

continuity with the people of the older covenant and as the fulfillment of that \*covenant. They are now, in Christ, all that the older covenant longed to see. So Christians are a new \*Israel, the spiritual \*seed of Abraham (Gal 3:29, 6:16), ruled over by and belonging to God himself (1 Pet 2:9-10) and composed of all those who have faith in Christ, whatever their racial or cultural background.

Central to OT religion was the \*temple. The church of Jesus Christ does not worship at a temple but has *become* the temple. God now lives both among and within his people, not in buildings but in a living community (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16-18; Eph 2:20-21). This metaphor is implicit in the frequent references to \*building (e.g., Mt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Jude 20). Given that the church is the place where God dwells by his Spirit, people must live in unity with each other and in holiness of life. Integral to the temple was the priesthood. Under the new covenant, all believers have become priests (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), once more bringing into actuality the unfulfilled design of the old covenant (Ex 19:6).

The picture in John 15:1-17 of Jesus as a \*vine and his disciples as \*branches who need to remain in him and derive their life from him is equally an OT image. Israel was spoken of in Isaiah 5:1-7 as a much-loved vineyard, which had only produced bad fruit and was thus destined for destruction.

**Identity in the Present.** The bulk of images focus on the character of the church in the present age. The primary one is that of the church as a \*body. This image is initially used to stress the dependence of members on one another in the face of tendencies, such as their differing gifts or their different cultural and social backgrounds, which might cause them to pull apart from one another. The key issue is the quality of relationships and mutual responsiveness that believers have with each other (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12-31). Commitment to one another was essential because they "were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor 12:13 NIV). The nature of their fellowship life is far more profound than when people gather because they merely have a common interest or wish to pursue a common goal.

The concept of the body is also developed in other ways. It indicates that the church is a living organism, not a religious organization. As such it not only has coherence, but it should expect to grow and develop (Eph 4:1-16; Col 2:19). Bodies also have \*heads from which commands are received and which enable them to function. So it is with the church. Ephesians 1:22 and 4:15 and Colossians 1:18-19 make clear that Christ is the head of the church.

A second image that is developed in a number of ways is that of the church as a \*household. A more inclusive social unit than our contemporary family, it nonetheless picks up the idea of the church as a \*family brought in to being by the faithfulness of God's son, Jesus (Heb 3:1-6). As in any family, relationships are maintained by members behaving

appropriately to one another. So the focus here is on the correct behavior of members in the household of God (1 Tim 3:15; Gal 6:10, see also the household codes of behavior, e.g., Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13 and 5:1-20).

Further images arise naturally from the everyday world in which Jesus and his followers lived. These include the image of a \*flock being cared for and guided by a \*shepherd (Jn 10:1-21; see also Lk 12:32; Acts 8:29; 1 Pet 5:2-4) and of "God's field" in which the word of the gospel is planted and watered by persons but is germinated by God himself (1 Cor 3:6-9; see Farming).

**Images that Point to the Future.** The people of God look forward to the complete realization of their salvation in the future. This theme is particularly captured by the image of the church as the \*bride of Christ (Jn 3:29; Mt 9:15; 25:1-13; Mk 2:19; Lk 5:34-35). Paul exploits this metaphor in two ways. He speaks both of the love Christ had for the church (Eph 5:25) and of the consequent need for the betrothed to keep herself pure for the coming of the bridegroom on their \*wedding day (2 Cor 11:2). Revelation 19:7 brings the picture to a climax by foreseeing the wedding \*banquet when at last, after all the suffering and necessary preparation, the bride and groom are finally united and the festivities begin.

See also BODY; BRANCH; BRIDE, BRIDEGROOM; BUILD, BUILDING; FAMILY; FLOCK; HEAD; HOUSEHOLD; ISRAEL; KINGDOM OF GOD; SEED; TEMPLE; VINE, VINEYARD; WEDDING.

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**CHURL.** See REFUSER OF FESTIVITIES.

## CIRCUMCISION

Circumcision is a symbolic act that functions as a powerful image throughout the Bible. It was the sign of the \*covenant between God and \*Israel (Gen 17:11; cf. Acts 7:8; Rom. 4:11) whereby he had chosen them and given them the promise "[I will] be God to you and to your descendants after you" (Gen 17:7 RSV; cf. Deut 7:7-9).

**Circumcision as Ancient Rite.** During OT times circumcision was practiced by most of the other nations near Israel, including the Egyptians, so in and of itself it was not a distinguishing mark. But the significance attached to it by Israel was unique. Among the other Semitic peoples and in Egypt, it was not generally applied to infants, and its significance is unclear. It was perhaps an initiation rite associated with puberty, a symbolic sacrificing of the reproductive powers to the gods, or even a token human sacrifice. Only in Israel did it have a clearly defined theological significance that extended beyond the individual who received it to his family and the wider community. The requirement of a ceremonial flint rather than a bronze or iron knife suggests the great antiquity of the rite itself (Josh 5:2).

### Circumcision as Membership or Covenant.

Before the establishment of a central sanctuary, circumcision served as the main symbol of God's covenant with Israel and as a symbol, in turn, of Israel's commitment to keep his covenant. Dire consequences attended those who failed to comply (Ex 4:24-26). It was the *sine qua non* of membership in the covenant community (Gen 17:14), perhaps even a test of loyalty (Gen 34). It could express a powerful recommitment (Josh 5:2-8). The Philistines alone among Israel's immediate neighbors did not practice circumcision. The automatic equation of foreskins and Philistines lies behind Saul's stipulation that David pay a bride price of one hundred foreskins (1 Sam 18:25). Because of the traditional hostility between them, "uncircumcised" came to be summary term for wicked and godless (e.g., Judg 15:18; 1 Sam 17:26; 2 Sam 1:20). Ezekiel extends the label to most of Israel's enemies in describing them as the dead nations who formerly terrorized the land (Ezek 32:17-32) but who will now be relegated to the recesses of Sheol without honor (Ezek 32:27) among the "uncircumcised."

**Circumcision as Genuine Belief.** Against this background it is remarkable to find the charge of "uncircumcision" leveled at Israel. "Their ears are uncircumcised so that they cannot hear!" says Jeremiah of the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Jer 6:10). He charges the whole of Israel with being "uncircumcised in heart," so that whether they practice physical circumcision or not, there is no difference between Israel and all the other nations who really are uncircumcised (Jer 9:26; cf. 4:4). They are equally wicked and godless. This awareness that outward obedience through the act of circumcision did not necessarily imply the obedience *of the heart*, and that "uncircumcision" of heart will lead to loss of the covenant blessings appears already in the Pentateuch (Deut 10:16; Lev 26:41). Stephen levels the same charge against his fellow Jews (Acts 7:51). In spite of these hints about the obsolescence of circumcision, some early believers had difficulty abandoning the outward sign.

**Circumcision as Old Law.** Picking up where he had interrupted Stephen, Paul develops the theme further, not only making the basic point about the redundancy of circumcision and law-keeping (Rom 2:25-29) but also warning (with caustic humor), "Watch out for the mutilation [*katatomē*]. We are the [true] circumcision [*peritomē*], we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3). Elsewhere he dared wish that agitators for circumcision would amputate or castrate themselves (Gal 5:12). Christians, Paul believed, have been circumcised in Christ (Col 2:11), because they have been given a new heart by the Spirit; and chiefly for this reason, Paul strongly opposed those who wanted to make Gentile converts accept the literal sign of circumcision (Acts 15:1-29). "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation!" (Gal 6:15, 5:6 NIV).

Thus time and the establishment of successive covenants radically change the symbolism of circumcision. An ancient ritual becomes the primary mark of a keeper of the covenant. And after Christ, it serves as an emblem of the unkeepable law that cannot save.

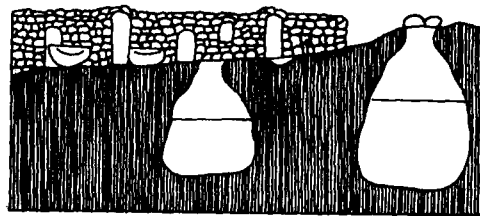
See also COVENANT; GALATIANS, LETTER TO THE.

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### CISTERN

Cisterns are \*water reservoirs, which can include both large public water works and small home cisterns. Modern urbanites, particularly in the West, tend to overlook the importance of water conservation for the life and well-being of a community. In an era when water pours from faucets hot and cold, the significance of a cistern is easily lost. The limited \*rainfall of Israel made cisterns an absolute necessity, and it is likely that in dry settled areas most homes had a cistern fed by rainwater gathered on the roof during the rainy season. Most of the cisterns that have survived were cut into the limestone in a bottle shape, plastered to help retain the water and sealed with a \*stone to prevent contamination and evaporation. Freestanding containers of various materials were also employed in a manner much like the "water barrel" of the more recent past.

It is not always possible to distinguish cisterns from \*pits in the OT (e.g., Ex 21:33-34). The word *bôr* is used for both cistern and pit (the related *b'r* refers only to cisterns), though never for a well, despite some English versions. These water storage structures were usually cut into rock and were common in both the city and the countryside (2 Chron 26:10). They could also serve as \*hiding places (1



A cross-section of cisterns dug from limestone.

Sam 13:6), prominent landmarks (1 Sam 19:22), temporary \*prisons (Jer 38:6) and dumping places for corpses (Jer 41:7).

Along with \*house and \*vineyard, having your own cistern completes the image of the secure and good life in a peaceful society (Deut 6:11 [NIV "well"]; Neh 9:25). \*Drinking from a cistern may