

99-01-24a

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Isaiah chapter 41. There are a couple of reasons why this is an appropriate passage of scripture for us to dwell on at the beginning of our worship this morning. One of the reasons is, and I do want to continue to work together on verses of scripture for memory.

We have, because of the holidays and some schedule changes and so forth, sort of put our memory work on hold. But the two verses we're currently working on are in Isaiah, and one of them is Isaiah 41.10, which we'll see in our reading this morning. The other is Isaiah 26.3, Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.

That's the way I learned it out of the King James. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee. There is perfect peace available to us when our minds are stayed on the Lord.

There is deliverance from fear, there is deliverance from uncertainty, there is deliverance from this present evil age. This is what the entire chapter, Isaiah 41, deals with, which includes our other memory verse, Isaiah 41.10. And this is, in fact, a part of the promise that God makes throughout the scriptures. It is expressly stated as you get into the prophets and the writings.

It is inherent in God's statement to Abraham, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward. I am your benefactor. Isaiah chapter 41, this is another statement of God's assurance to Israel that he will sustain and help them.

Keep silence before me, O coastlands, and let the people renew their strength. Let them come near, then let them speak. Let us come near together for judgment.

Who raised up one from the east? Who in righteousness called him to his feet? Who gave the nations before him and made him rule over kings? Who gave them as the dust to his sword, as driven stubble to his bow? Who pursued them and passed safely by the way that he had not gone with his feet? Who has performed and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last, I am he. The coastlands saw it and feared. The ends of the earth were afraid.

They drew near and came. Everyone helped his neighbor and said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the craftsman encouraged the goldsmith.

He who smooths with the hammer inspired him who strikes the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering. Then he fastened it with pegs that it might not totter. We realize, of course, that this is those who see God's deliverance of Israel, who see him raising up a people unto himself, who recognize, as is stated in Romans chapter 1, that there is a

God, that he is an issue, he is the person of the universe to be reckoned with.

What is their response? They go to the goldsmith and to the blacksmith and they say, Make me a God that can protect me when the people of God move forward. So the craftsman encourages the goldsmith and the one who strikes the anvil. They solder together and fasten with pegs an image.

But you, verse 8 of Isaiah 41, you, Israel, are my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham, my friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest regions and said to you, You are my servant. I have chosen you and have not cast you away.

Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you.

Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. We reviewed the translation of that and this is the right hand of my righteousness.

I would encourage you to memorize it that way. It is not just God's right hand, which is righteous, that sustains us, but it is the right hand. It is the strong power of God implemented in our life.

It is God's righteousness which we are heirs of by faith. The righteousness of God gives us inner strength. Verse 11 of Isaiah 41, Behold, all those who were incensed against you shall be ashamed and disgraced.

They shall be as nothing. And those who strive with you shall perish. You shall seek them and not find them, those who contended with you.

Those who war against you shall be as nothing, as a non-existent thing. These are those that were mentioned earlier who encourage one another and confederate themselves against the people of God. For I the Lord, verse 13, The Lord your God will hold your right hand, saying to you, Fear not, I will help you.

Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel. I will help you, says the Lord, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make you into a new threshing sledge with sharp teeth.

You shall thresh the mountains and beat them small and make the hills like chaff. You shall winnow them. The wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them.

You shall rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel. The poor and needy seek water, but there is none. Their tongues fail for thirst.

I, the Lord, will hear them. I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in desolate heights and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land springs of water. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree. I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together, so that they may see and know and consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

God's protection, God's deliverance, God's establishing Israel in their land and prospering them will be a sign to the people of the coastlands. It will be a sign to every creature in the universe that God is God, there is no other. He delivers with a mighty hand those who respond to His call.

The reason this is made an issue to everyone, the reason it is established and proclaimed throughout the universe is that this is God's grand design, this is the sign, this is the communication from God to all creation, that He is a God of mercy, He is a God of grace, He is benevolent, He will lift up the poor and the needy and provide for them and give them abundance, but it's on God's terms, it is God's way and it is through focusing on God and heeding the word of God that these things come. The very nation of Israel is a sign to all peoples of the earth. The work that God has done in and for the descendants of Abraham is designed to communicate to all of us these things.

We're going to see this morning as we turn now and resume our study in Genesis chapter 17 that this is the larger purpose which we find being initiated and brought to fruition in the life of Abraham. We noted last time that this chapter, chapter 17, has a structure that focuses our attention on the rite of circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant. You will recall that there is a set of concentric circles or brackets within brackets within brackets as we have seen elsewhere in Genesis.

I'll review that real quickly with you. The age of Abraham in verse 1 and in verses 24 and 25. Abraham at the age of 99.

This draws our attention. Why mention Abraham's age two different times? Well, we begin to see that this is the outermost bracket, your A and A prime, if you will. The Lord appears in verse 1, the second part of verse 1. The Lord appears to Abram.

God goes up from Abram in verse 22b. So once again, you have an opening and a closing statement. God speaks in verse 1. He speaks to Abram and says, I am almighty God.

God ceases speaking explicitly in verse 22a. He finished talking with him. God began and God ended.

So that would be your C and your C prime. You have the first speech by God and in the very last part of verse 1 and in verse 2, I am El Shaddai. Walk before my face and be Tammim.

Have integrity. Lack nothing. Be complete.

And I will make my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly. Once again, I'm not sure how this came to be categorized as an unconditional covenant. We're going to see additional passages this morning that remind us that the fulfillment of verse 2 hinges on the fulfillment of verse 1. But God speaks and that's his first speech in the last part of verse 1 and verse 2. God's fifth speech in verses 19-21 is set in parallel to this speech.

And this is the statement about Sarah bearing the son Isaac with whom God will establish this covenant that he is making and confirming with Abraham and with his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, he will be blessed. He will be fruitful.

He will be multiplied. He will beget twelve princes. He will be a great nation.

But the covenant is with Isaac. The question which we hope to answer for ourselves this morning is why then in verse 25 is Ishmael circumcised? If circumcision is the sign of the covenant and God specifically says the covenant is with Isaac and not with Ishmael, then why is Ishmael circumcised? Just tuck that away and remind me if I fail to answer it later. That's one of the things we hope to see.

So the first speech and the fifth speech are set in parallel. That would be your D and D prime. And we're moving ever closer to what is at the center of this chiastic structure.

In verse 3, it says that Abram fell on his face. In verse 17, Abraham fell on his face. You have Abram, before his renaming, falling on his face in verse 3. You have Abraham falling on his face in verse 17.

That would be your E and your E prime. Then in verses 4-8, you have God's second speech. He has stated the as for me section of the covenant.

The preamble was his first speech. Walk before me, have integrity, be blameless, I will make my covenant. Then when Abram falls on his face, God speaks.

Of course, we already knew God was speaking, but that statement is made again in verse 3 because it introduces a new speech. There is a marker for the beginning of each of these sections of God's statement to Abram. So he speaks, and in verses 4-8, this is the as for me section.

And we saw last time that there is an as for me statement back in Genesis 9, when God states his covenant with regard to not destroying all flesh with a flood, not cutting off all flesh. But that speech, 4-8, that would be F. Your F prime is the fourth speech, which is in verses 15 and 16. God said to Abraham, as for Sarai your wife, her name will be changed, I will bless her, give you a son by her, I will bless her, she shall be a mother of nations, kings of peoples shall come from her.

So the second speech in 4-8 and the fourth speech in 15 and 16 are set in parallel. And

that leaves us at the center of this chiasm with the section verses 9-14. Verses 9-14 deal with the sign of the covenant, circumcision.

So we spent a good portion of our time last week exploring what exactly this sign is. We went back and reviewed some of the signs elsewhere in the Bible. We recalled that the rainbow was a sign and we see a very interesting relationship between that sign and that covenant and this sign and this covenant.

That was the removal from the earth, the flood that is, was the removal from the earth of the evil, wicked, ungodly portion of the human race, which was the vast majority of it at that time, by God. After the flood God says, I will never again cut off all flesh with the waters of a flood. And there will be a sign of this covenant, God says.

And that is the rainbow. And that arc is to remind us that God will never do that. In the midst of that, God talks about the shedding of blood if someone commits murder.

And this stands in for, this is the first instance of capital punishment. Cain was not executed for the murder of Abel, which was premeditated. Why? Well, that responsibility had not been delegated to man.

God sat in judgment of Cain. God pronounced upon him a living death. He was cut off from his people.

He was made a fugitive and a vagabond. He was banished to wandering. And this was a living death, cut off from the presence of God, cut off from the blessings and the promise of God.

And yet he is preserved because he is a believer. And he is not summarily executed. He has the chance to live out his life.

But this was not a responsibility of man, is the point. God delegates that responsibility to man after the flood. He says, If a man sheds man's blood, then by man his blood shall be shed.

God makes statements about the blood and about man's responsibility for the blood. And in nucleus form, this is man's responsibility to his fellow man and man's responsibility before God. You can eat the flesh of animals, but don't drink the blood.

This is an offense against God. Taking another man's life, that's an offense against man. You have the nucleus of responsibility toward God and responsibility toward man in these statements that God makes to Noah after the flood.

And the mark of this covenant and that the responsibility to enforce these things has been delegated to man is the rainbow. God says, I'm never again going to cut off all flesh. That's your responsibility now.

And specifically in the instance of murder. Here we have another ot, another sign. And it's the sign of circumcision.

And it's a reminder that the people of God, the seed and descendants of Abraham are to circumcise their male offspring. They are to circumcise the males that are born into their household, even among the slaves. If they purchase a male slave and he comes into the household, he is to be circumcised.

We'll talk more about that shortly. But this is the third speech. This is at the center, in the heart of this chiasm.

Circumcision, for fairly obvious reasons, isn't a real favorite topic for sermons. You don't wander into your typical denominational church and find, well, we're going to have a three-part or a five-part series on circumcision. It's not a popular topic.

And it's unfortunate that it's overlooked because we're at a very important part of the Genesis story. And God has, in a number of ways, pointed neon signs and arrows and red flags to this issue. It harks back to things God has said and done earlier.

It looks forward to things that are going to happen later in the book of Genesis and later in the history of Israel. We need to understand circumcision. It is repeatedly cited and referred to in the New Testament.

It comes up in the book of Acts. It comes up as an issue when Paul is traveling with Timothy. It's an issue when Paul is traveling with Titus.

There is a necessity for us to understand both the physical act and rite of circumcision and its spiritual significance. So we have slowed down, at least briefly here, last week and this week to make sure we understand this. It's going to help us a lot in the rest of Genesis.

It helps enormously in understanding what God says and requires of Israel in the law. We'll be looking at that here shortly. Once we understand this, we're prepared to move forward.

We're going to see why there is a difference in the outcome for Isaac versus Ishmael, who are both circumcised sons of Abraham. We're going to see why the fate of nations is different. We're going to see why God treats Israel the way that he does.

And a lot of this goes back to the idea of a sign. We've studied the doctrine of signs long ago in another study. I mentioned briefly some of the signs that have occurred thus far in Genesis.

I want to just quickly look at seven signs. If you want to study this out for yourself, it's a fascinating study. If you just follow the word Ot through the Bible, and you can do this

even with an English concordance, look up the word sign or the word signs.

And I encourage you, if you don't already have one, get yourself a Strong's Concordance. Get it for whatever version of the Bible you are most familiar with, or the one that you choose to use for your personal study. I use one that is based on the King James because most of the scripture that's tucked away in my mind, I learned, memorized, or am familiar with the wording from the King James.

And so I can find my verses most easily in pretty much the original Strong's King James. But if you are comfortable in the New American Standard or the NIV, those are pretty much the two popular alternatives to the King James or New King James, then I encourage you to get one because you can do these things for yourself. I will digress just for about one minute here and say that I think all of us here and perhaps in other contexts have at one time or another been exposed to the idea that the Word of God is bound up in its original language, the Hebrew and the Greek and the Aramaic, and it is not profitable to go in and study it for yourself.

You really need an expert to go in there and start with the original and translate, do the Isagogics and the Exegesis and the exposition and go through the steps to unlock the secrets of the Word of God. That is false. That is not true.

Every believer should be familiar with and should be comfortable traveling around in the Word of God. I encourage you to dust your Bible off if it has been collecting dust. Open it up, get into the Word of God and read it, study it.

It is fascinating. I would feel bad if I was the only one that had the joy of going in and exploring in the Word of God. It is a lot of fun.

If you care anything about the things of God, it is really fun to explore. Do not be afraid that you are going to get yourself off into some area of heresy. If you are asking and seeking and knocking, if questions come up in your mind, that is a healthy thing.

That is going to give God the Holy Spirit the chance to let you put line upon line and precept upon precept. Get yourself into the Word of God. Here is an example of something you can do.

I am going to talk about seven signs this morning. The word for sign is the Hebrew word Ot. It starts with the letter Aleph, which means it is going to be near the beginning of the Hebrew alphabet and also near the beginning of the list of Strong's Numbers.

If you get yourself a Strong's Concordance and you look up the English word sign or signs, you will see that there is a number out there. I believe it is Strong's Number 220. You can see that there are other words translated as sign.

They will have a different Strong's Number. If you want to study the word Ot, which is

the one we have here used with circumcision, then just look at the Concordance references that out by the side have the number 220. This will tell you that this is the same word we have in our passage.

You will find Genesis 17 listed there. Look up the other things that God says are a sign. Ezekiel the prophet was a sign to Israel.

He walked around barefoot for three years. That was a sign to Israel. There are many fascinating things.

What does God use for a sign? Why would this be a fruitful study? Just signs for their own sake? Sort of a practical exercise in the use of a concordance? Not at all. What does a sign do? What does the rainbow do? What does circumcision do? They are reminders. If God says something is a sign, this means, and He tells you what it is a sign of or what it is a reminder of, this is something God thinks is so important that He is not just going to say it.

He is going to give you a physical symbol as a reminder. When God makes the statements He makes to Noah in Genesis 9, He says this is so important I am going to put a celestial marker out there and everybody is going to see it. You can't miss it.

Who that has the ability to see has not seen a rainbow. Everybody has seen a rainbow. You can't miss it.

There is a gospel song. God put a rainbow in the sky. Well, it is supposed to be a reminder of something.

What a tragedy to see the sign which if you think about it, God had to invent some physics here to get light to refract through water droplets and put the water droplets up there and get the angle of the sun and the angle of the viewer and so forth. Sometimes you see a double rainbow and a triple rainbow. Well, that ought to be a double and triple reminder that we are supposed to remember something.

But if you walk up to the average believer, we won't count ourselves in this because we already know, but you walk up to the average believer and say, what does a rainbow mean? Well, God will never destroy the earth by a flood. What does that mean to you? Have you been walking around in fear that a flood was going to come and wash you away, but then you looked up in the sky and got comfort? What difference is it supposed to make? It is supposed to make a difference in our soul, these things. What does that sign remind us of? It reminds us of responsibility for sanctification, responsibility for separation and for putting to death the things that are unfruitful.

Separating and executing, if you will, putting to death the things that are not a part of God's plan and purpose. We have an actual social responsibility to execute people guilty of murder and similar capital crimes. And God spells this out more fully in the Law of

Moses.

We know the things that are worthy of death, such as homosexuality, such as rebellion on the part of a teenager, such as defiling yourself when you are fulfilling an office as a representative or as a leader of worship in the house of God. There are some pretty amazing principles that come out when you study. Go look up the things that are capital offenses under the law and look at the things that go on today that are not only tolerated, but are excused and in some cases even praised.

Well, you go back to the rainbow. God says there are things that are worthy of death. And you have the responsibility to identify them and to carry that out.

Not only in the literal sense, but also in the figurative sense. Circumcision is the same way. Well, if you get your concordance out and look up Strong's Number 220 and find out Oat and what a sign is, these are things that God thinks are so important that in the Old Testament he said, I'm going to give you a sign.

This shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. Now, there's an important event and God marked it with a sign.

That's the Greek word for sign. But this is a fruitful study. I encourage you, get yourself into the Word of God at times other than our studies, because this is the food for your soul.

Just think about what happens when you skip a meal or two or three in a day. What happens to your physical body? It gets weak. You get distracted.

You have a hard time concentrating. You have rumblings. You can actually get the physical shakes.

You run out of energy. Well, think about your soul. Our souls need nourishment.

We don't always have the time or the opportunity to sit down with our Bible and a concordance and meditate, but we carry around in our souls. I've been reading a story to the girls written by Lloyd Alexander back in the 60s. There's a series of books that are sort of a fantasy about people living in olden days.

And one of the characters is given this magical bag of food that never runs out, kind of like the widow's cruise of oil and her barrel of flour. And this little character, when they're off on their wanderings and having their adventures and it's time for a meal, they don't have to go hunt down a deer or a rabbit or something. He just pulls this inexhaustible food out of his bag.

That's what we have in our souls. The Word of God is an inexhaustible source of nourishment to us. And we ought to be carrying that purse, we ought to be carrying that

bag in our soul and lift the flap and pull that nourishment out.

You don't have to have a tape. You don't have to have a lesson. You don't have to have a pastor.

You don't have to have a Bible even if you've got the Word of God in your soul. But you've got to open up that reservoir. You've got to open up that place of storage and bring it out and be nourished by it.

That's a conscious act that we perform. And it's our responsibility. How can you expect to be strong? How can you expect to be perceptive and to discern, have your senses exercised to discern good and evil if we don't nourish our soul? Our soul is going to faint.

Our soul is going to go unconscious and fall asleep in terms of conscience and in terms of sensitivity to God's plan and God's purpose if we don't nourish it. So, what things ought to be in that purse? What ought to be in that storage place in our soul? Well, God has conveniently marked out some of the most important things in the Word with signs. God says, here's something I want you to remember.

I'm going to put a sign on it. I want you to remember your responsibility for purging bad things out of your society and out of your heart. I'm going to put a rainbow in the sky.

Your responsibility to be separate and remember your calling and your identity as a child of God started with the sign of circumcision. And we have the circumcision made without hands, Paul tells us in Colossians 2. It's a reminder to us of what? You are bought with a price. Glorify God in your body.

Your life is not your own. You shouldn't be living for your own goals and your own objectives. You ought to be living in the light of God's presence, in the light of God's plan, God's calling, God's purpose.

That's a daily, minute-by-minute responsibility. Well, all of us have a hard time remembering that. We get caught up in the minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour life.

We have things to get done. We have responsibilities. We have tasks.

We have a day to get through. We've got a schedule to fulfill. We've got this earthly life to get through.

Well, God says, you've got to wake yourself up. Awake from the dead, O sleepers, and Christ will give you life. We can be fruitful and productive in this life when we start to wake ourselves up day-by-day.

God has given us signs to mark these important things. I want to give you just seven, and I encourage you to get a concordance and look up the others and dig out for yourself. It's a lot of fun.

There is nothing that is more satisfying and more beneficial, nothing that is a greater blessing in my mind than getting into the Word of God and searching and seeking and digging, like it says in Proverbs 2, for that truth. And if you hit a passage that you don't understand, go tell God. God, I'm reading this passage in Isaiah, and I cannot figure this out.

This is just mumbo-jumbo to me. If you want to know what is God's promise, ask and it shall be given. Seek and you will find.

Knock and the door will be opened to you. God has put means here. He has gifted certain individuals with teaching, with insight, with perceptive ability into the Word of God.

And He may not give you a lightning bolt, thunder clap inspiration as to what a passage means, but if you pester Him enough with your desire to know what His Word means, you'll find out. It will come to you. You'll hear somebody on the radio.

It'll come up in a lesson here. It'll come up when you look at another passage of Scripture or when you consult any one of the numerous great helps that are available. But you have not because ye ask not.

You have not because ye ask amiss that you may consume it upon your desires. That's what the Word of God tells us. So, seven signs in the Word of God.

Seven things that are designated in the Old Testament Scriptures with the word ot. These are things God says, I really want you to remember Israel and by extension, all of us as believers. Turn with me to Exodus chapter 13.

This is early in the career of Israel as a nation. They have just recently... You know the book of Exodus is the story of God's deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. And you figure anything you find in the early chapters of Exodus is going to be reflecting that story.

You're going to find a lot of first things for the nation. In chapter 13, now how much time passes? Here's a little memory quiz for you. How much time passes between the Passover and the Exodus from Israel until the next day from Egypt and the Red Sea episode? If you remember the Ten Commandments movie or what's this cartoon movie that I just saw? I can't remember the name of it.

The Prince of Egypt. You realize that this is hard on the heels. They come out and within hours it seems, the armies of Pharaoh are pursuing the Israelites and they're backed up against the Red Sea.

There's virtually no time at all. But if you look at the book of Exodus, sandwiched between the Exodus, the physical departure of the Israelites from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, you have chapter 13. God does this for a reason.

So this is going to be pretty important. What does it say? The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Consecrate to me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast, it is mine. And Moses said to the people, Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand, the Lord brought you out of this place.

No leavened bread shall be eaten. You remember the tenth plague. You have the Passover.

You have the splashing of blood on the lentils, on the doorposts. And the firstborn are spared. It wasn't everyone in the house.

You watch some of the movies like the Ten Commandments and you think, oh my gosh, anybody that doesn't have the blood on the doorposts may be struck down. It's only the firstborn that are at risk. And that's a study in itself.

On this day you were going out in the month of Eid, but the firstborn, the Passover, and the unleavened bread that is baked in haste as they depart are all tied together. They're linked. It shall be when the Lord brings you, verse 5, into the land of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you.

That's what we're seeing in Genesis chapter 17. This was the promise to Abraham. A land flowing with milk and honey that you shall keep this service in this month.

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. No unleavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters.

And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt. It shall be an oat for you. It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes.

Now, let me ask you something. Can you observe the feast of unleavened bread and purging the leaven out of your house and doing this seven days of unleavened bread diet on your hand and between your eyes? You can't, can you? You don't eat with the back of your hand. You don't put your food between your eyes and then pop it in your mouth.

At least nobody that I know does. This is figurative language, isn't it? It's clear from this passage when God says this feast of unleavened bread will be a sign on your hand and a sign between your eyes. What does this speak of? In your perception? The first thing you see is something that's right between your eyes.

Maybe not right on the bridge of your nose, but the idea is it's right in front of your face. It's right between your eyes. It should color and guide all of your perceptions.

If it's on your hand, anything you do ought to be influenced by this knowledge. This feast of unleavened bread ought to be a constant reminder any time you perceive, any time you look at the world, this ought to be an issue. Any time you stretch out your hand to perform an act, this ought to be an influence.

This is a sign to you. It's a reminder to you. And how often does this occur? Annually.

One week a year is devoted to reminding Israel of something. What is it a reminder of? It tells us in verse 9, so that the Lord's law may be in your mouth. If you keep this knowledge and what this represents, this unleavened bread, what it represents, if you keep that between your eyes and on your hand, that's going to keep the law of the Lord in your mouth.

With a strong hand, the Lord has brought you out of Egypt. You have been separated. You have been distinguished and sanctified from that background, that bondage and slavery in Egypt.

You have been delivered. You ought to be different. You have been separated from that slavery, that bondage, that evil nation that God punished with the plagues.

Stay that way. That's the message of leaven. Leaven is a symbol of impurity.

Leaven is a symbol of evil. Throughout the Bible, any place you find it, leaven is a symbol of that which defiles, that which corrupts. It is through the corruption.

What is corruption? How does the rotting of flesh and vegetation take place? It's the process of little microbes eating and digesting and giving off gases, right? Well, that's what yeast is. Yeast basically rots a portion of the dough, eats it, digests it, and gives off gas, and that's what makes the bread rise. So yeast, leaven, is a symbol of death.

It is a reminder of corruption because that's what happens to a corpse. Microbes get in it and start digesting that formerly living flesh that is now dead, eats it, digests it, and gives off gas. This is why corpses bloat.

This is why you have the whole concept of rotting that takes place. Well, death is the opposite of life. There's a profound statement for you.

But God concentrates on life, and He says, And so leaven is a symbol of this. The unleavened bread is a reminder. You've been separated from the things of death.

God has promised you life. He's promised you an eternal heritage, an eternal land, an eternal throne, and so forth. So unleavened bread will be eaten seven days.

This will be assigned to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes so that the Lord's law may be in your mouth. You remember that you've been separated from these things? This is the great concept of repentance. When you change your mind away

from something, it has to go toward something else.

If you say, I am leaving this sin and bondage to evil and so forth, what am I going to do in its place? You are leaving one thing, and you are embracing another. And here, if you're reminded that you've been separated from sin and evil, you've purged out the old leaven, you've left the land of Egypt, what are you then going to embrace? What are you going to set your mind on? The law of the Lord. That's what's going to be in your mouth.

So that is a sign. This is an important reminder. God says, I'm going to give you a physical ritual, a feast that takes a week out of your year to put this in remembrance.

The consecration of the firstborn is closely tied to this. In the very next section of this chapter, look at verse 11. It shall be when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, this is Exodus 13.11, as He swore to you and your fathers and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb.

That is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have, the males shall be the Lord's. This harks back to verse 2. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, so forth. There's a lot of detail we could go into here.

But look at verse 14. So it shall be when your son asks you in times to come, saying, What is this? That you shall say to him, By strength of hand, the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass when Pharaoh was stubborn in letting us go, that the Lord killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast.

Therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem. It shall be as a sign on your hand and as front lens between your eyes. For by strength of hand, the Lord brought us out of Egypt.

Another reminder of this specific aspect of God's deliverance. The unleavened bread is a reminder of the separation from the evil of Egypt. The consecration of the firstborn is a reminder of the redemption that made that take place, that made that possible.

This is to be a sign on your hand and as front lens between your eyes. Now, you can't do your actual firstborn redemption on the back of your hand or on the bridge of your nose, can you? This is where the early Israelites went astray because they developed the idea of a phylactery. And you see this among the hyper-orthodox Jews even today.

They've got a little leather bag and all kinds of straps and they've got a little ritual and a certain way of wrapping them. It reminds me of the tassel that goes on the Mameluke sword, which is the officer's sword in the Marine Corps. There's a little black leather strap that's got a tassel on it and there's a prescribed way of affixing this to the sword.

There's a certain knot that you tie on that lower part of the handle of the sword there.

Well, the Jews have this particular way that you wrap the leather straps of the phylactery and you tie this little bag and it's got a tiny parchment or piece of paper or something in it with the Ten Commandments or some other part of the law written on it. And they try to literally fulfill this command to tie it between your eyes and to bind it on your hand.

And you'll see them walking around with this little funny thing tied to their hand. Totally missing the point. You can't tie the Feast of Unleavened Bread to your hand or to your forehead.

You can't tie the Consecration of the Firstborn to your forehead or to your hand. Why take the other passage that we're about to look at and make that same statement? Which we're going to find over in Deuteronomy. We'll go there in just a second.

But you have Unleavened Bread, you have the Consecration of the Firstborn, and if you turn over a few pages to Exodus 31, you have the Sabbath day. Exodus 31, verses 12 through 17, the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. Keep the Sabbath.

You can read all the rest of that. You've probably been through it before. Look at verse 17.

It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. When he had made an end of the speaking with them on Mount Sinai, he gave Moses two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

The Sabbath is a reminder. If you think about this, unleavened bread is an annual feast. It is a reminder on the hand and between the eyes.

The consecration of the firstborn happens any time an animal gives birth, any time a woman in Israel gives birth to the firstborn son. So you have an annual reminder, you have an occasional reminder on the occasion of the birth of a first child to an animal or to a woman, and you have in the Sabbath a weekly reminder. All of these things are a reminder of what? The word and the calling of God.

The person and the work of God. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Be holy.

I am holy. This is the idea. Turn over to Deuteronomy 6. By the way, those are the first three signs.

Unleavened bread, the consecration of the firstborn, and the Sabbath. Three of the seven that we are going to look at. Turn to Deuteronomy 6 and then just put a marker in

your Bible because we are going to pause here and take our break.

When we resume, we will take a look at what God has to say in Deuteronomy 6 about another sign on the hand. Let's pause and take our break.