

99-01-24b

Let's resume our study now this morning as we continue to explore for ourselves the things that God considers so important for us to remember that He marks them with a sign, a physical reminder to jog our memory and focus our attention on these things. We have already seen the first three, the Feast of Unleavened Bread for Israel, the first born consecration and the Sabbath day. These were all in Exodus, Exodus chapter 13 for the first two, Exodus chapter 31 for the Sabbath day, the third.

The fourth is found in Deuteronomy chapter 6. God chooses these not only in terms of the physical nature of the sign, is it an observance, is it a feast day to observe, is it a day of the week to observe, is it a ritual to observe at the birth of the first offspring, the first son in a family or in a herd of animals, but also the timing, the different phases of life, different areas of life where these signs occur and there's also different timing. Some of them, the Sabbath occurs every week, the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurs once a year for one week. You have the staggered or unpredictable nature of the consecration of the firstborn.

It happens depending on the season of the year or the type of animal or when a child is about to be born as the firstborn. Here in Deuteronomy chapter 6, we have another thing that is to be assigned and of course in Deuteronomy you have a great deal of the substance of the law of Moses recorded. Chapter 6 records for us the summation, the concise statement of principle that is embodied in the entire law.

Now this is the commandment and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you so that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, so that you may fear the Lord your God to keep all his statutes and his commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson all the days of your life and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear O Israel and be careful to observe it so that it may be well with you and so that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you. Notice the same condition when the covenant promise to Abraham is reiterated in the hearing of all Israel, the same condition is stated.

What is necessary so that your days will be prolonged, so that it will be well with you and so that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God has promised? What is the condition? To keep the commandments, statutes and judgments, to fear the Lord in so doing, that is what enables God to fulfill those covenant promises. So once again this is the statement of condition. It is not an unconditional promise that individuals will multiply and be fruitful and be blessed just because they are heirs of Abraham.

They have to meet the same condition Abraham himself met. So that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you.

A land flowing with milk and honey.

And then you have the Shema, the statement of worship heard countless millions of times down through the history of Israel. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength.

You remember Jesus saying that this sums up all the law and the prophets, doesn't it? This and the second commandment that is like unto it, to love your neighbor as yourself. And these words which I command you today shall be where? Tied to your hand, tied to your forehead? No, in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. The very same language that was used in the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Consecration of the Firstborn. This ought to make a difference in the way you view the world.

This ought to make a difference in the way you live your life in the world, the way you perform your actions. Before your eyes, on your hand. Everything ought to be guided by your identity as a child of God and your desire to fear God and keep his commandments.

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. So internally, you do it first in your house and then when you exit your house and go out your gates, it still ought to guide you. It ought to be the last thing you see when you leave your house.

The first thing you see when you return. A constant reminder. And of course, once again, Israel took this literally, made little niches in the doorpost and put a tiny scroll in there.

That little tiny scroll isn't going to do any good sitting in a niche in a lintel. They've unearthed in archaeology the stone lintels of doors and there's a little niche there and they would put a little tiny scroll, write in microscopic Hebrew or Aramaic characters the Ten Commandments or some other portion of the law, wrap it up carefully and stick it in the niche. The thing about a sign is, it has to, you have to make it fulfill its purpose.

The little scroll in the lintel isn't going to jump out and sock you in the eye as you walk by, is it? It's not going to reach out and tap you on the shoulder and say, hey, remember me? It's not a talking scroll that's going to speak and remind you of these words. You have to look at a sign and be reminded. You have to look at the rainbow and be reminded.

You have to look at circumcision and be reminded. You have to think back on the mighty acts of God and be reminded. All of these signs in the Old Testament were recorded for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Each of the signs to Israel ought to remind us of something. But it has to be a reminder. They had a thing on the news one day this week.

I only listened to it with half an ear. But there was some channel or other that had a little feature on what they call Jesus Chic, where teenagers have decided that it is fashionable to wear t-shirts or articles of jewelry that have crosses or the name of Jesus. You've got the WWJD bracelets and so forth.

And this is trendy. It's fashionable now to wear a cross or wear a Jesus t-shirt or have the little nylon bracelet on your arm or whatever. They call it Jesus Chic.

Well, lots of people wear crosses. I don't know if you've seen MTV lately, but I have seen it from time to time. And you see all these various flavors of quote-unquote musicians on there wearing crosses in their ears or in their nose or around their neck or elsewhere on their person.

And I seriously doubt that that sign of the cross means to them what it means to you and to me. Even in the Christian world, it's easy to stick a cross on top of the steeple of your church. It's easy to stick a cross up on the wall behind your pulpit or to put one on the front of the pulpit or to emblazon it on the front of your hymnal or your Bible.

But when we look at that sign, what does it trigger in our soul? What do we think of in our mind? A sign in one sense is what you make of it. The Israelites saw the sign of God's mighty wonders power in delivering them from Egypt. They saw the implementation of all ten plagues.

They saw the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. They saw the parting of the Red Sea. And they weren't three days in the wilderness before they were grumbling and complaining and completely lost their faith.

God has brought us out here to die. All of those mighty signs and wonders did not do for them what they can only do for themselves, and that is to read into a sign truth. You have to have the truth.

You have to recognize the link between the sign and the truth or it's meaningless. This is what happened with circumcision in Israel. Did every male that got circumcised latch on to the truth of God's promise and God's covenant? Did every Israelite who observed the Sabbath or the Feast of Unleavened Bread or any of the other commandments of the law, did they really latch on to loving the Lord their God with all their heart, all their soul, and all their strength? They didn't.

And neither do we. We have got to do that for ourselves. We are to look at the sign and link it to the truth.

What do you think of when you look at these signs, whether they're the physical signs or

the recorded signs in Scripture? What do we think of? Does it make a difference? Anybody can wear a cross. Anybody can stick a cross up on the wall or on the pulpit or on the top of their church or on the back of their car, put a little magnetic fish on there or whatever. It is not the merit of the sign itself.

It's what that triggers when you look at it. And I've got nothing against putting things on your car, but I think a lot of people who have a fish on the back of their car ought to put it up on the dashboard and look at it themselves. We have a responsibility to remind ourselves of who we are and what our responsibilities are before God.

And to me, it is symbolic. And I haven't even looked. I don't know if any of you all have a thing on your car.

If you do, I'm not talking to you. I have no idea what you may or may not have on your cars. But to me, it is symbolic of what's wrong with Christianity today, that we want to put a fish on the back of our car and tell other people something rather than reminding ourselves of what our responsibility is before God.

That's what's the matter with us as this generation of the church. We're too busy trying to make an impact on others, and we're not busy enough letting God make an impact on us. And if I ever get a magnetic fish, I'm going to stick it right on the center of my steering wheel so that I am reminded of who I am and why I'm here.

And my life ought to be the sign of the fish or the sign of the cross that shines the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, to the rest of the world. Well, I don't know how I got off on that, but we're talking about signs. And this sign in Deuteronomy chapter 6 is the possession of the law itself.

Remember in Romans when Paul talks about the Israelites, he says, to them belong the oracles of God. They are the custodians of the law. Possession of the law itself was to be a sign to Israel, and it ought to be something in front of their face and bound on their hand.

They ought to be reminded of it every time they cross the threshold of their house. Every time they exit the gate in their little wooden picket fence out there and go out into the world, they ought to remember who they are. They are a special people.

They are called people. They are the custodians. They are the possessors of the presence of God, of the word of God, the oracles of God, the destiny that God has assigned them as a people and as a nation.

And of course, that in the Old Testament is basically the destiny for believers. Believers in the Old Testament come to Israel. God gets them there by hook or by crook.

They may come to Israel as a slave. They may come to Israel as a fugitive. They may

come to Israel as the mixed multitude.

There is great provision in the law for the foreigner and the stranger. Why? Because foreigners and strangers were constantly coming to Israel. Why? Well, a variety of reasons, but there is at least a portion of them that are coming because they are looking for God.

And the presence of God, the place of God, the provision of God, the word of God, the plan of God exists in the Old Testament days in Israel. And that is why the word of God to Israel is the word for believers. It is commandment for believers.

Nobody thought they could get saved by keeping the law. They thought they could be righteous by keeping the law. God says the law is assigned to you.

It ought to be something in your heart. If it is in your heart, it will be before your eyes. It will be on your hand.

It will guide how you look at the world. It will guide how you act in the world. It will guide how you behave yourself when you exit your house, when you leave your yard.

And that is why this figurative language is used in Deuteronomy chapter 6. You can turn over also to Deuteronomy 11 and verse 18. Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul. It has to start on the inside.

Too many people try to start on the outside. If I strap this phylactery to my hand and to my head, I will be a more righteous person. It has to start on the inside and work its way out.

In your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit down in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Virtually identical language.

Why is it in here twice? Because it is a sign. It is a reminder. God repeats it because it is important.

This is the central issue in the life of Israelites. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. For, if, and this is once again the conditional nature of the covenant, verse 22, Deuteronomy 11, if you carefully keep all these commandments, which I command you to do, and then he doesn't give a repetition of the rituals, does he? What is keeping the commandments? To love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to hold fast to him.

That's what keeping these commandments consists of. Then the Lord will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves. Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours.

This is exactly what God told Abraham, isn't it? Remember back in chapter 15 of Genesis? Everywhere you set your foot, that's the land I've given you. He reiterates that to Israel. If you're careful to keep these commands.

To love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to hold fast to him. Not to them, to him. That's what they are to hold fast to.

This is a sign. The law is a sign. It's a reminder of God's covenant promises to them.

Remember the word of God. Remember the calling of God. That's what the sign is designed.

And this is helpful to us. God marks these things with a sign. We look at those signs.

These things are written for us as well as for them. So that's the first four signs. What are the last three? There are two that are paired together over in Numbers, chapter 16 and chapter 17.

Turn with me to Numbers, chapter 16. Go back a little bit from Deuteronomy. There was dissension in the camp.

In Numbers 16, you have the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. They rose up in Numbers 16 too before Moses with some of the children of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation. Notice who it is that goes astray in Israel.

It's those who get the leadership and start thinking of themselves more highly than they ought to think, as the New Testament puts it. Representatives of the congregation, men of renown. And right away, this is another one of the fascinating things about the word of God.

God gives you footnotes. He ties passages together. When's the last time we saw that phrase, men of renown, men of the name? It's over in Genesis, chapter 6. Sons of God saw the daughters of men.

They were beautiful. They took wives of all whom they chose. After that, sons were born to them.

These were the mighty men of old, men of renown. And of course, these are the ones that God wiped out with the flood. Well, these men of renown are similarly about to be wiped out by God.

They, in verse 3, gathered together against Moses and Aaron and said to them, you take

too much upon yourselves. This is one of the most common things that happens when believers attack other believers. They typically find fault with others of which they themselves are most guilty.

Or should I say, we. We typically find fault with others in areas of which we are most guilty. And the reason is, we know that area so well.

We are the pots calling the kettle black. Who is it that's taking too much on themselves, deciding that Moses and Aaron are usurping authority and leadership in Israel? Well, it's these 250 men of renown. You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them.

See, they're applying the word of God. God has pronounced all of Israel holy. So they're quoting scripture, as it were.

They're saying, we've got biblical support for what we're saying here. All of Israel is holy. What makes you think you're, are you holier than thou, so to speak? Everyone in the congregation is holy, and the Lord is among them.

Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord? Who died and put you in charge is the idea here. When Moses heard it, what did he do? He rebuked them. He defended himself.

He said, don't you know I was at the burning bush? Don't you know I threw the rod down in front of Pharaoh? Don't you remember it was me that stretched out my hand over the Red Sea? When Moses heard it, he fell on his face. Falling on one's face is an expression of humility. Moses doesn't stand up on a rock and berate and belittle and defend himself.

What does he say? He fell on his face. He spoke to Korah and all his company saying, tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is his and who is holy and will cause him to come near to him. That one whom he chooses, he will cause to come near to him.

Do this, take censers, Korah and all your company, put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi. These men are Levites.

Levites have a special standing in Israel by right of birth, and yet they don't have the standing that Aaron and his sons have as priests. They don't have the standing that Moses has as the duly called and commissioned, personally chosen leader, chosen by God. But they say we're Levites, all of Israel is holy, you're out of line, we want more of a voice in government here, we're as holy as you are, etc.

Moses does not belittle them, he does not berate them, he does not do anything other than say, take your case to God. If you think that you've got the same rights as Aaron

and his sons, then you just light up your little torch there and go approach God, and we'll see who God chooses. This is the same thing that David says to Saul over in 1 Samuel.

The Lord judge between me and thee. The only response he makes is to put their own words back in their court. It is you who are taking too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi.

He reminds them of who they are. They are Levites, they have plenty of responsibility as Levites, but they are taking more on to themselves than they should. He speaks the truth to them, but he's on his face when he does it, in humility.

He says, and Moses is sad about this because he knows who God is going to choose, and he knows what these men have brought upon themselves by disregarding God's plan. Then Moses said to Korah, hear now you sons of Levi, is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them? He reminds them of the rest of the word of God. They've quoted one part, all Israel is holy.

He reminds them of the rest of it. Certain of you have been separated for certain specific purposes. He has brought you near to himself, in verse 10, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you.

Are you seeking the priesthood also? God has given you an area of service, an area of opportunity that's separate and distinct from everyone else in Israel, but you're not content with that. You want to take something else. Therefore, you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord.

When you gather yourself against a believer that God has chosen for a particular purpose, you're gathering yourself against the Lord. What is Aaron, that you complain against him? Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, we will not come up. This is their problem.

They have lost their respect for the authority that God has established in Israel. They don't respect Moses' authority. Moses says, come here, I need to talk with you.

Moses is going to try to reason with them, to remind them of the word of God, just like he does with Korah. Korah at least shows up. Dathan and Abiram won't even respond when Moses says, come here, I need to tell you something.

They said, we will not come up. Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? They're calling Egypt a land flowing with milk and honey. So, it's not hard to see who's in the wrong here.

You've brought us out of the land flowing with milk and honey, that wonderful land of

Egypt where we were having such a great time making bricks and beating straw into the clay and so forth. You've brought us out here to kill us in the wilderness, and you're acting like a prince over us. Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards.

What are their eyes on? We came along for this ride because we thought we were going to get a lot of stuff. Where is the milk and honey and the vineyards and all of the great prosperity? We're looking for the material benefit that this excursion is supposed to bring to us, and we don't see it. Will you put out the eyes of these men? Are we blind? Are you trying to blind us to the truth that we're out here wandering in the wilderness and we're having a hard time finding enough to eat and drink, and we certainly don't have prosperity? Moses was very angry.

So, what did he do? He went to the Lord. This is why Moses is the leader of Israel and Korah is not. Nathan and Abiram are not.

Moses was very angry. He said to the Lord, Lord, do not respect their offering. Moses is righteously indignant.

He sees their viewpoint. He sees the disrespect and the dishonor and the lack of gratitude, complete lack of understanding of who God is and what he's done for them. Do not respect their offering.

I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them. The donkey wasn't even qualified to be a sacrificial animal. We were talking about this on the break.

The very least of the possessions that one might have, Moses hasn't taken anything from them, nor have I hurt one of them. Moses said to Korah, tomorrow you and all your company be present before the Lord, you and they as well as Aaron. Let each take his censer and put incense in it.

Each of you bring a censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers, both you and Aaron, each with his censer. So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. Moses says, let God judge between me and thee.

Korah gathered all the congregation against him at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. You can already see the application that this has in our lives.

When there is contention, when there is division, when there are people who are out of line, who wrongly accuse, who take too much on themselves, who want to be a different part of the body of Christ than what they are. They have been assigned to be a hand and they want to be a foot. They have been assigned to be an ear and they want to be an eye.

Most people in the body of Christ have an assignment to be some body part and they want to be the mouth. They want to speak, they want to influence, they want to be the head in some way. They want to be directing the rest of the body in some way, shape, or form, just like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

The most recent example of this is the surge of, and I don't want to raise anybody's hackles here, but there has been a surge of the desire for women to take leadership roles in the church. Moses tells the Levites here, look, you've got a wonderful area of opportunity. It's not necessarily better to be a priest than it is to be a Levite.

It's just different. God has assigned a specific function to you. He's assigned a specific function to the sons of Aaron to be the priests.

Be content with such things as you have. Do well in what God has assigned you. You don't have to be a foot.

You don't have to be a hand or an eye in the body. Concentrate on what God has given you. The one who is faithful in that which is least is going to get the chance to be faithful in that which is much later on.

Don't be looking over the fence at somebody else's assignment and saying, why didn't I get that pageant ground to plow? Why didn't I get that opportunity? Look how great that is over there. Be content with your assignment. Women can do more in the church in their assigned area of function than a pastor can, than a teacher can, than an elder or a deacon can.

You have more range of opportunity. You have more places to minister than somebody that's in a leadership role does. But there are women in the church today who think they have to be standing in the pulpit, they have to be leading the board, or they have to have some other exercise of authority, or they're just not equal.

They're somehow substandard. This is something they've done in their own minds just like Korah, Dathan, and Byron have done here. And I would submit to you that when the glory of the Lord is revealed for our age, which is at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the same level of judgment is going to take place.

People who arrogate to themselves functions, positions, operations in the plan of God to which they have not been assigned, for which they have not been gifted, will suffer what is just about to happen to Korah, Dathan, and Byron and the other 247 people who are standing there trying to be a priest with fire in their censer. When the glory of the Lord is revealed, stand by. What happens here? The glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Verse 20, the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, separate yourselves from among this congregation. This is a theme we've been seeing in both of our studies, isn't it?

Stand back from these who enjoin themselves to evil, that I may consume them in a moment. In a very wonderful demonstration of their orientation to the plan of God, look what Moses and Aaron do in verse 22.

They fell on their faces and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and you be angry with all the congregation. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the congregation saying, get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram and the elders of Israel followed him.

This, by the way, just as an aside, tells us that there are levels of responsibility. Did the congregation come and assemble under the leadership of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? Yes, they did. Are they as responsible as those leaders? No, they're not.

They're not going to suffer the same fate. Moses and Aaron interceded for them saying, just because these men stirred them up and got them to follow, are they as guilty as these? God says, no. Tell them to get away and they won't suffer the same fate.

Moses rose and verse 25, went to Dathan and Abiram, the elders of Israel followed him. He spoke to the congregation saying, depart now from the tents of these wicked men. Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins.

And to their credit, the congregation realized that something is up here and they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents with their wives, their sons, and their little children. Note that detail and remember who it is that Abraham is to circumcise.

Moses said, by this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates a new thing and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord.

In throwing rocks at the duly constituted, divinely authorized leadership in Israel, these men have gathered themselves against and rejected the Lord. Verse 31, it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit.

The earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, lest the earth swallow us up also. And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Tell Eliezer the son of Aaron the priest to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy.

I want you to notice something. Evil men, for their own reasons, can bring something before the Lord, and even though they themselves are consumed for doing it, that which they bring is holy. This is a caution to those ministries who are going out and in all kinds of distorted, deceitful, and wrongly motivated ways are preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They may, in fact, bring a soul to God in spite of themselves, and that thing will be holy, but they themselves are not justified in so doing. It doesn't reduce their condemnation one whit. They shall be assigned to the children of Israel.

Verse 39, Eliezer the priest took the bronze censers which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, to be a memorial to the children of Israel, that no outsider who is not a descendant of Aaron should come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the Lord had said to him through Moses. These censers are to be a sign, a reminder in Israel that God has decided who is going to do what. Don't arrogate to yourself.

Don't take a portion of scripture and twist it and try to apply it, and think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. This is a sign. It's a sign that we need to be reminded of in this day and age.

God has given us a very general set of guidelines for the function of the church, and yet some people resist even those few. God didn't tell us whether or not to have a baptistry, whether or not to have a steeple, whether or not to meet in a building or in a home. He didn't tell us whether or not to have a board of elders or a board of deacons or one pastor or three pastors.

He didn't tell us whether or not to have Sunday school, whether or not to sing hymns, whether or not to have instruments to accompany the singing of your hymns. We are free in so many areas to constitute ourselves as believers of like mind and worship before God, but he did say a couple of things. One of them is that there is a certain kind of leadership that is to be exercised when believers gather together, and that does not include women.

Women are not to exercise authority over men. They are not to abuse or reject the authority of their husbands. That's the whole head covering issue, to act in spite of what their husbands have said.

That's operating and praying with your head uncovered. You dishonor your head. You dishonor your husband.

Any woman who dishonors her husband in any way connected to the worship life of the church brings shame on herself and on her husband. So there are some guidelines, and we are reminded here that when the glory of the Lord is revealed, there will be a reckoning and a judgment on those who do not order themselves accordingly. In the very next chapter, number 17, you have another sign.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel. Get from them a rod from each father's house, all their leaders according to their father's houses. Twelve rods, one rod for each tribe in Israel.

You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi, for there shall be one rod for the head of each father's house. You shall place it in the tabernacle of meeting before the testimony where I meet with you. It shall be that that rod of the man whom I choose will blossom.

I will bring life from death. I will bring life from death. Every rod that a guy is walking around with as the head of the tribes of Israel, it's a dead stick.

You don't walk around with a live tree, but this dead stick is going to blossom. It shall be, in verse 5, the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom. Thus, I will rid myself of the complaints of the children of Israel which they make against you.

Moses spoke to the children of Israel. All these things were placed before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. Look at verse 8. The rod of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds, produced blossoms, and yielded ripe almonds.

It's not like somebody stuck a leaf on it. It is alive and fruitful. Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel.

They looked and each man took his rod. The Lord said to Moses, Bring Aaron's rod back before the testimony to be kept as an omen, as a sign against the rebels that you may put their complaints away from me lest they die. Who put the complaints away the first time? Who opened up the earth and swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram? Who burned up the 250 with fire? God did.

But now the designation has been made. The rod has budded. God has designated in graphic fashion who it is that will serve him.

In the future history of Israel, does the earth ever open up again and swallow up those who rebel against Moses' authority or Aaron's authority? No, because God says, You will put their complaints away from me lest they die. You will now put away their complaints. This rod is going into the ark of the testimony.

That's a reminder to God that he has already done his part. It's on the analogy of the flood. Now it's going to be the responsibility of the Israelites to put away those who rebel against the constituted authority in Israel.

Thus did Moses, just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did. The children of Israel spoke to Moses saying, Surely we die, we perish, we all perish. Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die.

Shall we all utterly die? Of course, you can see the sheep-like nature of these people. They follow Chordathon and Byron. They see them die.

Now they're afraid that if they come anywhere near the Lord, they're going to die. That's not the point. They can't distinguish the good and the evil.

That's why they are spared. They're not yet spiritually mature enough to even make these discernments, and that's why God spares them. They're not as accountable as the Levites were, who knew better.

Anyway, this is a sign. The bronze censers that are hammered into plates and put on the altar. Aaron's rod that buds.

How often are these reminders? Every time somebody looks at the altar, they see these censers. Every time they think about the Ark of the Testimony, they think about its contents. The tables of the law are in there.

Aaron's rod that budded is in there. God has an order. It is to be respected.

It's a reminder. You can't arrogate to yourself just any old function you choose. Even though you're a believer, even though you've been declared holy, you have an assigned place.

You have an assigned function in God's plan. Don't mess it up. There are reminders for that, physical reminders in Israel.

Reminders of God's orders. Reminders of God's holiness. Not just anyone can approach God.

The necessity for a designated priest, this reflects on the future ministry of Jesus Christ. It's important that these things be pictured in the worship life of Israel, because it's going to teach us about Christ, about his ministry as the great high priest who enters in once and offers atonement for us all. The final one we want to look at, the seventh sign that we're studying this morning, is in Joshua chapter 4. Joshua chapter 4. This is an interesting one.

There is no physical reminder of the crossing of the Red Sea. There might have been a few Egyptian helmets floating in the water, but those were soon gone. But in Joshua

chapter 4, when Israel passes over the waters of the Jordan, actually passes over the riverbed of the Jordan into the land of promise, they are instructed to pick up from the center of the riverbed stones.

One stone for each tribe in Israel. Verse 3 of Joshua 4. Take for yourselves twelve stones from here out of the midst of the Jordan from the place where the priest's feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodged tonight.

Joshua called the twelve men whom he had appointed from the children of Israel, one man from every tribe. To make a long story short, when the priests who bear the Ark of the Covenant on its poles walk up to the waters of the Jordan, as soon as the first priest's sandal hits the edge of the water, the water is going to part. And it's going to part in an even bigger way than it did at the Red Sea.

Those waters are going to part and back up several miles upstream. There's going to be a giant wall of water clear out of sight of the Israelites. They're going to walk across on dry ground.

And when they get halfway across, they're going to stop and stand there with the Ark of the Covenant. These men are going to pick up the twelve stones, and then they're going to proceed on across. And they're going to pile these stones up as a memorial on the other side of the Jordan.

Crossing the Jordan in traditional Christianity has been a sign of crossing over into heaven, chilly Jordan's foam and so forth, and I'm bound for the promised land, and so on, has been looked at as going to heaven. But this is the entering into inheritance, entering into the receiving blessing and reward because of fulfilling the conditions of God's promises. That is our opportunity as well.

It doesn't have to do with salvation. And although we will enter into the fullness of those things when we die and go into the eternal future, we can seize and lay hold of those things now. Entering the promised land is entering the place of great function.

It's entering into adulthood, as it were. The generation in Israel that couldn't do that dropped in the wilderness. The next generation understood the importance of faith in God.

They entered the land, and what did they do? Heaven and the eternal future is not a place of killing the enemies and driving out the pagans and conquests and so forth. It's settling down every man with his fig tree in his vineyard. In this life, we have the opportunity to be fully equipped for every good work.

We have the opportunity to go in and drive out the enemies out of the land, like Israel had the opportunity to do. Well, this monument of stones, what happens if they,

figuratively speaking, decide to go back across the Jordan? To go back to the immaturity? To go back to the years of wandering? To go back to the days when it was sin and failure that were the point? Well, as you get to the river, you come across this heap of stones. Dad, some child asks, what's this heap of stones here by the Jordan? This is the place where God enabled us to cross.

This is the place where God fulfilled his promises and brought us to that land flowing with milk and honey that he had promised all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And he brought us across on dry ground. It's by God's might and God's power that we entered into this land.

Don't forget that and go back across the other way. These stones, in verse 20, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal. There's a lot you can say about Gilgal.

We don't have time this morning. He spoke to the children of Israel saying, when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, what are these stones? You shall let your children know, saying, Israel crossed over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty.

When we enter into the land, the place of fruitfulness, the place of prosperity, the place of victory, the place of great function in God's plan, this is a sign to all the peoples of the earth that God's power is great. It is mighty, and so that you may fear the Lord your God forever, so that you don't forget what got you here. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, which is by faith, so walk ye in him, we're told in the New Testament.

God's deliverance and God's provision after our deliverance is symbolized by this monument of stones, which God takes an entire chapter in Joshua to point out to us as a sign. So these things, and circumcision in particular that we have in view here, these signs are reminders to us of who we are and why we're here. They always point to God, the word of God, the calling of God, the person of God, the work of God, the holiness of God, the order of God, the assignments of the plan of God, God's deliverance, God's provision, God's mighty power.

Every time you find an oar in the Old Testament you will find a demonstration, a reminder of God's power, God's plan, and God's purpose. So these things ought to remind us in the same way. And as we think about the spiritual nature of circumcision in our lives, this is where our attention should rest, to bind these things before our eyes, on our hands, on the doorposts of our houses, in the daily minutes and hours of life, to remember who we are and why we're here.

Every thought captive for Christ. Let's close in prayer. We thank you, Father, for the

privilege of setting these things, for the position we occupy in your plan.

We pray that we will be content with it and explore its opportunities and fulfill the calling that has been placed on our lives, that we will reflect the glory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in every thought, in every action. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.