrew Bible (Gen 17:11–14; Lev 12:3), yet this definition rarely surfaces within the ancient texts.

To demonstrate the fundamental diversity and richness in understandings of circumcision, I survey a broad range of treatments of circumcision in the ancient texts, three of the four books of the Maccabees, the book of *Jubilees*, a treatise of Josephus, several writings of Philo, and four of Paul's extant letters. Within all of these writings, the meaning of circumcision is in every instance contingent upon the context. Elements such as the overall purpose of the treatise, the intended audience, and the author's rhetorical style and point of view play a crucial role in its meaning.

By contrast, the situation within the scholarship on circumcision belies this fundamental diversity in the meaning of circumcision. While several the general reference works acknowledge the differences in understandings of circumcision, rarely is that same degree of variety reflected in the analytical discussions (i.e., lectures, commentaries, and specialized studies) on circumci-

¹ It merits mention that circumcision, in some circles, can equally be considered the sign of a Muslim. Although circumcision is nowhere mentioned in the Qur'an, it was mandated by Muhammad and hence receives considerable support. The ceremony is often performed just prior to the onset of puberty. Girls may be circumcised as well as boys. See Kathryn Kueny, "Circumcision," *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* 1 (2004): 148–49; See also Kathryn Kueny, "Abraham's Test: Islamic Male Circumcision as Anti/Ante-Covenantal Practice," in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 166.

sion in the ancient world.² When the diversity in the meaning of circumcision is absent, distortions occur not only in the understanding of circumcision itself, but also in the ancient author's interpretation of Jews and Judaism. Some examples should suffice to illustrate this point.

In a recent monograph, the Philonic scholar Ellen Birnbaum argues that Philo is less concerned about Jews themselves and their religion than with notions of universalism and individualism.³ Her more general assessment of Philo's philosophy is derived in part through a consideration of his treatment of circumcision in *Quaestiones et solutions in Genesis* 3. Through an analysis of this treatment of circumcision rather than on a range of treatments, Birnbaum states that Philo's allegorization of this rite indicates his lack of concern for an historic or contemporary Israel.⁴

By contrast, scholars such as Peder Borgen and Marcel Simon cite *De migratione Abrahami* 16.89–93 in support of the opposite perspective, Philo's commitment to the continuation of contemporary Judaism. Borgen remarks that *De migratione Abrahami* 16.89–93 "summarizes" Philo's "attitude as an exegete." "The symbolical, though higher and more important, practically never invalidates the literal."⁵ In the same vein, Thomas Tobin writes that

² For general reference works on the treatments of circumcision in the first and second centuries CE and beyond, see Rudolf Meyer, "περιτέμνω," *TDNT* 6:81–84; Otto Betz, "Beschneidung II," *TRE* 5:719–22; and Robert G. Hall, "Circumcision," *ABD* 1:1025–31. Andreas Blaschke has written what can be termed a "reference book" on treatments of circumcision. He reviews circumcision in a wide variety of primarily early sources, the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, rabbinic texts including the Targum, the New Testament, early Christian writings, and the patristic writings. His work is less focused on a comparison of treatments of circumcision than is my own. See Andreas Blaschke, *Beschneidung: Zeugnisse der Bibel und verwandter Texte*, Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (Tübingen: A. Francke, 1998). Shaye J. D. Cohen has worked extensively on this issue, see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?: Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Susan Elliott provides a brief survey of Greco-Roman and Jewish views on circumcision in the ancient world. See Susan Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 233–44.

³ Ellen Birnbaum remarks, "While no one, then, would question Philo's commitment to the Jews and their religion, his tendencies toward universalism and individualism are marked enough to undermine or at least pose a challenge to this commitment. He himself, however, rarely acknowledges or addresses this potential challenge directly." Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, ed. David M. Hay, *Studia Philonica Monographs*, vol. 290 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 2.

⁴ Birnbaum, *Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 155–56.

⁵ Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. Michael E. Stone (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 260–61. See also Simon who writes «*Ses interpre-*

Philo “condemns those who want to desert an observance of the Mosaic law.”⁶

Maren Niehoff voices yet another view of Philo’s interpretation of circumcision. Niehoff writes that Philo’s allegorical understanding of circumcision, as seen especially in *De specialibus legibus* 1.9–10, signifies that this rite is to be emblematic for how Jews are to respond to God’s laws in general. The allegorical passages in that treatise speak of the importance of purging the mind of thoughts of excessive pleasures. According to Niehoff, such an interpretation suggests that circumcision signifies *enkrateia*⁷ or self-control.

However, by considering only certain treatments of circumcision rather than the full range of them, these Philonic scholars develop only a partial and hence false understanding of circumcision and its significance for Jews. By taking into consideration a broader range of Philo’s understanding of circumcision, they would not only bring greater clarity to his understanding of circumcision, but also to larger questions, such as whether or not he sought to diminish Jewish particularity, or the degree to which Philo considered law abidance central for Jews.

As I demonstrate in chapter three, Philo’s understanding of circumcision is diverse and varies from text to text. According to him, the physical practice of circumcision signifies the promotion of health, life, and well-being (*Spec.* 1.1–11), benefits the mind, gains the respect of fellow Jews (*Migr.* 16.89–93), and draws the Jewish male closer to God (*QG* 3.46–52).

The situation within the scholarship on Paul⁸ and circumcision is similar to that of Philo. Interpreters from ancient to modern times rarely consider the

tations allégoriques ne diminuent en rien son respect du sens littéral.» Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l’empire Romain (135–425)* (Paris: Éditions E. De Boccard, 1964), 182.

⁶ Thomas H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, ed. Bruce Vawter, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), 155–57.

⁷ Maren R. Niehoff, “Circumcision as a Marker of Identity: Philo, Origen and the Rabbis on Gen 17:1–14,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10 (2003): 101.

⁸ Recent articles and books devoted to the topic of circumcision and Paul are numerous and include. John M. G. Barclay, “Paul and Philo on Circumcision: Romans 2:25–29 in Social and Cultural Context,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 536–56, Peder Borgen, “Observations on the Theme ‘Paul and Philo.’ Paul’s Preaching of Circumcision in Galatia (Gal. 5:11) and Debates on Circumcision in Philo,” in *Die Paulinische Literatur und Theologie*, ed. Sigfred Pedersen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 85–102, Peder Borgen, *Paul Preaches Circumcision and Pleases Men and Other Essays on Christian Origins* (Dragvoll-Trondheim: TAPIR, 1983), James D. G. Dunn, “What Was the Issue between Paul and ‘Those of the Circumcision’?,” in *Paulus und das antike Judentum*, ed. Martin Hengel and Ulrich Heckel (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1991), 295–317, Timothy W. Berkeley, *From a Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart: Pauline Intertextual Exegesis in Romans 2:17–29*, ed. Mark Allen Powell, Society of Biblical Literature: Dis-

full breath of his treatments of circumcision. In doing so, they formulate understandings of this rite and of first-century Jews and Judaism that are both limited and false. To illustrate just how far understandings of circumcision have veered from Paul's wider understanding of this rite, I dedicate an entire chapter to a brief history of the interpretation of circumcision from ancient to modern time. Below, however, are a few examples of recent scholarly assessments of Paul's views on circumcision.

Like the Philonic scholars mentioned above, Pauline scholars often employ only one of his several treatments of circumcision in support of a larger theological or philosophical position. Statements by the prolific Pauline scholar⁹ James D. G. Dunn illustrate this widespread tendency in Pauline scholarship.

sertation Series (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), Werner E. Lemke, "Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor," in *A God So Near*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbauns, 2003), 299–319, Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2," in *The Galatians Debate*, ed. Mark Nanos (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 2002), 235–60, Neil J. McEleney, "Conversion, Circumcision and the Law," *New Testament Studies* 20 (1974): 319–41, Troy W. Martin, "The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antithesis in Galatians 3:28," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 1 (2003): 111–25, Troy W. Martin, "Circumcision in Galatia and the Holiness of God's Ecclesiae," in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2007), 219–37, Donald W. Robinson, "The Circumcision of Titus, and Paul's 'Liberty,'" *Australian Biblical Review* 12, no. 1–4 (1964): 24–42, Joel Marcus, "The Circumcision and the Uncircumcision in Rome," *New Testament Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989): 67–81, Donald W. Robinson, "We Are the Circumcision," *Australian Biblical Review* 15, no. 1–4 (1967): 28–35, Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-Imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*.

⁹ The following is a non-exhaustive list of Dunn's work on Paul. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 295–317, James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 39 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1990), James D. G. Dunn, "Once More ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ," *SBL Seminar Papers* (1991): 730–44, Dunn, "What Was the Issue?," 29–317, James D. G. Dunn, "The Question of Anti-Semitism in the New Testament," in *Jews and Christians: The Partings of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 177–211, James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992): 1–22, James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. Henry Chadwick, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1993), James D. G. Dunn, "Echoes of Intra-Jewish Polemic in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112 (1993): 459–77, James D. G. Dunn, "The Pauline Letters," in *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 276–89, James D. G. Dunn, "The Status and Contribution of Paul," in *The Future of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 169–82, James D. G. Dunn, *New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

Dunn bases his assessment of Paul's understanding of circumcision on Romans 2 and understands circumcision fundamentally as a boundary marker Jews have set to distinguish themselves from others. According to Dunn, as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel circumcision functioned first and foremost as a marker that distinctly identified Jews.¹⁰ Dunn writes,

These identity markers [circumcision, abstention from pork, and the Sabbath] identified Jewishness because they were seen by Jews themselves as fundamental observances of the covenant. They functioned as badges of covenant membership. A member of the covenant people was, by definition, one who observed these practices in particular. How could it be otherwise, since precisely these practices belong so clearly to the basic ground rules of the covenant? If we think of circumcision, no loyal Jew could ignore the explicit stipulations of Genesis 17.¹¹

He goes on to explain that Paul objected to circumcision because the distinctive mark of identity served as a means by which Jews boasted of their privileged position before God. He writes,

It is this attitude which Paul attacks in criticizing Jewish 'boasting', their misplaced emphasis on the outward and physical, their claim to an exclusively Jewish righteousness. It is this attitude which Paul sees as a stunted and distorted understanding of what the law requires, and therefore as falling under the curse of the law (Gal 3.10).¹²

Other Pauline scholars such as Hans Dieter Betz and Sam Williams represent the thoughts of many modern interpreters of Paul who consider circumcision both as a distinctive mark of identity and also as that rite representative of a means of salvation. In contrast to Dunn, Betz and Williams found their interpretation of Paul's understanding of circumcision in Galatians and in light of Paul's statements regarding works of law. Betz writes, "Circumcision is the external ritual symbolizing the acceptance of Judaism, even if it takes the

¹⁰ Peter Schäfer's description of the Substantialists' position with regard to anti-Semitism appears to undergird much of the scholarship related to circumcision as a boundary issue. According to Schäfer, the Substantialists viewed anti-Semitism as a "natural" phenomenon and "as old as *Judaism itself*." It was the "simple result of the barrier which Jewry itself increasingly erected against the world in whose midst it lived." The Substantialist Victor Tcherikover writes the following tautological statement. "The inner quality of anti-Semitism arises from the very existence of the Jewish people as an alien body among the nations. The alien character of the Jews is the central cause of the origin of anti-Semitism, and this alien character has two aspects: The Jews are alien because they are foreigners derived from another land, and they are alien because of their foreign customs which are strange and outlandish in the eyes of the local inhabitants." Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3–4.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul," in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1990), 192 (Italics are my own.)

¹² James D. G. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Gal. 3.10–14)," in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1990), 231.

form of Christian-Judaism.”¹³ Paul’s exhortation that Galatian Gentiles avoid becoming circumcised signifies that Jewish concepts have lost their meaning for Christians;¹⁴ now faith has become the determinative factor for salvation.¹⁵ In like fashion, Williams defines circumcision in two ways, the first is as an entrance rite of Judaism.

Circumcision is the ritual of entrance into a distinctive people, and one who takes that step takes upon himself the obligation to live according to the Sinai covenant in every sphere of personal and communal existence. He adopts a complete way of life. In doing so, however, he severs himself from that inclusive community where ethnic distinctions remain but are no longer in effect (Gal 3:28).¹⁶

Later, however, he argues that circumcision and other works of law are opposed to faith, and it is faith in Christ that makes one righteous. Faith, says Williams, is not “a way of life that takes its direction from requirements of Torah such as being circumcised and avoiding certain foods. Positively, faith is a way determined by Christ.”¹⁷ Thus, according to scholars such as Betz and Williams, circumcision both defines a person as a Jew but also functions negatively in that it has no ability to save a person, only faith in Christ can function in this way. The notion that circumcision does not provide a means of salvation dates to the second century, to the writings of Justin, as I demonstrate in chapter five.

In contrast to this and much of the scholarship on Paul and circumcision, the meanings the ancient writer assesses for circumcision vary significantly from one letter to the next. In Galatians, Paul refers to the physical practice of circumcision as a rite that enslaves a person (Gal 5:1–6), yet in 1 Corinthians, Paul is unconcerned whether or not a person is circumcised (1 Cor 7:19). In Philippians, he speaks of himself and others as being “the circumcision,” defined in positive terms as those who worship God and boast in the Anointed Jesus (Phil 3:3), whereas in Galatians, those of the circumcision are assessed negatively, in that they have an adverse effect on Cephas, as Jews who follow the law. In Romans, Paul remarks that a person qualifies as being “circumcised,” whether physically so or not, when he follows the statutes (Rom 2:25–29). Finally, Paul assesses the sign of circumcision allegorically as a seal signifying the righteousness of faithfulness (Rom 4:11).

¹³ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 258.

¹⁴ Betz, *Galatians*, 262.

¹⁵ Betz, *Galatians*, 262–63. Hans Dieter Betz writes, “In Judaism the terms [“circumcision” and “uncircumcision”] symbolize the dividing line between those who belong to the Torah Covenant and thus are insured of their salvation and those who are outside of that covenant.” Betz, *Galatians*, 262.

¹⁶ Sam K. Williams, *Galatians*, ed. Victor P. Furnish, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 136–67.

¹⁷ Williams, *Galatians*, 67.

Before proceeding with the treatments of circumcision among the ancient writings, however, some attention must be given to how ancients spoke about circumcision. In the first place, ancient authors seldom supply an explicit meaning for circumcision. Thus, one rarely finds an expression such as “circumcision signifies,” using the Greek verb to signify (σημαίνειν) or “circumcision is,” using the Greek verb to be (εἶναι), or “circumcision means” (λέγειν). By contrast, ancient authors often speak of the function of circumcision. Philo, for instance, remarks that the mark of circumcision makes something visible (ἐμφανίζειν) (*Migr.* 16.92). More often, however, he refers to the benefits of circumcision.

In the second place, ancient authors often simply refer to the mark of circumcision without specifically elaborating upon what it means (1 Macc 1:60–61; *Jub.* 15:23–24; 2 Macc 6:10; 4 Macc 4:25; *A.J.* 20.2–4; *Spec.* 1.4–8; *QG* 3.46–52; *Migr.* 16.92; Gal 2:3, 5:1–3; Rom 2:25–26; Phil 3:5). In these instances, I have extrapolated the meaning of circumcision from its literary context and by taking into consideration the author’s intent for the treatise.

In the third place, in supplying explicit meanings for circumcision or its sign, ancients often employ allegory. In keeping with the text of Genesis 17:11, the author of *Jubilees*, for example, refers to circumcision as the sign of the covenant (*Jub* 15:28). Philo refers to circumcision as a symbol (σύμβολον) of various things pertaining to the mind (*Spec.* 1.8, *QG* 3.48, *Migr.* 16.92), and Paul calls circumcision a sign (σημεῖον) and seal of the righteousness of faithfulness (Rom 4:11).

In the fourth place, ancient authors employ the term “circumcision” as a metonym, a figure of speech whereby the name of one thing is used in place of another word of which it is an attribute. Paul, for example, employs the term “circumcision” in a metonymic sense in the place of a circumcised “Jew” or “Jews” (Gal 2:12, 6:13; Rom 3:30), but not always only for the physically circumcised (Phil 3:3). In Paul’s letter to the Galatians in which he employs circumcision as a metonym but also uses the term to refer to the physical practice itself, I demonstrate a correlation in the meaning of circumcision between two diverse uses of this term.

Finally, ancient authors employ the term “circumcision” as a metaphor. Both Philo (*QG* 3.46, 48) and Paul (Rom 2:25–29) use the term in this sense. In the case of Paul, the notion of circumcision is not necessarily associated with the physical practice itself. As a metaphor “circumcision” also retains a unique signification. Thus, even in these cases, “circumcision’s” meaning must be derived from its context. Through these various uses, ancient authors freely assess a wide variety of meanings to circumcision’s signification.

The book proceeds along the following general outline. In chapter one, I explore the diverse meanings of circumcision within the book of *Jubilees* and within three of the four books of the Maccabees (1, 2, and 4). While each of

the books of the Maccabees refers to circumcision, and indeed the subject of circumcision is rather central and referred to in much the same way in each of these works, the meaning of circumcision nonetheless varies according to each book's overall goal or purpose. By contrast, *Jubilees*, a reworking and expansion of the Genesis and part of Exodus, provides an explicit and thus more easily retrievable definition for circumcision.

Chapter two is a discussion of Josephus' narration of the circumcision of Izates, the King of Abiabene (*A.J.* 20.2.4). In this brief and most likely fictional tale, the meaning of circumcision is derived through an exploration of how King Izates determined to become circumcised.

In chapter three, I discuss the diversity of treatments of circumcision within three of Philo's works, *De specialibus legibus* 1.1–11, *Quaestiones et solutions in Genesin* 3.46–52, and *De migratione Abrahami* 16.89–93. While there are similarities between Philo's treatment of circumcision in *QG* 3.46–52 and in *Spec.* 1.1–11, in the former work Philo focuses primarily on circumcision's benefit for the mind and in the latter on its more corporeal benefits for general health and fertility.

Chapter four concerns Paul's various treatments of this rite, taking into consideration his discussions of this rite in Galatians 2:11–14, 5:1–6, Philipians 3:3, 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, and Romans 2:25–29, 4:9–12. At the end of chapter four, I provide a brief evaluation of Paul's overall assessment of circumcision as far as it concerns Gentiles of the faith.

In chapter five, I survey the scholarship on circumcision within the Christian exegetical tradition. The history of the interpretation of circumcision begins with Justin's second-century treatment of this rite and continues into the present era. This survey is warranted due to the degree of influence and distortion in the meaning of this rite within the tradition. In a concluding chapter, I sum up my findings of the ancient authors' understandings of this rite.

Chapter 1

Circumcision in 1 Maccabees, *Jubilees*, 2 and 4 Maccabees

Written in defense of Jewish practices and laws, the books of Maccabees¹ and *Jubilees* provide some of the earliest extant reflections outside of the Hebrew Bible itself on Jewish rites. In these writings, specific Jewish practices such as circumcision, particular types of sacrifices, eating undefiled foods, and the adherence to the Book of the Covenant are reified as indicators of Judaism²

¹ While the first two books of the Maccabees stem from different hands and time-periods, there has been a relatively long tradition along with some rational explanation, beyond the fact that they all carry the same name, for conflating these two works. In the first place, 1 and 2 Maccabees circulated together within the Septuagint and later within the Vulgate. Protestants consider them both apocryphal literature, and since the Council of Trent (1546), Catholics have declared them deuterocanonical. Solomon Zeitlin, *The First Book of the Maccabees*, trans. Sidney Tedesche (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 63–64, Solomon Zeitlin, *The Second Book of Maccabees*, trans. Sidney Tedesche (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 86.

In the second place, the first two books bearing this title have been considered primary sources for understanding the war between the Hasmoneans and the Seleucids during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 BCE). For instances of this trend, see Thomas Fischer, trans. Frederick Cryer, “Maccabees, Books of,” *ABD* 4:439; Uriel Rappaport, “Maccabean Revolt,” *ABD* 4:433; Zeitlin, *The First Book of the Maccabees*, 34–38, J. C. Dancy, *A Commentary on I Maccabees* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), 3–8, F.-M. Abel and Jean Starcky, *Les Livres des Maccabées* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), 16, Elias J. Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees: Studies on the Meaning and Origin of the Maccabean Revolt*, trans. Horst R. Moehring (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 23, 95, Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 151–70.

² It is generally agreed that parts of the biblical book of Daniel (7–12:13) refer to the reign of Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) and that the completed work dates to approximately this same time period. While the book of Daniel mentions the desecration of burnt offerings (8:9–13, 11:31) and the attempts to change the sacred seasons and the law (7:25), it offers no elaboration of these or other religious practices, as do the books of the Maccabees. See Dancy, *A Commentary on I Maccabees*, 25–28.

Unlike the books of Maccabees, the book of Daniel considers that the affront to the law and sanctuary will have a definite end (7:25; 8:14; 11:35–36, 45; 12:1, 7, 11–13). After the time of desolation, the sanctuary will be restored to its proper state (καθαρισθήσεται τὸ ἅγιον) (8:14). In other words, the writer or writers of the book of Daniel do not foresee any perma-

and staunchly defended. Each work addresses itself to the same external situation, the threat of the demise of Jewish practices, laws, and lifestyle during the reign of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175–164 BCE). While the three books termed “Maccabees” share a common name³ and themes, their authors, overall tone, and points of view differ. Each work defends Jewish customs⁴ in ways that differ dramatically from each other. For its part, *Jubilees*, or *Little Genesis*, differs from the books of the Maccabees in part due to its genre. It claims to be a replacement of the book of Genesis and promotes circumcision and other Jewish rites through divine pronouncements.

In each of the writings, the authors treat circumcision as a physical practice and not as a symbol for something else. To distinguish circumcision from its symbolic meaning, I refer to it in these writings as a mark. However, circumcision in its capacity as a mark also represents a physical practice associated with a practitioner. Thus, in defining circumcision in its capacity as a physical practice or mark, I am also defining a particular type of Jew, the one who would have this mark on his body. As is the case with all of the books of the Maccabees and *Jubilees*, the mark of circumcision is nowhere made explicit and hence must be teased out from its literary context.

A. 1 Maccabees: Circumcision as a mark of allegiance to Hasmonean rule

The literary context determines the understanding of circumcision in 1 Maccabees⁵ as a mark of allegiance to Hasmonean⁶ rule. The narrative clearly

ment structural changes to particular religious practices, as they are presently known. Rather this author is looking for a return to “normalcy.”

³ Christians most likely applied this common name to all the books at a later date. See Fischer, *ABD* 4:444. Daniel Schwartz comments that while 1 and 2 Maccabees were written for Jews, there is not much evidence of Jewish readership in the centuries immediately following their appearance. By contrast, Christians showed more interest in these books than did the Jews. There is evidence, for example, that Hebrews as well as several Christian post-canonical texts borrowed from 2 Maccabees. The martyrdom stories in 2 Maccabees, in particular, attracted much attention. Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (CEJL) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 85–90.

⁴ The verb περιτέμνειν occurs three times in 1 Maccabees (1:60, 61; 2:46). The nominal antonym ἀπερίτμητος occurs once (1 Macc 1:48). The verb περιτέμνειν occurs only once in 2 Maccabees (6:10) and 4 Maccabees (4:25).

⁵ There is no known date for the composition of this writing. Some scholars speculate that the work was written around 100 BCE. See Steven Weitzman, “Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (1999): 50, Abel and Starcky, *Les Livres des Maccabées*, xxix, Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees: Studies on the Meaning and Origin of the Maccabean Revolt*, 18. See also Goldstein who does not date this work before the last decade of the second century BCE. Jonathan