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As we continue our worship this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to Amos. Amos chapter 5. Amos is a fascinating book. I hope before too long we get to study through it.

It is a warning book. It is a book about judgment. Its message relays to Israel God's deep displeasure with their operation, specifically the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century B.C. Amos notes in his prophetic message to Israel the displeasure and the wrath of God because of their complete disregard for God's righteousness, for God's justice, the way they abuse the poor and so forth.

These are the descendants of Abraham. This is the seed of Abraham that we are studying in prospect in Genesis 17 and moving into chapter 18 this morning. And as such, as the nation of Israel, as the divinely called and chosen people, they are not called to salvation.

They are not called to belief in God. The message that is transmitted to Israel in the Old Testament, the various messages, can be taken by us as examples of what God has to say to believers. They are not examples of how to win the lost.

They are examples of warning, encouragement, exhortation for believers. And it is very much the case here in Amos 5. These are the covenant people. These are the people of the circumcision.

Amos 5, verse 1. Hear this word which I take up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel. The virgin of Israel has fallen. She will rise no more.

She lies forsaken on her land. There is no one to raise her up. For thus says the Lord God, the city that goes out by a thousand shall have a hundred left.

And that which goes out by a hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel. For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, Seek me and live. But do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba.

For Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing. Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, with no one to quench it in Bethel. You who turn justice to wormwood, and lay righteousness to rest in the earth.

He made the Pleiades and Orion. He turns the shadow of death into morning, and makes the day dark as night. He calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth.

The Lord is his name. He rains ruin upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the

fortress. They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

Therefore, because you tread down the poor, and take grain taxes from him, though you have built houses of hewn stone, yet you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine from them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins, afflicting the just, and taking bribes, diverting the poor from justice at the gate.

Therefore, the prudent keeps silent at that time, for it is an evil time. Seek good and not evil, that you may live. So the Lord God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken.

Hate evil, love good. Establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

You can read the second half of this chapter, and see the continuation of this theme, if you skip down to verse 21. I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings, and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.

Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

Did you offer me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikuth, your king, and Cheun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts. This is a condemnation of the forms of worship that have an outward appearance, but are empty of substance, or empty of the heartfelt worship that God is looking for.

It reminds us of other passages where God says, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. These words speak to us today. We have a lot of music in the church.

We have, I watched a program last night that was, it's a funny thing, I don't know what it is about the weekend evenings, but there's a lot of material on public broadcasting, especially on Channel 2 here in Dallas, about homosexuals. And a lot of it is very positive and favorable and written by about for that perversion. This was a program that was in that category, although it caught my eye because this was the story of a small group of transvestite drag queen type men who had been ministered to by a Christian man and had been brought out of that lifestyle, who had recovered.

And it was the story of one man in particular who, through his faith and his life in the church and his acceptance by believers in this particular church, had escaped that

lifestyle. And they had film of his wedding to a lady who knew about his past, but loved him for who he was and so forth. His visits back to people that he knew in his former life and trying to communicate to them that there was a way out, that it wasn't hopeless.

He had once thought it was just as hopeless. All of them said, there's no way, I could never change. I was born this way and so forth.

And he said, I used to think like you. But there is a way to be delivered. And I have realized that you are not born to the gay lifestyle.

It is something you may have a disposition toward or a weakness in that area, but you don't have to live that way. It was quite a long program, and I watched a lot of it while I was working on something else. But the point is, there is a veneer in the church that looks great, but it lacks the substance of God.

It lacks the power of God. And they showed at one point this individual and his wife in church. And the church service, the portion that they showed was music and drums and people clapping and chanting and singing the same chorus over and over and so forth.

And you think, here is someone that has been delivered by the power of God out of a very vicious and destructive and powerful lifestyle, something that is extremely difficult to escape. And God has done that. The thing that people need is the power of God in their soul to not be drawn back and to know what it is that delivers and what it is that guards your mind.

The Bible talks about girding up the loins of your mind and putting on the armor of God. And standing up and singing a song and waving your hands isn't it. And what a perilous and shaky position you're in when you are delivered and yet you don't know the source of your deliverance.

You don't know the source of God's strength. And how difficult it is to go and communicate to others that there is power and there is deliverance when you yourself so ill understand it. And it's such a sad thing that God can deliver.

It reminded me of Israel being delivered out of bondage in Egypt and yet getting into the wilderness and not having a grip on the plan of God and the power of God and what the purpose of God really is. And it was a sad thing because this individual had these conversations with others both who had been delivered and who had not. They had quite a bit of their conversation.

And in the substance of it you could see how tenuous this man's grip was on his new found freedom and his new found life. And how easy it would be for him to fall back. And you were left with a sense that there was really no confidence.

Of course the whole reason this program was on there was almost in a way to show that

because all of these programs seem to be favorable to that homosexual lifestyle. And it wasn't exactly a mocking tone to say, oh there are some who think they can be delivered and they really can't. But it accurately showed that there doesn't seem to be any more power in this than there is in any other reform effort that society has put forward to try to take people out of that lifestyle.

And in exposing its weakness it was sad because they were accurate. That particular type of Christianity is weak. It is relatively powerless.

And his grip on that deliverance was so tenuous because he didn't understand where the power is. You can enter into a relationship with God. You can be sealed with the Holy Spirit.

He's like our circumcision made without hands. He's the sign of our covenant if you will. And I use that word guardedly because it's been abused a lot in theology.

But we have a sealed relationship with God and the Holy Spirit is the mark of it. He is the means of conveying the power of God into our souls. His presence, the presence of God's word, that's where our strength to live this life and fulfill this calling comes from.

And it's so sad to see people who enter into a relationship with God and never find that power, never see the provision of God in the same way that Israel wandered for 40 years. Amos here in this passage harks back to that and reminds them. He says, You remember your forefathers who wandered in the wilderness 40 years? They claimed to worship me too just like you are.

But they also had their idols. They had their Sikuth and their Chiun idols, the stars of the gods that they made for themselves. And you're harking back to that hollowness, that superficiality.

He says, I hate and despise your feast days. Who commanded observance of the feasts? It was God. And they're observing.

They're being obedient. They can point and say, You said observe Passover, observe booths, observe unleavened bread. We're doing all of those things.

We're coming together and having our sacred assemblies. And God says, Because these things I commanded you to do and that you're doing, I despise them. I do not savor your sacred assemblies.

Even though you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. I will not regard your fattened peace offerings in verse 21 and 22 there. Why is that? Because it's not the form, it's the substance.

It isn't the mark of circumcision that constitutes the covenant. It's what circumcision

represents. It's what it is a reminder of.

It's a sign. It's not the substance. The rainbow is one of the most ethereal things there is.

It's a pattern of light in water vapor. The rainbow itself, we have this as a metaphor. You don't go chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow because you can never catch the rainbow.

It's ephemeral. It's a far off thing. It's just a sign.

It's not a substantial thing. Israel tried to make circumcision a substantial thing. If you're circumcised, if you're following the rituals, you're home free.

The rituals are the reality. We find this pervading our Christian life and worship today where we have put the ritual for the reality. We have put the form for the substance.

We think if we're meeting together and a lot of people came, we must be doing the right thing. Look how many people came. This church must be on to something in God's plan because look how big it is.

I was reading something about a man who started a church with only two families and now his church has 15,000 people in it. So he's going to have a seminar and everybody's going to come and find out how he did it. How did he make that? We're on to something.

Look how many people are coming. We have to remind ourselves that God can look down on an assembly like that. I'm not saying anything about that group.

I know nothing about what they're doing. I hope and pray that they really are on to the power of God and the truth of God, and if they are, praise God. But it is possible, and it happens a lot in this day and age, where we get a big group together and we say, Look at this great assembly.

We're lifting up the name of God. We're singing. We're praising.

We're giving. We're reading the scriptures and doing all the things that are right and that are a part of God's plan, but it lacks the dedication of heart. We haven't gotten rid of the idols.

We haven't driven out the enemies, and the presence of God is not in that place, and the pleasure of God is not found in those assemblies. So we want to recognize here, and I want in particular to direct your attention in this reading this morning to verses 4 through 7. Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, Seek me and live, but do not seek Bethel, nor enter Gilgal, nor pass over to Beersheba. Gilgal shall surely go into captivity.

Bethel shall come to nothing. Now wait a minute. We've studied Bethel.

Where did Bethel come from? That's the place where God appeared to Abraham, Abram at that time, and Abram built an altar to the Lord, and he called the name of the place Bethel. Jacob is going to see God there. Jacob is going to lay his head down on a rock and see Jacob's ladder.

Angels ascending and descending from the heavens. That's a holy place. That's a wonderful place.

Bethel is the place of being close to God. When Abram is dwelling near Bethel, he's doing good things. When he leaves and goes south, that's when he gets in trouble.

What about Gilgal? We talked about Gilgal at the end of our study last week, where Joshua and the second generation of Israel is crossing the Jordan. They take those twelve stones out of the midst of the riverbed, and they stack them up on the other side of the Jordan as a memorial, as an oar, as a sign, reminding Israel. God says, later on, you fathers, when your son comes and asks you, what is this pile of stones? It will be a reminder.

It's a mark to them. It's a mark to you. It's a mark to all the peoples of the earth that it is the mighty power of God that brings about deliverance.

Gilgal is a wonderful place. Turn back over to Joshua chapter 4. Toward the end, and getting into Joshua chapter 5, what else happens at Gilgal? How does it even get its name? We didn't really get a chance to pursue that at the end of the lesson last time, but I'd like to point your attention to it just briefly. Joshua 4.21 He spoke to the children of Israel, Joshua did, saying, this is right after verse 20, where they took the twelve stones that they took out of the Jordan.

Joshua set them up in Gilgal. 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 ground. 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.

I could spend so much time on this passage. It's such a neat thing, because crossing over the Red Sea right after their deliverance from Egypt reminds us of that verse I've quoted so often, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him. The way you were saved is the way you walk.

It is all by grace through faith. And it's all a memorial to the grace and the power of God. Verse 24, so that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord.

If you want to preach the gospel to every creature, what is the gospel? It's the gospel of the power of God. It's the gospel of the deliverance of God. What's the best way to preach that gospel? Have your life be a memorial sign so that all the peoples of the earth

may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, and that you may fear the Lord your God forever.

God's deliverance of us, God's sustaining grace, God's parting of the waters to deliver us from bondage, His parting of the waters to deliver us into the place of production and fruitfulness and accomplishment, eradication of that which is evil, establishing that which is good. That's what's going to happen in the land. These stones that are stacked up, it's a memorial sign.

And so then in chapter 5 of Joshua, so it was when all the kings of the Amorites who were on the west side of the Jordan and 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, that their heart melted. And there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel. At that time, the Lord said to Joshua, Make flint knives for yourself and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time.

So Joshua made flint knives for himself and circumcised the sons of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And 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.

For all the people who came out had been circumcised. That generation that left Egypt, even though they were slaves, even though they were living in Goshen and for 400 years had been in bondage, they had maintained this sign of the covenant. It was a reminder.

This is one of the things that Moses' parents taught him when he was a little boy. He was circumcised as a child. He was raised in the household.

So this generation that came out was circumcised, but they did not circumcise their sons. We saw in Genesis 17, God said that every male born in your household or born to the slaves in your household, anyone that enters your household because you purchased them as a slave or whatever, they've got to be circumcised. The baby should be circumcised on the eighth day.

These Israelites that came out of the land did not do that. How come Moses didn't enforce this? I don't know, but he didn't. And this whole generation got there and God brought them across the Jordan and they were all uncircumcised.

And it's a reminder. This could have been another point that Paul could have made over in Romans 4 after he talked about the faith of Abram that was blessed and commended by God and imputed to him as righteousness. Paul makes the point, this all happened when he was uncircumcised.

Well, the same thing is true of this generation. They entered the land. God delivered them across the Jordan and sustained them for that 40 years in the wilderness.

They were all uncircumcised. They had the faith to cross. But at this point, before they go in and continue, just like before Moses goes in to speak to Pharaoh and get involved in the deliverance from bondage, this has to be squared away.

In the same way that Moses' son had to be circumcised, you would think Moses would have remembered that and in their 40 years of wandering would have made sure the rest of these kids were circumcised. He did not. You have to wonder if that was a part of the reason God didn't let him enter the land.

It doesn't say that, but it is definitely a failure. And it's corrected here. Verse 5 of Joshua 5, All the people who came 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.

For the children of Israel walked 40 years in the wilderness till all the people who were men of war who came out of Egypt who, parenthetically, were circumcised, 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. So, 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. You get the idea from this repetition and the drawing out and expansion of this account.

This is an important point. You don't hear it preached on very much. Verse 8, So it was when they had finished circumcising all the people that they stayed in their places in the camp until they were healed.

We know, and we're going to see this later on in Genesis, that this operation when you're an adult is something of a debilitating thing. You have to kind of wait to heal up. It takes a few days.

Jacob's sons are going to exploit this fact to wreak havoc on some people later in Genesis. But look at verse 9, Then the Lord said to Joshua, This day I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you. Therefore the name of this place is called Gilgal, which literally in Hebrew means a rolling.

There's a lot of symbolism in this whole thing. Circumcision is, after all, a circular type of surgery. This place in Gilgal is named because this is the day that God rolls away the reproach of Egypt from Israel.

Interestingly, in verse 10, The children of Israel camped in Gilgal and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land, and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the

food of the land of Canaan that year.

Fascinating portion of the story, but it ties back to what we've seen at the institution of circumcision as the sign, the reminder, the seal of the covenant with Abraham. And in our scripture reading this morning over in Amos, when Israel, even though they are circumcised, falls away from obedience and falls away from dedication to the things of God, they are judged. That generation that was circumcised dropped in the wilderness.

And the things that speak of the covenant, if you break the covenant, the things that speak of the covenant are meaningless. Your circumcision is meaningless, God says, if you have no faith, if you have no desire to seek the things of God. It doesn't matter that you're circumcised.

That circumcised generation didn't enter the land. So in Amos 5.5 when he says, Seek me and live. Don't seek Bethel.

Don't seek Gilgal. Don't seek Beersheba. Bethel is the place where God appeared to Abraham.

It's the place where Jacob had the covenant renewed. It's a highly significant covenant place in Israel. Gilgal is a highly significant covenant place in Israel.

If you want a fascinating study for yourself, just get a concordance and look up all the places where these cities are mentioned in the Old Testament. Look at the things that happen there. Look at the events that take place in Bethel.

Look at the events that take place in Gilgal. Look at what Beersheba represents. Why does Beersheba even have that name? You remember, Dan to Beersheba was a way of referring to the whole land of Israel.

Dan is in the far north, Beersheba is in the far south. And the wells that Abraham had dug had been stopped up when he was out of the land, when he was away. When Isaac comes back down to the southern regions of the promised land, he finds all these wells have been filled in, so he has his men dig new wells, and they find the water that Abraham had found.

And so, when they say, My Lord, we've found water, Isaac says, this is great. He calls the name of the place Sheba. And Beer means well, so it's Beersheba.

It's a place where the provision of God is made. It's a reminder of the covenant promises that God made to Abraham being fulfilled to the seed, Isaac. So these are covenant places.

And Amos says, Don't go back and start seeking the signs of the covenant and the expressions of the covenant. Don't go back to the places of the covenant, Bethel and

Gilgal and Beersheba. There's no point.

You haven't been seeking the Lord. You have to be seeking the Lord first before these places have any meaning. You have to be seeking the Lord first before your circumcision has any meaning.

And if you think about the application in our day, there are a lot of people who are paying attention to the signs of our relationship with God, the presence of the Holy Spirit. People are seeking the Holy Spirit right and left just like Israel would pay attention to circumcision, pay attention to the feast days and so forth. The Holy Spirit is our seal.

He is our circumcision made without hands. And people go for the Holy Spirit and seek a Holy Spirit experience and seek the power of the Holy Spirit. And they seek all the forms of worship in making melody and singing songs.

And you can't find any contemporary church today that hasn't incorporated a lot of worship. It isn't actively trying to incorporate things that will draw people in. And so they want to have contemporary types of music and they want to sing the old hymns.

And we're not going to stand up and sing all four verses of Rock of Ages. That's not going to attract anybody. Let's get the drums and the guitars and let's make it sound current and whatever all the synonyms are for current.

They used to say hip. I don't know what they say now. But whatever it is, as they're trying to appeal to the contemporary mind, they're trying to sort of bait and switch.

But we'll get them in here with skits and productions and presentations and films and charismatic people, speakers, celebrities. We want to give them a worship experience. These are the forms, it's not the substance.

If you want a genuine worship experience, come in contact with the living God. Every individual that has ever come in contact with the living God, that's the experience by which all other experiences are measured. It's hollow and it's empty.

And we're paying attention to the signs and the forms and not to the substance. We're making the mistake that Israel made. And you look at Amos, look at the whole book and summed up here in chapter 5, you will find that God is not happy.

God will judge his people. The axe is laid at the root of the trees. And there's an attraction.

There's a pull. Why do people do this? How can you get 15,000 people to come to a worship service? Jesus Christ did not say when you get on the narrow road going through the straight gate, you're going to look at your elbow and find 15,000 people at your side. Did he? There's something wrong when we go for mass appeal.

And it always should at least make us alert and cautious when we find ourselves in a great milling throng. It is generally true that the majority hasn't got it right. And if we find ourselves in a great majority, this gives me great comfort when I look at national polls on various subjects, that I find myself in disagreement with all of these 65 and 70 and 75% of people that have a certain opinion about how things are going in the country. Well, it just confirms my deep suspicions that if you find yourself in the majority, you're probably in trouble.

And the majority of the church today, unfortunately and to our shame, is under this type of condemnation. So as we leave and conclude our study of the sign of circumcision as the seal of the covenant, we recognize that in the Old Testament and in the New, over and over again, we're reminded, don't confuse the sign with the reality. Don't confuse the form with the substance.

That is the hallmark and the signature of the church today, at large, our church, our Christianity, our brethren. We are guilty of confusing the form and the substance. We did not so learn Christ, if indeed we have been taught in Him.

So it's our goal to be sensitive and perceive these things. We can't do a whole lot about the church at large, but we have the opportunity to do something about our own lives. We don't want to lull ourselves to sleep thinking, well, I attended Bible class, or I heard a tape, or I read a book, or I performed some act that is a legitimate and even commanded part of my life as a believer.

We need to search the corners of our soul. We need to shine the light of the Word of God there. The Word of God is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

We need to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith, not in the religion, not in the signs and the forms. What are we really seeking? Where is our heart? God says, Seek me and live. Hate evil and love the good.

We've got to pursue the things that make for fruitfulness and glory in God's plan. That's what the sign should remind us of. The presence of the Holy Spirit, among other things, should remind us that we are not our own.

We've been sealed. We're like a scroll that has a seal on it. It belongs to somebody.

It says something. It communicates something. That pile of stones by the Jordan says something and communicates something.

Those people picked up those stones and carried them to the far side of the river and piled them up. And it is a sign to them and it's a sign to the world. That's what our life should be.

Our life should be a marker and a sign, not just a hollow might have been. Let's turn

back now to Genesis. I wanted to point those things out in Joshua 5 and Amos 5. And we move now.

I want to just point out quickly a couple of details in Genesis 17 as we prepare to move into 18. 18 and 19, by the way, are a fascinating story. And those two chapters, they really ought to be one long chapter.

Genesis 18 and 19, this is the Sodom and Gomorrah story. And it's a fascinating, fascinating section. I'm really anxious to get into it.

But I don't want to leave without remarking on a couple of things in chapter 17. We've talked about circumcision. I think we have a good understanding of what it meant as well as what it means.

There's a lot more that we could do on that. We could easily spend another three weeks looking at the New Testament appropriation of circumcision. But we will encounter this again a little bit later in Genesis.

And we'll save the study for that time. What's one of the memorable things that takes place in this chapter? There is a change that takes place in chapter 17. We have Abram and Sarai all the way up to 17.

And ever after, we have Abraham and Sarah. Why does God change their names? Well, if you pause and reflect on this for a moment, we're not going to do a deep, detailed study. I will leave this again to your investigations.

But can you think of other times that God has changed someone's name? We have a New Testament example among the disciples, don't we? How many disciples did Jesus change their name? There's one. Simon bar Jonah. Simon, son of Jonah.

Jesus gave him a different name, called him Peter. Why did He do that? Jacob starts out being Jacob, a planter. We're going to see here before long in Genesis, that his name gets changed to Israel, Prince of God.

Why does God do that? Did God change Adam's name? Did God change Noah's name? Why does He change Abraham's name? He didn't change Isaac's name, but He changed Abraham's name and He changes Jacob's name. So this name changing is a theme that runs all the way through the Bible. If you want to see something especially interesting and pertinent to us, turn over to Revelation.

Remember the letters to the seven churches? Revelation 2, verse 17. The end of the message to the church at Pergamos. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. Heaven had manna

since that day we saw in Joshua 5. I will give him a white stone and on the stone, a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it. This tells us that the assigning of a new name is a high honor.

It is a reward from God. It is a mark of achievement in the plan of God. When God changes somebody's name, it means something.

It is a reward. It is a part of having made advance in the area of faith. There's a lot we could say.

There are a lot of comparisons we could make between these individuals who have had their names changed. I've mentioned before, and I will say again this morning, I think that the Apostle Peter, the Disciple Peter, has taken a lot of flack over the years. I've heard a lot of sermons preached on how impulsive and foolish and almost oafish people sometimes present Peter as a disciple.

Well, look at him. He's jumping into the water. He's rushing in where angels fear to tread.

He's up there on the Mount of Transfiguration and gets the wrong idea about building a booth. One thing and another, Peter got further than any other disciple of the twelve, with the possible exception of Paul. But of the ones that traveled about with the Lord Jesus, Peter is the only one who got his name changed.

Didn't change John. Didn't change James. Didn't change Andrew.

Those four, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, were accorded special attention by the Lord Jesus. They were there when he raised the dead girl in the upper room. They were there, Peter, James, and John, at the Mount of Transfiguration.

And so we know that he was in that select group that more was given to because they were asking and seeking and knocking. But it's only Peter who has that new name assigned. He's the most perceptive.

He got the furthest in the area of faith. None of the other disciples walked on the water, not even the Apostle Paul. When his ship sank, he went right down with it.

Splashed ashore with all the rest of the sailors. He didn't walk on the water. Peter did.

So I personally think Peter's gotten a bum rap. And one of the ways you know that he was favored and rewarded by God is that assigning of a new name. That's a special, wonderful privilege.

Abraham is a great man of faith, and God changes his name. Jacob is a great man of faith. He makes some colossal mistakes, but he's a great man of faith.

God changes his name. The same is going to be true. Anytime you see this second name assigned, Sarah gets her name changed.

Interestingly, her new name means the same thing as her old name. It's just a different way of pronouncing the very same name. It means basically princess in each way that you inflect it.

But it says something about Sarah. She's kind of cast in a bad light with her abuse of Hagar. We're going to see in chapter 18 here that she's going to laugh when the Lord says she's going to bear a child and so forth.

She seems to get in trouble with Pharaoh. She's going to get in trouble later on with another king as far as being made a member of the harem and so on. She doesn't seem to resist that too much.

She gets her name changed, and that tells us something. We have the opportunity ourselves to be handed a little... Sometimes they do this when you work somewhere. Somebody will give you a little thing to sit on your desk.

It's got your name scratched in it. Sometimes they do this at companies. When you've been there a while, you get one of these brass plaque things.

In the Marine Corps, they used to do this. They'd melt down artillery shells of brass, and they'd make you a real fancy name plate thing. What do you think it would be like to have the Lord Jesus Christ come up and hand you a white plaque with a new name engraved on it that He chose? You and He are the only two that know that name.

It is a high, high honor. It's an honor that all of us can merit, can receive. I use the word merit on purpose.

We have the opportunity to earn reward, to be counted faithful and worthy as servants. Just in passing, I wanted to point out that this name change is not without significance. In doing that, we close our study of Chapter 17.

The one other thing I will point out that we glossed over in passing is that Ishmael, as a part of the promise God makes to Abraham on his behalf, he is going to be the father of twelve princes. Twelve princes are going to come from Ishmael. How many princes are going to come from the chosen line of Isaac and Jacob? You have almost a foreshadowing here that if things had been different, Ishmael could have been the father of the twelve tribes.

He's going to be the father of twelve princes, but those are not going to be the twelve tribes of Israel. They're not going to be the chosen people. He's going to be blessed and multiply.

He's going to have a career from an earthly standpoint very similar to the line of Isaac and Jacob, but he's not in the covenant, even though he's circumcised. He's not in the covenant, and that bears reflecting on as well. As we prepare to enter Chapter 18, this is a good place to pause and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to embark on a study of this fascinating set of chapters, Chapters 18 and 19 in Genesis. Let's pause here and take a break.