

We have already seen that the language God uses here is a strong reminder that this is the confirmation of an existing relationship, not the establishing of a new one. This language is used, as we've seen, in Genesis 6 with Noah, Genesis 9, where God says He will perpetuate His covenant with all flesh; He'll never again destroy them with a flood, in 9:11 of Genesis 9. It's used here in the case of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 17:7, 17:19, 17:21. It's used of God's covenant relationship with Israel over in Leviticus chapter 26 and verse 9. It is used, as I think we saw last time we looked at this principle, over in Numbers chapter 30 and verse 13 of the relationship between a husband and wife.

If, in the case of the vows that have been made in a marriage, every vow and every binding oath to afflict her soul that a wife makes, her husband may confirm it or her husband may make it void. The husband has the say-so in the household. The woman can go out and make a promise or make a vow or make some sort of commitment.

The husband has the choice of either perpetuating that or revoking it. He's not going to go out and create a fresh covenant. His wife has already done that.

He can confirm it. He can perpetuate it. He can say, "Yes, that's okay. Let's continue."

So this gives us some insight into the meaning of this term, the verb *kum* in Hebrew. You find the same thing in 1 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 23. Remember, in 1 Samuel 1, you have, of course, the story of how Samuel came to be born.

His mother Hannah has been down praying and has been spotted by Eli, who thinks she's drunk. And once the situation clears up a little bit, there's this prediction that Eli makes to Hannah that she will have a child, and they do in time conceive in verse 20 and bear a son. They call his name Samuel because he was asked from the Lord. The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow.

But in verse 22, Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "Not until the child is weaned, then I will take him, that he may appear before the Lord and remain there forever." Once again, it's one of those forever passages where we understand that in Hebrew doesn't mean unto the ages in the sense of, you know, Samuel isn't still there and he's not going to be there forever in our sense of it, but remain there perpetually throughout his life. Verse 23, Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Wait until you have weaned him. Only let the Lord establish His word." And this is the verb *kum*: let the Lord confirm, perpetuate, make good on His word.

And what was the word of the Lord? It was that their petition would be granted, as she says in verse 27: "I prayed for this child. The Lord has granted me my petition. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he should be lent to the Lord." So this is the type of usage.

You can find other interesting uses of the verb *kum* in confirmation. For example, Isaiah 49, verse 8, where God establishes the earth, or perpetuates the earth, for a particular reason. Isaiah 49:8: "Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the servant of rulers: kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen you. Thus says the Lord: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you. I will preserve you.'" He's talking to Israel. "I will preserve you and give you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth," it says in the New King James.

Restore there is the verb *kum*: to perpetuate the earth, to raise it up, to continue it, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages. It is as though the earth, by association with Israel, receives the blessing of being perpetuated. God will redeem or deliver the earth by honoring Israel, but He's not creating the earth, is He? When He restores Israel and preserves them and gives them as a covenant to the people, this doesn't create the earth. This isn't the inception of the earth. This perpetuates the earth. This keeps it going. It doesn't disappear. And this is the verb *kum*.

So we have, once again, a confirmation of our understanding over in Genesis 17. You can also see this language used of God's covenant with Israel time and time again in passages already mentioned: Leviticus 26:9. You can put with that Deuteronomy 8:18, Deuteronomy 28:9 and 13. These are other cases where the covenant promises

God has made to Israel, He says, "I will confirm this." You may find it saying establish or make a covenant in English, but it's kum: I will honor that relationship.

So we have in Genesis 17 a contrast between the future of Isaac and his descendants and Ishmael and his descendants. And in the central part of this chapter, God spends some time talking about the sign of the covenant. The sign of the covenant is circumcision.

If you think about this, circumcision initially is kind of a strange thing to—I mean, the place where it happens, the whole thing, you know, the portion of the body that's involved in the actual removal of something that you're born with as a male. How did this get started? You know, whose idea was this? It just seems like an odd sort of a thing. Why did God pick this particular thing? Why not carve an X in the forehead? Or why not put twelve dots on the forearm? Or it could have been anything. Could have been a tattoo. It could have been a haircut of some sort. Could have been a special hat, little beanie hats like they wear in Israel. That could be the sign of the covenant. Why does the sign of the covenant have to be circumcision of the male foreskin, of all things? Why that? Why not an earring in the left earlobe or something?

Well, it is helpful to us to look at the Scriptures that talk about circumcision and see what it represents. Obviously, God never limits Himself or concerns Himself exclusively just with the physical act of anything. It always has a greater significance. It means something. It carries with it spiritual freight. So circumcision obviously has meaning beyond just the physical act of removing this little piece of skin.

We know that, as God says here in verse 10 of Genesis 17, "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male child among you shall be circumcised." Every male child. Now, there is such a thing—although I will leave it to your own investigations to figure out exactly how it works—but there are some primitive cultures and things in the historical past where people have tried to practice something akin to circumcision with females, and that is not in view here. And there's a reason. This is something that only applies to the males, to the men in the line of Abraham. Men only. Why? That's the structure. It reminds us that that is where the responsibility primarily lay in Israel.

In the Church Age, we don't distinguish responsibility in terms of male or female as far as spiritual function before the Lord. There are certain parts of worship that women are not to exercise authority in the church and so forth, and this harks back to the pattern that God has established in the family, in the marriage. But it was a much greater distinction to be a man versus a woman in the Old Testament days under the Law.

So the male child among you shall be circumcised. "You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you." It is not the covenant; it is a sign of the covenant. What does a sign do? What's the purpose of a sign? A sign is a reminder. What was the sign of the Noahic covenant? It was the rainbow. Now, the rainbow is not the fulfillment of the covenant. It is a reminder. It is a symbol. It keeps it in the mind. We look at the rainbow, those of us who are believers and know its origin, every time we see a rainbow, we think, "Oh, yes, God's promise: I will never again destroy the earth by a flood." It reminds us, takes our mind back to dwell on the truth that is involved. That's what circumcision is.

And if you think about this in practical terms, for a male this is going to be a daily reminder, especially at a couple of different times, a couple of different events. For one, you have the natural process of elimination. It's not a delicate subject to bring up, but every time that is necessary, which for a male is several times a day, every man in Israel is going to be reminded. When he performs that bodily function, there's a reminder there. There's a visible reminder that he's been set apart, that he should have a covenant relationship with God. So, like, it would be like looking up in the sky and seeing a rainbow every day. What do you do with that knowledge, that reminder? God has put a reminder there that you can't avoid, that you can't miss.

Also, I mean, again, why couldn't it be a tattoo on the back of the hand or something? Why does it have to be that particular body part? Well, that puts us in mind of the procreative process, the process of intercourse with one's wife and the production of offspring, the future, the very thing that is in view here in Genesis 17. It was a big deal in terms of having sons and having offspring and having your line perpetuated, having your heritage in Israel perpetuated. Well, circumcision is a reminder that this process of life that goes from father to son, from parents to children and so forth, can't happen without going through this area. That's where reproduction takes place. It is a reminder of the covenant between husband and wife as well as a reminder of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants.

It's a—if you think about it—it's a wonderful way to remind. This sign of the covenant reminds at critical times: times when conception is about to take place, times when the union between man and woman and their covenant relationship is consummated, times in the routine part of the day when you're busy doing other things and you stop for a moment because you have to go to the bathroom, and you're reminded in the midst of the day, "I have a covenant relationship with God." It's—it is a beautiful expression of how smart God is to put this sign where He puts it. The man cannot help but be reminded in the course of the natural expression of his bodily functions, whatever they may be, that he belongs to God.

It is also a reminder should that man decide to violate his covenant with his wife, whether she is prospective or he has already married her. Maybe he hasn't married her yet, but he's going to. If he is going to commit fornication or adultery, there is a reminder just as he's about to commit that act that there is such a thing as a covenant and that he bears the sign of that covenant, and it ought to make a difference, ought to make a difference in his life and in his decisions.

So it is far better than a haircut or a tattoo or a cap or a tassel on the corner of the garment to be the sign of the covenant. It is permanent. It is something that one becomes aware of at important times as well as routine times, and it ought to make a difference. It encompasses both the mundane and the sublime functions of life, and that's what the covenant of God ought to encompass in our minds and in our hearts.

God makes that point. We know, of course, that on this day Abraham, in verse 23, when God goes up from Abraham, Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house, all who were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very same day as God had said to him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. That very same day Abraham was circumcised, and his son Ishmael, and all the men of his house, born in the house or bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him. The Bible makes a strong point of emphasizing that.

When is it that Isaac is going to be born? Twelve months hence.

He has not yet been conceived. If you think about the act of copulation that produced Ishmael, what was Abraham's status? Uncircumcised. He's an uncircumcised man. He engages in relations with Hagar, who is a woman of Egypt. The product of that is Ishmael, a man on whom the covenant will not rest. And the symbolism there—these are not causative. This doesn't doom Ishmael before he's born. But it is significant as an illustration and as a reminder, the communication value in the Word of God. Look at all of the things that are associated with Ishmael: uncircumcision, Egypt, no interest in the things of God.

We'll see this borne out in Ishmael's attitudes as he sees the birth of his younger half-brother. But Isaac, the child of promise, when he is conceived, Abraham is circumcised. Abraham has gotten rid of something in obedience to God, and it is not until Abraham is circumcised that the fulfillment of the promise takes place. Ninety-nine years—you figure he and Sarah have probably celebrated their seventy-fifth anniversary by now, or certainly their sixtieth or seventieth anniversary. They've been together a long time. You can imagine how many different times their physical relationship has been consummated. But it's not until Abraham is circumcised.

And you think, well, maybe there was a physical problem that fixed. Well, obviously not, because he fathered Ishmael before he was circumcised. So it wasn't like this fixed some physical problem that enabled him to father children. Rather, it has a spiritual value because Abraham has reached the point, after living a long time and trusting God for a long time, he has reached the point of beginning to receive the covenant of blessings from God.

He is now beginning to meet this condition as a pattern of life. He's walking before God. He's seeking to be blameless.

He's realized through the experience with Hagar that you can't accomplish the plan of God by human strategies and human means, and that's what Ishmael represents. He's the product of Egypt. He's the product of uncircumcision. He's the product of lack of faith. And he bears that out in his own choices and decisions, even though those things don't cause that. So circumcision begins to stand for an attitude of heart more so than a physical condition.

We know that Isaac was circumcised in compliance with this covenant in Genesis 21:4. We know that Jacob and his sons are circumcised. You have the whole episode where his sons use this as a means of disabling and then

killing their foes who they feel raped their sister Dinah, or Dina, in Genesis 34:15 and following. That passage, among other things, tells us that Jacob and his sons were all circumcised. They say, “Well, you’ve got to become like us before you can have any truck with our sister,” and once these men say, “Okay, fine,” and they all get circumcised and they’re recovering and they can’t move around, then the brothers descend on them and wipe them out in revenge.

A very interesting passage. Turn over with me to Joshua chapter 5. This isn’t one of the more commonly visited or remarked upon passages in Scripture, but it’s really quite fascinating in this light.

You know the story of Israel. The generation that comes out of Egypt is, of course, compliant with the covenant. They are all circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses and so forth. But that generation, through their apathy and indifference and lack of faith and disobedience, drops in the wilderness, and after forty years there’s a new generation that will actually enter the land and receive the fulfillment of God’s promises.

So in Joshua chapter 5, so it was when all the kings of the land were circumcised—and you notice Israel has now, in Joshua 5, they have crossed the Jordan. They’re in the land and they’re about to attack Jericho, but they’ve already come across the river. God has parted the river Jordan for them, the twelve stones, the Ark of the Covenant, the feet of the priests—that whole wonderful story in the first few chapters of Joshua has taken place. They are in the land. God’s promise has already begun to be fulfilled for them, but then there is a stop.

And when the kings of the Amorites on the west side of Jordan, all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.

God has already frightened their enemies by His act of bringing them across the river. At that time—and that’s important in Joshua 5 too—at that time, after God had dried up the waters, after He had brought them across the river, the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives for yourselves and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.” This doesn’t mean there’s a bunch of them running around that have already been circumcised and you’re going to try to find something else to cut off.

It explains it. Joshua made flint knives for himself in verse 3, circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins, or Gibeath Ha’aralot, which literally means the hill of the foreskins. This is the reason why Joshua circumcised them. All the people who came out of Egypt who were males, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt, except, of course, for Caleb and Joshua. For all the people who had come out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness on the way as they came out of Egypt had not been circumcised.

And you figure, here’s Moses leading the children of Israel. He delivered the Law that includes the discussion of circumcision. They’re all aware of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But they were busy. They were busy traveling around and so forth, and they didn’t circumcise their sons on the eighth day when they were born in the wilderness.

Now what are we to make of that? Well, whatever it was, it was a failure because God said the male children should be circumcised on the eighth day, and they weren’t. For forty long years, the entire new generation of Israelite young men were uncircumcised. Now, did that stop God from delivering them into the land? It did not.

You think, well, couldn’t God have mentioned this before they came across the river? Like, well, you can’t cross the river until you’re circumcised. No. But before they go in to drive out the uncircumcised from the land, they themselves have to be circumcised. They have to be purified in this sense and in compliance with the covenant before God can give them victory in the land. It doesn’t require circumcision to cross the river. It does require circumcision to be given victory against the enemies in the land. That’s important.

Verse 6, Joshua 5: “The children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness till all the people who were men of war who came out of Egypt were consumed because they did not obey the voice of the Lord, to whom the Lord swore that He would not show them the land which the Lord had sworn to their fathers that He would give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.” Here’s the point that God is making.

Your fathers were in technical compliance with the covenant. They were all circumcised. But their hearts weren’t right, and they didn’t receive the blessing.

You, I have brought across the Jordan into the land because your hearts are right, even though you're uncircumcised. But you've got to take care of this before you go forward to drive out the enemies. Why does God wait till after they're across the Jordan to make the point that it's not the physical act of circumcision that makes it possible for them to go into the land? It's their faith.

God lets them into the land by faith, just like He confirms His covenant with Abraham before Abraham is circumcised. God says—God doesn't say, “Walk before Me, be blameless, and get circumcised, and I will make of you a great nation.” The circumcision follows as a confirmation, as a sign of the covenant that already exists.

When people take their baby son down on the eighth day to be circumcised, to have the bris and so forth, it is supposed to be recognition of a covenant relationship that the parents have with God. And you think about the—you can go into all the psychology of bonding and how they talk about that after—it's really right at the end of that first week that the mother is firmly bonded to the child. And this is where the woman gets involved in circumcision in Israel, because a baby on the eighth day not only is physically up to this, but the mother has to participate with her consent and with her giving up her young son to what is acknowledged by everyone to be sort of an unpleasant experience, certainly painful to the child.

And it requires faith on the part of the mother and recognition that this is necessary, that this is a good thing, hopefully for the right reasons, that it's a sign of the covenant with God. So it's the faith of the parents that's really at issue. The baby doesn't know up from down when they're eight days old, but the parents do, both of them.

So in verse 7, Joshua circumcised their sons whom he raised up in their place, for they were uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. That phrase “on the way” reminds us of something because—and most of us, Janelle will tell me this morning, that having viewed this movie, *The Prince of Egypt*, which we saw a week or two ago, and it's a wonderful, I think, great telling of the story of Moses. It takes a few liberties here and there, but it's very well done and doesn't commit any major mistakes, and very enjoyable, and you can enjoy for yourself the other things you know about it that are not necessarily in there. But I thought it was very well done.

But the story of Moses in his youth, as he grows up in the palace of Egypt, he begins to see the plight of his people and kills the taskmaster, flees to Midian, and then he has the experience forty years later with the burning bush, and it's time to return. God commissions him for this mission. God calls him and says, “You will lead My people out of bondage. You will go before Pharaoh. You will commit these mighty deeds,” and so forth.

Well, if you look at Exodus chapter 4, in the details there are a few—there are a couple of cryptic verses here in Exodus chapter 4. When God speaks out of the bush, talks to Moses, gives him—He says, “Take the rod you have in your hand and do these mighty signs before Pharaoh,” and so forth—you get down to verse 18.

So Moses now is going to pack up and leave Midian and go back to Egypt and deliver the people. Moses went and returned to Jethro, his father-in-law—this is Exodus 4:18—and said to him, “Please let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt and see whether they're still alive.” Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.”

Now the Lord said to Moses in Midian, “Go, return to Egypt, for all the men who sought your life are dead.” Then Moses took his wife and his sons and set them on a donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

And the Lord said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all these wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand, but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn.’” This is in anticipation of the last of the plagues. Remember the death of the firstborn, the Passover and all that? God tells Moses before he ever leaves Midian, when you get there, one of the first things you say to Pharaoh is, “Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” And this, of course, does take place in the culmination of the plagues.

Now, Moses is a smart man. Moses knows a lot. Why did God pick Moses? Not because he was just sovereignly selected out of the great swarming mass of Israelites. Moses has been in the libraries of Egypt. Moses has discovered the books and the writings left behind by Joseph hundreds of years earlier in the libraries of Egypt. Moses has been taught by his mother. He was raised to the age of seven or eight by his mother. And he knows the truth of God. He knows the heritage of Israel. He understands the covenant promises that God made to his

forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He knows those things. He's a Levite. And these things have been handed down even before the written Scriptures in the Torah were available.

Moses knows these things, and he has responded to them. And so he is prepared. He is a knowledgeable believer at this point. And God holds him accountable for that knowledge. Moses ought to know better than to do what he's about to do.

The last thing God says to him as he's leaving Midian is, "Tell Pharaoh this: Israel is My son, My firstborn. I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. If you refuse to let him go, I will kill your son, your firstborn." And God brings up this idea of sonship. What does it mean to be a son? What does it mean to be the firstborn?

It came to pass on the way, verse 24—very same phrase we have over in Joshua—on the way at the encampment, that the Lord met him, Moses, and sought to kill him. Now whether he came down with a mortal illness, it's very cryptic at this point. We don't know the details. But God stops Moses, and he is in danger of losing his life. Why? Well, Moses should have remembered something about who he is and about what it means to serve God.

And God doesn't just come out and say, "Oh, by the way, Moses." God gives him a hint. I do this with the girls all the time. I don't want to just tell them the answer. I want them to think their way to the answer, to train their minds to think and to meditate and to arrive at solutions on their own and to recognize things on their own. I could say, "Rebecca, you didn't pick up your socks. Go back and pick up your socks." Or I can say, "Rebecca, have you done everything you were supposed to do?" and see if she can figure out what her omission is. That's healthy. That teaches her to perceive on her own.

God does the same thing with us. And God does this with Moses. God says, "Oh, by the way, Moses, here's another thing to say to Pharaoh." He's already given him a complete set of instructions, but then He comes back in an unusual way and says, "By the way, Moses, say this to Pharaoh: Israel is My son. If you don't let My son go, I will take your son. Son, son, son. Think, Moses. Your son, your son." Moses' sons are not circumcised. And Moses doesn't catch the hint.

And so he's going back. And it may be that he even brought this up to Zipporah and she would not allow it. And so now Moses is about to die because of this issue. So we don't know the details. They're not recorded for us. But in some way, shape, or form, it came down to either the sons get circumcised or Moses is going to die. And Zipporah is obviously against it.

So you get the idea that Moses had made sort of a feeble attempt on the eighth day for his sons to be circumcised. Zipporah, who's a Midianite, says, "No way. You're not going to—I don't know what you're talking about. We're not going to maim. We're not going to cut and cause to bleed and do all the—what are you talking about?" And she apparently forbade it.

Well, now she and Moses and the sons are returning, and Moses is going to die if this doesn't take place. God will not permit Moses to go back with uncircumcised sons. And so then in verse 25, Zipporah took a sharp stone, cut off the foreskin of her son, cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me." You get the idea that this forces her to comply.

And then in verse 26, then He let him go. She said again, "You're a husband of blood because of the circumcision." So she was obviously against it. She says, "You're a bloody husband to make me do this." But there just isn't any way. God will not permit Moses to return without the son being circumcised. Moses knows better.

God calls him. God commissions him. God makes all the promises to him when this condition exists. But there's a certain point at which he has to come into compliance with the terms of the covenant or forfeit. Same thing with Israel. God promises. God delivers. God sends them across the river. But there's a point at which they have to come into compliance obedience-wise or they're going to forfeit. So it's a fascinating detail both in the life of Moses and the life of Israel.

And circumcision, we see, goes beyond the physical act. It is a matter of the heart. Look at Deuteronomy. We tend to think, well, this is a point the New Testament makes. The New Testament authors, the apostles, like to go back and show us what these literal, physical things really mean, their spiritual sense. And Paul talking about

circumcision of the heart and so forth. But in the Old Testament, it was pretty much just the literal thing: circumcise the foreskins of the sons and everything's good to go.

Look at Deuteronomy 10. This is Moses communicating to Israel the essence of the Law. He's brought the second pair of tablets down and he's talking to them. He says in verse 12 of Deuteronomy 10, "Now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him?" We saw this in connection with walking before God last week. "To serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes, which I command you today, for your good.

"Indeed, heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, and also the earth with all that is in it. The Lord delighted only in your fathers to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore," verse 16, "circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be stiff-necked no longer."

You've been circumcised physically, but you, Israel, Moses says, need to circumcise your hearts. Remove that flesh attitude. That's what he has described in verses 12 and 13. Circumcise the foreskin of your heart. Fear the Lord, walk in His ways, love Him, serve Him with your heart and your soul completely. Circumcise the foreskin of your heart.

"For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and widow. He loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore, love the stranger. You were strangers in the land of Egypt. Fear the Lord your God, serve Him, love Him. To Him you shall hold fast and take oaths in His name. He is your praise. He is your God who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. He has made you like the stars of heaven from multitude," and so forth.

Circumcise your hearts, Moses tells Israel, right at the giving of the Law, the delivery of the second set of tablets. So, from the beginning, this has symbolized attitude of heart.

You see the same thing in Deuteronomy 30 and verse 6. "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." And this is the result of fulfilling the condition. Notice the beginning of chapter 30.

"Now it shall come to pass when all these things come upon you, the blessing and curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you." This is if they've been disobedient. God chastises them. God fulfills the five cycles of discipline and they're scattered among the nations. They lose everything. He says, "If you call this to mind and return to the Lord your God," verse 2, "and obey His voice according to all that I command you today, you and your children with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.

"If you're driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

This will be fulfilled when God resurrects the Old Testament saints at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. And without going into great detail, there is the possibility of return.

I saw a very interesting program yesterday on the educational channel talking about drug addiction and what exactly happens when people choose to indulge themselves in cocaine or methamphetamines and this sort of thing. The very first time that someone takes these drugs, they went into great detail about the mechanism of pleasure in the brain. There are places in the brain that release a substance called dopamine, which gives us our sense of pleasure.

Normally, when you do any of the things that normally result in pleasure—you finish a task, or you achieve a victory, or you are with people that you enjoy, or you do something you enjoy—there are these slight elevations

in the level of dopamine and we experience pleasure. We say, “Wow, that was fine, that was great, I enjoyed that meal,” or, “I enjoyed that visit,” or, “I enjoyed that activity.” And this is a natural thing in the brain.

And the brain has a regulating system for that sense of pleasure. We don't sustain an exhilarating emotional high for very long. The brain regulates that, and we sort of recover from that and get back to stasis, to a stable place. Just like when you have a fever, your body can temporarily elevate your temperature, but it needs to come back down or you are going to suffer.

Well, when you take—you indulge in one of these drugs, heroin, crack cocaine, methamphetamine, whatever it may be—it overstimulates, grossly overstimulates, the parts of the brain that release dopamine, and you get this huge rush, this huge high, this overwhelming sense of euphoria and well-being and so forth. And the first time you take these drugs, that is the most powerful experience of pleasure you will ever experience.

Because they compare it to having a bank, to having money in the bank. You have dopamine reserves. You have a sense of pleasure that you would ordinarily experience over the course of two weeks or a month, and you have robbed the bank. You have taken all of that out and experienced it all at once. And that is why people crash so hard when they come down from these, because they have exhausted the reserves of these things. And it permanently, because of the built-in mechanism in the brain, it adjusts. It knows, because of the way God built it, that you are not supposed to experience that. It says, “I have got to compensate. I have got to restructure so that this doesn't happen because this is bad.”

And so the stimulation required for a normal release of dopamine, a normal experience of pleasure, is altered, and it is permanently altered from that first experience. And that is why if someone goes back and takes the same dose of cocaine a second time or a third time, or heroin or any of these others, they never again—and you can talk to any drug addict; they interviewed a half a dozen of them on this program—and they said, “Have you ever felt a high like that very first one?” None of them ever had.

They said, “You know, I have spent the whole rest of my life—the reason I am a junkie is I have been trying to recapture that first high,” and it becomes a compulsion. And the problem is the structure of the brain has been altered, and it is impossible to ever experience that again. And the things that would normally give you a sense of accomplishment or pleasure or whatever can't stimulate the normal sensation of pleasure. And so people are almost chained to, in order to experience well-being or pleasure or satisfaction, they have to do something over and over. And this is how that cycle of addiction gets started.

And so the key is don't make the choice to start, because you can make a choice, especially if you are susceptible, and some people are more susceptible to this than others. Not all that try a drug become addicted to it, but for those that do, that one decision is permanent.

It's like the same—I think night before last I saw a program where this wonderful Christian girl, who was beautiful and talented and had a life before, had one sexual experience and got AIDS from it and has had all no end of suffering ever since. You can commit one bad decision and mess yourself up. Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and he could never come back from that.

So it's a choice, and that's what Deuteronomy 30 is all about. You read the last half of the chapter. It's all about choice. You can choose to participate in the covenant or not. The sign of the covenant does not achieve the covenant. It's not the physical compliance. And we miss this in Christianity. We think our physical compliance with whatever we think complies with the plan of God—church attendance, evangelism, Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, doing good deeds, refraining from sin, whatever it may be—we think that these physical things bring us into compliance with the plan of God. And God says, “No, you've got to have a circumcised heart.” It has to be a result of covenant relationship that is being perpetuated with God the Father. It's not a means.

You can't get circumcised and become a member of those who are going to be blessed in a covenant way. It's supposed to be a sign. Abraham was circumcised after the confirmation of these things. Israel was circumcised after they crossed into the land and had expressed that faith. Moses has to circumcise his son because he is about to make faith and obedience a big issue for Egypt and for Israel, and he himself cannot be out of compliance if he's going to go be the leader of those people.

And you find examples of this we've studied in the past: the apostle Paul and the difference between the way he treats Timothy and the way he treats Titus. You can go over to Acts chapter 15 and see that Paul has Timothy

circumcised so as not to create a stumbling block for the Jews to whom he is about to minister, but later on when he is ministering to the Gentiles, that is a big