

§ 012

THE CIRCUMCISION OF JESUS

*And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*¹

Luke 2:21

Introduction

1. The fact that the child was circumcised is only implied, somewhat as in John's case in 1:59.
 - This means that Luke puts the stress on the giving of the name, a custom that was connected with the rite of circumcision.
 - Although this emphasis on the bestowal of the name is evident, Luke by no means makes the circumcision a minor act.
 - He mentions "eight days," the number prescribed by the law, and in verse 39 adds the statement that Joseph and Mary completed "all things according to the law of the Lord."
2. The act of circumcision made Jesus a member of the covenant people and thereby placed him under the law, Gal. 4:4.
 - It was legally performed on the eighth day (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3).
 - So Jesus was formally obligated to fulfill the divine law.
 - No ordinary Jew could fulfill that obligation because he sinned often and thus required the sacrifices to remove his sins and to keep him in the covenant.
 - But Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law perfectly, not for himself, as is sometimes supposed, but in order to redeem (buy free) us who are under the law and cannot fulfill it.²
3. We here see the Lawgiver make himself subject to that law.
 - Moreover, circumcision was a part of the ceremonial law and as such an arrangement that was connected with the Abrahamic covenant.
 - Jehovah could have used some other covenant sign.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

² The view that his active obedience concerned his own person does not see far enough. It stops with the bare fact that he was circumcised, it does not ask why he was born and thus subjected to circumcision.

- Jesus receives the sign chosen by *Yahweh*, not as one who needed that covenant and that sign for himself, but as the one who would fulfill, bring, and dispense what that covenant and that sign promised.
- The circumcision is thus on a par with the baptism of Jesus.³

Commentary

1. *At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised. Eight days* indicates the time for the circumcision, and usually, the naming of a male child (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:3).
 - Jesus was circumcised in the normal way.⁴
 - God's law ever precedes man's finest medical discoveries.
 - Normally, in the blood of infants, the coagulants reach their maximum effectiveness on the eighth day after birth.⁵
2. Our Lord Jesus, being *made of a woman*, was *made under the law*, Gal. 4:4.
 - He was not only, as the son of a daughter of Adam, made under the law of *nature*, but as the son of a daughter of Abraham was made under the law of *Moses*; he put his neck under that yoke, though it was a heavy yoke, and a *shadow of good things to come*.
 - Though its institutions were *beggarly elements*, and *rudiments of this world*, as the apostle calls them, Christ submitted to it, that he might with the better grace cancel it, and set it aside for us.
3. Matthew Henry writes: He was *circumcised* on the very day that the law appointed: *When eight days were accomplished ... they circumcised him*.
 - a. Though it was a *painful* operation (*Surely a bloody husband thou has been*, said Zipporah to Moses, *because of the circumcision*, Ex. 4:25), yet Christ would undergo it for us; nay, *therefore* he submitted to it, to give an instance of his early obedience, his obedience unto blood.
 - Then he shed his blood by drops, which afterwards he poured out in purple streams.
 - b. Though it supposed him a *stranger*, that was by that ceremony to be admitted into covenant with God, whereas he had always been his *beloved Son*; nay, though it

³ Lenski, R.C.H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (139). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

⁴ Marshall, I.H. (1978). *The Gospel of Luke : A commentary on the Greek text*. Includes indexes. The New international Greek testament commentary (115). Exeter [Eng.: Paternoster Press.

⁵ *Believer's Study Bible*. 1997, ©1995. ©1991 Criswell Center for Biblical Studies. (electronic ed.) (Lk 2:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

supposed him a *sinner*, that needed to have his filthiness taken away, whereas he had no impurity or superfluity of naughtiness to be cut off, *yet* he submitted to it; nay, *therefore* he submitted to it, because he would be made in the likeness, not only of *flesh*, but of *sinful flesh*, Rom. 8:3.

- c. Though thereby he made himself a *debtor to the whole law* (Gal. 5:3), yet he submitted to it; nay, *therefore* he submitted to it, because he would take upon him the form of a servant, though he was free-born. Christ was circumcised,
- That he might own himself of the seed of Abraham, and of that nation of *whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, and who was to *take on him the seed of Abraham*, Heb. 2:16.
 - That he might own himself a surety for our sins, and an undertaker for our safety.
 - Circumcision was our *bond*, whereby we acknowledged ourselves *debtors to the law*; and Christ, by being circumcised, did as it were set his hand to it, being *made sin for us*.
 - The ceremonial law consisted much in sacrifices;
 - Christ hereby obliged himself to offer, not the blood of bulls or goats, but his own blood, which none that ever were circumcised before could oblige themselves to.
 - That he might justify, and put an honor upon, the dedication of the infant seed of the church to God, by that ordinance which is the instituted seal of the covenant, and of the righteousness which is by faith, as circumcision was (Rom. 4:11), and baptism is.
- d. At his circumcision, according to the custom, he had his name given him; he was called *Jesus* or *Joshua*, for he was *so named of the angel* to his mother Mary *before he was conceived in the womb* (Luke 1:31), and to his supposed father Joseph after, Mt. 1:21.
- It was a *common name* among the Jews, as John was (Col. 4:11), and in this he would be made *like unto his brethren*.
 - It was the name of two eminent types of him in the Old Testament, Joshua, the successor of Moses, who was commander of Israel, and conqueror of Canaan; and Joshua, the high priest, who was therefore purposely crowned, that he might prefigure Christ as a *priest upon his throne*, Zec. 6:11, 13.
 - It was very significant of his undertaking. Jesus signifies a *Savior*. He would be denominated, not from the glories of his divine nature, but from his gracious designs as Mediator; he *brings salvation*.⁶

⁶ Henry, M. (1996, ©1991). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Lk 2:21). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Conclusion

Titles of Christ

The two most popular titles or names Christians use in speaking of our Lord are Jesus, a translation of the Hebrew word Joshua, which means “Yahweh is Salvation,” and Christ, a transliteration of the Greek term Christos, meaning “Anointed One” or “Messiah.” Following are some other significant names or titles for Christ used in the New Testament. Each title expresses a distinct truth about Jesus and His relationship to believers.

Name or Title	Significance	Biblical Reference
Adam, Last Adam	First of the new race of the redeemed	1 Cor. 15:45
Alpha and Omega	The beginning and ending of all things	Rev. 21:6
Bread of Life	The one essential food	John 6:35
Chief Cornerstone	A sure foundation for life	Eph. 2:20
Chief Shepherd	Protector, sustainer, and guide	1 Pe. 5:4
Firstborn from the Dead	Leads us into resurrection and eternal life	Col. 1:18
Good Shepherd	Provider and caretaker	John 10:11
Great Shepherd of the Sheep	Trustworthy guide and protector	Heb. 13:20
High Priest	A perfect sacrifice for our sins	Heb. 3:1
Holy One of God	Sinless in His nature	Mark 1:24
Immanuel (God With Us)	Stands with us in all of life's circumstances	Matt. 1:23
King of Kings, Lord of Lords	The Almighty, before whom every knee will bow	Rev. 19:16
Lamb of God	Gave His life as a sacrifice on our behalf	John 1:29
Light of the World	Brings hope in the midst of darkness	John 9:5
Lord of Glory	The power and presence of the living God	1 Cor. 2:8
Mediator between God and Men	Brings us into God's presence redeemed and forgiven	1 Tim. 2:5
Only Begotten of the Father	The unique, one-of-a-kind Son of God	John 1:14
Prophet	Faithful proclaimer of the truths of God	Acts 3:22
Savior	Delivers from sin and death	Luke 1:47
Seed of Abraham	Mediator of God's covenant	Gal. 3:16
Son of Man	Identifies with us in our humanity	Matt. 18:11
The Word	Present with God at the creation	John 1:1

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⁷ *Believer's Study Bible*. 1997, ©1995. ©1991 Criswell Center for Biblical Studies. (electronic ed.) (Lk 2:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.