

faith he sojourned in the land of promise, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the promise;" but this "faith" did not respect the temporal promise; for St. Paul adds, "they looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God," Heb. xi. 19. The next promise was, that God would always be "a God to Abraham and to his seed after him," a promise which is connected with the highest spiritual blessings, such as the remission of sins, and the sanctification of our nature, as well as with a visible church state. It is even used to express the felicitous state of the church in heaven. Rev. xxi. 3. The final engagement in the Abrahamic covenant was, that in Abraham's "seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed;" and this blessing, we are expressly taught by St. Paul, was nothing less than the justification of all nations, that is, of all believers in all nations, by faith in Christ:—"and the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen by faith, preached before the Gospel to Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So that they who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham;" they receive the same blessing, justification, by the same means, faith. Gal. iii. 8, 9.

This covenant with Abraham, therefore, although it respected a natural seed, Isaac, from whom a numerous progeny was to spring; and an earthly inheritance provided for this issue, the land of Canaan; and a special covenant relation with the descendants of Isaac, through the line of Jacob, to whom Jehovah was to be "a God," visibly and especially, and they a visible and "peculiar people;" yet was, under all these temporal, earthly, and external advantages, but a higher and spiritual grace, embodying itself under these circumstances, as types of a dispensation of salvation and eternal life to all who should follow the faith of Abraham, whose justification before God was the pattern of the justification of every man, whether Jew or Gentile, in all ages.

Now, of this covenant, in its spiritual as well as in its temporal provisions, circumcision was most certainly the sacrament, that is, the "sign" and the "seal;" for St. Paul thus explains the case: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." And as the rite was enjoined upon Abraham's posterity, so that every "uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin was not circumcised on the eighth day," was to be "cut off from his people," by the special judgment of God, and that because "he had broken God's covenant," Gen. xvii. 14, it therefore follows that this rite was a constant publication of God's covenant of grace among the descendants of Abraham, and its repetition a continual confirmation of that covenant, on the part of God, to all practising it in that faith of which it was the ostensible expression.

As the covenant of grace made with Abraham was bound up with temporal promises and privileges, so circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant in both its parts,—its spiritual and its temporal, its superior, and inferior, provisions. The spiritual promises of the covenant continued unrestricted to all the descendants of Abraham, whether by Isaac or by Ishmael; and still lower down, to the descendants of Esau as well as to those of Jacob. Circumcision was practised among them all by virtue of its divine institution at first; and was extended to their foreign servants, and to proselytes, as well as to their children; and wherever the sign of the covenant of grace was by divine appointment, there it was as a seal of that covenant, to all who believingly used it; for we read of no restriction of its spiritual blessings, that is, its saving engagement, to one line of descent from Abraham only. But over the temporal

branch of the covenant, and the external religious privileges arising out of it, God exercised a rightful sovereignty, and expressly restricted them first to the line of Isaac, and then to that of Jacob, with whose descendants he entered into special covenant by the ministry of Moses. The temporal blessings and external privileges comprised under general expressions in the covenant with Abraham were explained and enlarged under that of Moses, while the spiritual blessings remained unrestricted as before. This was probably the reason why circumcision was re-enacted under the law of Moses. It was a confirmation of the temporal blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, now, by a covenant of peculiarity, made over to them, while it was still recognised as a consuetudinary rite which had descended to them from their fathers, and as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace with Abraham and with all his descendants without exception. This double reference of circumcision, both to the authority of Moses and to that of the patriarchs, is found in the words of our Lord, John vii. 22: "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision, not because it is of Moses, but of the Fathers;" or, as it is better translated by Campbell, "Moses instituted circumcision among you, (not that it is from Moses, but from the patriarchs,) and ye circumcise on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a child receive circumcision, that the law of Moses may not be violated," &c.

From these observations, the controversy in the apostolic churches respecting circumcision will derive much elucidation.

The covenant with Abraham prescribed circumcision as an act of faith in its promises, and a pledge [to perform its conditions] [on the part of its descendants.] But the object on which this faith rested, was "the seed of Abraham," in whom the nations of the earth were to be blessed: which seed, says St. Paul, "is Christ;"—Christ as promised, not yet come. When the Christ has come, so as fully to enter upon his redeeming offices, he could no longer be the object of faith, as still to come; and this leading promise of the covenant being accomplished, the sign and seal of it vanished away. Nor could circumcision be continued in this view, by any, without an implied denial that Jesus was the Christ, the expected seed of Abraham. Circumcision also as an institution of Moses, who continued it as the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant, both in its spiritual and temporal provisions, but with respect to the latter made it also the sign and seal of the restriction of its temporal blessings and peculiar religious privileges to the descendants of Israel, was terminated by the entrance of our Lord upon his office of Mediator, in which office all nations were to be blessed in him. The Mosaic edition of the covenant not only guaranteed the land of Canaan, but the peculiarity of the Israelites, as the people and visible church of God, to the exclusion of others, except by proselytism. But when our Lord commanded the Gospel to be preached to "all nations," and opened the gates of the "common salvation" to all, whether Gentiles or Jews, circumcision, as the sign of a covenant of peculiarity and religious distinction, was done away also. It had not only no reason remaining, but the continuation of the rite involved the recognition of exclusive privileges which had been terminated by Christ.

This will explain the views of the Apostle Paul on this great question. He declares that in Christ there is neither circumcision nor uncircumcision; that neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but "faith that worketh by love;" faith in the seed of Abraham already come and already engaged in his mediatorial and redeeming work; faith, by virtue of which the Gentiles came into the Church of Christ on the same terms as the Jews themselves, and were justified and saved. The doctrine of the

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