



ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Renamed | 5.31.26

Libin Abraham

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Libin Abraham 0:00

As you know, my name is Libin, but it wasn't always Libbon, and some of you heard this story before, but when I was born, my older brother, who was four years older than me, he wanted me to have the exact same name as him, and his name was Liju, and my parents gave in, I guess he loved me so much, I must have been a cute baby, and so his name was Liju, and my parents named me Liju, because he was crying for me to have the same name, so they got two similar names. His name was Lidju, and my name was Liju. Well, that went on until about I was about to start school, like, and I was six years old, and my parents were putting me in school. We're both at the same school, he's four years older than me, but the principal said, 'Look, there's a problem because now that we're admitting your youngest kid to school, we've got to transliterate his name into English, because English was still the national language of India. We've got to transliterate his name, and there's a problem because their names have the same spelling in English, so one of your kids have to go through a name change, you got to change one of your kids' names. I don't know why they didn't just change our spelling, but my parents decided to change one of our names, and guess who drew the short straw? Me, the youngest one, I guess it was only fair because he had his name four years longer than I did. So they changed my name when I was six to Libin, so I was fine with that, but I went to my parents one day, thinking, hey, I want to know the vision, like the genesis of my name, like, how did you name me Libbon? I'm expecting prayer and revelation and a whole lot of scripture. Well, they said, well, we were standing outside, we knew we had this application due at like 5pm so we needed to rename you, and we didn't know what to call you, and as we were standing outside, a bus drove by, and the name of the bus was Libbon, that was it, no insight, no revelation, no vision, just named after a bus, all that to say, if I was born in Texas, your pastor's name would have been Greyhound Abraham. You never know, it could have been Greyhound Abraham. Names matter, don't they? Names carry meaning, and hopefully your name has a little bit more of a cooler story than mine. But names are such a big part of our identity, and that's why when someone calls you the wrong name or mispronounces your name, something inside of you turns a little. That's why, if you hear someone with your same name doing something horrible or something really dumb, you get a little more offensive, because you're like, that doesn't represent all of us. Sometimes all it takes is you hearing a name, and it brings a whole season of your life back into your mind, or an entire era of your life comes back into memory. So you hear the name Neil Armstrong, and we think about the historic moon landing. You think about Michael Jordan, now you're thinking the Chicago Bulls in the 1990s with six championships, greatest player of all time. Shout out to all the Spurs fan last night as well. You think about Steve Jobs, you're thinking innovation and technology, you think about the name Elsa, and all the parents of young kids are triggered because they've heard 'let it go' 10,000 plus times in their vehicle. In our world, in our mindset, though, we recognize names because of something significant people have accomplished. So, name recognition is earned because of what people have done. So, if they do something historic or monumental, then we remember names. But in the Bible, across scripture, God names people and he renames them, but what's amazing about God is that God renames people not in light of their past, but in light of their future, like before they would do anything significant, before they would conquer some great goal or do something amazing, God chooses to name them before any of that is done. In other words, God changes identity before He changes their circumstances. He changes their name, He changes the very essence of who they are before He does anything significant through them, because great transformation begins with recognizing who you truly are. So today we began a new sermon series called Renamed, and over the next five weeks we're going to look at five stories or renaming stories in the Old Testament where God changed somebody's name, and this wasn't just a cosmetic change. This wasn't just a label change. God was rewriting their destiny by changing their identity. He was doing something profound in changing their name. Now, here's why this matters for us, because some of you, you've picked up some unhealthy names along your life journey, and you're living true to. A name you picked up that's actually not true of you,

maybe the name you carry is failure or addicted or below average, not good enough, broken, too late, whatever it might be, you've got a name that you're trying to, it may not be a name you write on a name tag, but it may be what you believe about yourself, maybe something that happened to you, or something you did has convinced you now this is who you are, and you wear that as a label in your soul. For some of us, the names that we carry are more like pretenses, where we believe that we are what we produce, and so we keep producing, because we want to be better, or we believe our self-worth is our net worth, so we try to earn more, so we can feel better about ourselves, or we believe that I am what other people say about me, or I am the stuff I have, so we're trying to accumulate, or get people to give us a better review, so that we feel better about ourselves, and my prayer over the next five weeks is that God will liberate us, and that we will recognize that God may actually call us something different than what we have come to believe about ourselves, and when we recognize how God sees us, what He says about us, then we would experience freedom, and we would walk in the liberty of knowing what God says is true about us, and the shame would loosen its grip, that chains would break, and we would have a recognition of this is who God says I am. Amen. So this is the journey we're going to be in for the next five weeks, and today I want to begin with perhaps the most well-known name change in the Old Testament. It's the change of name that happens to Abram when he becomes Abraham and his wife Sarai when she becomes Sarah. This couple lived about 4000 years ago, and their name change has impacted all of us. Here's what we read about Sarai. The first verse about her found in Genesis 11 verse 30, Sarai was unable to conceive. She did not have a child. It's kind of a kind of a hard place to begin a story, but that's where we pick up her story. Now, the journey of infertility is hard. It's so disappointing, and many of you have walked that journey. I've walked that journey with people in my immediate family and close friends, and there's nothing easy about that journey. But in ancient times, infertility was not just a private disappointment; it was actually a cause for public shame, because in ancient culture women's identity and value and worth was so tied up to childbearing and continuing a lineage, so now you find Sarai, who's unable to produce a child feeling yes, internal grief, but public disgrace, and perhaps worst of all, the assumption that God himself is withholding a blessing. This is where Sarai is, and her husband, Abram, carries his disappointment too, because he wants to have kids, he wants his name to continue, he wants his lineage to continue, but he knows he, it will not. But in Genesis 12, God visits Abraham with a great promise, and God visits Abraham in verse two of Genesis 12, and says, I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. Abraham is hearing this and thinking to himself, How could you make me a great nation when I don't even have kids? In Genesis 15, God repeats this promise, and Abraham begins to negotiate. He says, "God, I'm childless, but I've got this servant named Eleazar. Why don't you bless him and use him to continue my lineage and be the heir of my inheritance?" They're in a hard place, they're in the season between promise and fulfillment, and they're there for a while. In fact, Abraham and Sarah lived 25 years between promise and fulfillment. 25 years is a long time, and I imagine every year that went by, every decade that went by, the promise of Genesis 12 and Genesis 15 just seem to fade a little bit more into the distant skies. They have faith, but they're really frustrated. They have hope, but they also carry a lot of heartbreak. It's the time between promise and fulfillment, and if you're honest, we spend a lot of our life in that in-between time. God has given us a promise. He said what He's going to do, but we're waiting, we're wrestling, we're disappointed. There are some unanswered prayers, and you might be there right now. You love Jesus, you trust Him, you're holding on to His promise, but it's been a prolonged season of disappointment, one after another, the. Action doesn't break, your marriage isn't healed, your child is still wandering away from the Lord. The depression keeps resurfacing, and you're wondering, man, the season feels so long. Where are you? And when disappointment happens in the same area of your life time and time again, that has a chance to rename you, and now you begin to identify yourself by why what didn't happen instead of what could happen, and you see your story, your life through the lens of your disappointment and to the unanswered prayers, and how long it's been, and perhaps that's the renaming that you've been carrying, the pain that has named you. So Abram and Sarai go 25 years before they see the fulfillment of a promise, and 25 years later Abram is 99 and Sarai is 90, and I don't know what you consider old, but that might be close to it, especially if you're hoping for a kid, the older I get, that number keeps going higher and higher, but they're thinking, okay, well, we must have misheard God. Maybe God chose somebody else, but in their old days, guess what? God comes back with a message in Genesis 17. Here's what God says: when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him, saying, I am God Almighty, live in my presence and be blameless. I will set up my covenant between me and you, and I will multiply you greatly. Then Abram fell face down, and God spoke with him. Notice that level of intimacy. As for me, here is my covenant with you. You will become the father of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram, your name will be Abraham. For I will make you the father of many nations, I will make you extremely fruitful, and will make nations and kings come from you. What a promise to a 99 year old man. What's amazing is the word Abram. The name Abram means exalted father. That's what Abram has been carrying for all his life till 99 and he's thinking, I don't even want to be an exalted father because I'm not a father. It's awkward to introduce yourself as an exalted father when you don't have really any kids. Abram is hoping for a downgrade, but what does God do? He gives them an upgrade. God says,

"I'm going to change your name from Abram, exalted father, to Abraham, father of multitudes, father of nations, you can imagine the shock, perhaps the disappointment resurfacing. Really, God, I'm having a hard time being the father that's exalted. I can't even imagine being the father of nations because I don't have a son with Sarah, but God was changing his name before he changed his circumstance, and God did the same for Sarai. Next verse says, and God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name. I will bless her indeed. I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations. Kings of peoples will come from her. Think often we remember Abraham as being a father of nations, but here Sarah is expanded to become the mother of nations. The word Sarai means princess, my princess, and it's the kind of princess limited to one family, but she goes through a name change to Sarah with an H, which means princess of multitudes. So, Abraham goes from exalted father to father of nations, Sarah goes from princess to Princess of Nations, God changed her name before He changed her circumstance, but when Abraham hears this, he doesn't respond with like some great faith. Notice how he responds to God and His promises. Abraham fell face down, and then he laughed and said to himself, can a child be born to 100 year old man? Can Sarah, a 99 year old woman, give birth? And again Abraham begins to negotiate with God. So Abraham said to God, If only Ishmael were acceptable to you. If only Ishmael were acceptable to you, that's a fascinating statement, isn't it? God has promised Abraham that from Sarah would come Isaac, and then he would be the one God blesses and establishes His covenant, but it's been 25 years, it's been a long time of waiting, and earlier Abraham proposed. Eliezer, and then Sarah proposed Hagar, and Abraham conceived the child was Hagar, and now Ishmael is there, and Abraham hears the promise and the covenant of God again, and he tells God, God, you're telling me I'm going to have a son named Isaac with Sarah, but he's not here yet, spent a long time. I'm 99 She isn't 90. How about we change the plans a little bit? How about we go with plan B, and you choose Ishmael? You go with Ishmael. You bless me through him. What Abraham is doing, he's doing something we often do, where Abraham, like us, asked God to alter his plans to go with proof rather than promise. Ishmael was visible physically in front of him, he could touch him, he could hear his breath. Ishmael was right in front of his eyes. Isaac was still a promise that seemed impossible. So Abraham is saying, let's go with what we have proof over, rather than your promise that seems so distant. It was easier for Abraham to ask God to reroute his plans than to wait on the promise of Isaac. Don't we often try to help God out as well, just like Abraham did, but God remained resolute, and God said, 'No, your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring, God says, 'No, Abraham, my promise will stand, and this is what I have determined. Now, this renaming that happens in Genesis 17 is pretty amazing. When you look at it, sometimes when we look at the renaming of Abram to Abraham and Sarai to Sarah, we're thinking, 'Ok, they just got a cosmetic name change, or maybe they just got an H drop into their name, but it's more significant than that. Their name change is related, and it's connected. And here's the connection. What God does is He places a Hebrew consonant into their name. Look at this map. Look at this graph with me. The consonant that God places into Abram and Sarai's name is the Hebrew letter hey. Say it with me. Hey, you got to spit it out a little bit. Hey, it's a good old sound of hey. Okay, that's a consonant which gets translated as h in our language, but it's not a random letter. The consonant hey is actually the prominent letter in the very name of God, it's the prominent consonant or letter in the name Yahweh, so what God is doing, he comes to this old couple, he says, I know you've been trying to do things on your own, you went with Eliezer, hoping that would work. You offered Hagar, you offered Ishmael, but I'm doing something covenantal with you, and for that to happen, the future I have for you requires my own name to be infused with your name, so God takes a part of his name and he puts it into the name of Abraham, making him Abraham, and he puts it into the name of Sarai, making her Sarah, because Abraham and Sarah's main issue, their main dilemma wasn't just their barrenness, their main dilemma, they've been fighting for decades was trying to achieve divine promises through human effort, and they've tried that multiple times now, trying to take matters into their own hands and achieve divine promises with human effort, and I think that's a common story of all of us. We're trying to achieve God's plan our way, our effort, our plan B, or our plan C, thinking maybe I'll just help God a little bit. He's a little late on His promises, maybe He's forgotten. What have I stepped in? But now God waits until Abraham and Sarah have exhausted all of their possibilities. They are too old to get pregnant, according to human understanding. And so God says, now is the moment where you are completely dependent on me, and now is the moment where I rewrite your name by putting my name into your name. Now it's a moment that, if you are to have a son, the only credit is to God. People will know that it's not because of you, it's not because of your human strength, it's not because of Sarah's determination or Abraham's ability. The only reason for. Child being born to a man 99 years old and to Sarah at 90 is if God intervened and if God would get the glory, so God puts his name into their name, because the future He called them to and the future He calls you to cannot happen by human efforts trying to achieve divine promises. Can only happen when we release control, and we recognize the only way for the story to go forward is for the very presence of God, represented by His own name, to be woven into our identity. Many Hebrew scholars say that the name Yahweh is, and that consonant hey in Yahweh, it produces a breath like sound. So, in ancient times, when the people of Scripture said the name

Yahweh, they would almost breathe in and breathe out His name. Now, you can't breathe in if you're trying to use your vocal cords, you have to whisper, it's like way, try that with me, this was their breath prayer, they knew that God was close, like a whisper, and so they would breathe him in Yahweh, and it was their way of reminding themselves that we have no breath apart from Yahweh, we have no life apart from his name, that he is our only source of life, he is our only source of hope, and so if we're ever relying on something else to sustain us, to give us life, we will die, we will be empty, but wait, He's the breath of our life. And here, in this moment, when God takes the consonant "hey" and puts it into their names, He is saying to them, the only hope for your future is for me to breathe covenantal life into your being. This is where miracles happen, not because we try harder or look at the next alternate plans that we can offer. No, no, we breathe in His presence. So, the deeper miracle in the story was not just that a child was going to be born, but it was Yahweh permanently joining himself to Abraham and Sarah, it was God being made one in their name, one in their identity, joining themselves, joining himself with them. And I wonder if you find yourself in a story in a moment where you're trying to fix it on your own, you're trying to heal the marriage on your own, you're trying to bring the kid back on your own, you're trying to be the best version of yourself, trying to feel like, okay, maybe if I just do this, I can break the addiction, but my friends, the only way for the promises of God to be fulfilled is actually come back to a deep sense of dependence, as if your very breath was dependent on Him, it is reliance and dependence, not performance and human effort, that moves the story forward. This is the lesson Abraham and Sarah are learning. The only way for the promises of God to be fulfilled is for His presence, His name to be interwoven into ours and Abraham didn't quite know the extent of all that God was doing, but I believe that moment in Genesis 17 when God renamed him, it changed everything, and long before their circumstance changed, something in them changed. They recognized if God's going to put His name on us. Then this has to be the beginning of something new. If His presence is going to be intertwined with us in such a way, this is where everything changes in the next year, or however long from then till they have the kid. Must have been a weird season. It's an awkward conversation when you go to people and say I'm Abraham, the father of nations, and they ask you, How many kids do you have? Like, well, none was my wife, or you're Sarah, and you're saying I'm the princess of nations, and they say, How many kids do you have? None, but they believed that because God renamed them, that this is who they were, and they contended in faith, and in fact, 2000 years later, the Apostle Paul, as he's talking about how we are saved by faith and grace alone, you know where he goes back, he goes back to the story of Abraham and Sarah, he brings up how their faith in God to do what He promised was the secret to the fulfillment of the promise, so in Romans four, notice what Paul says. This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, not human effort, not keeping law, but by grace to guarantee it to all the descendants, not only. To the one who is of the law, but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith, he is the father of us all. That's why I said his rename impacts us all, as it is written, I have made you the father of many nations in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist, isn't that good news? He brings things into existence that does not exist. He believed, hoping against hope. Are you there? Is that what you're living through? You believe, but you're hoping against hope. Everything seems impossible. There are no more options available. Hope against hope, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what had been spoken. So will your descendants be. And Paul continues, he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead since he was about 100 years old, and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. Paul's just putting it out there. Abraham's body was as good as dead. Sarah's womb was as good as dead, but they did not weaken in faith, I thought they were trying to, they were until God renamed them, but the moment they were renamed, things were different. He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. Because he was fully convinced the moment God renamed him, he was fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to do. I want to just speak this over some of you. What God has promised, he is also able to do some of you have departed from some of the promises God made to your family, to your individual life, whatever it may be, but I'm just here to remind you what God promises, He is able to do. I know it might take a little longer, it might not look like what you thought it would look like, but if God said it, if he promised it. He'll do it. I love the imagery here of Abraham's body, good as death, Sarah's womb, completely incapable, no human possibilities, and therefore it had to be the grace of God through faith. In fact, what Abraham and Sarah embodied for us is resurrection faith in believing what God said over what they saw and felt. So, if you're in the in between between promise and fulfillment, you could choose to believe what you see and what you feel, or you could choose to believe what God has said, what He's promised. And the moment their names were rewritten, they chose to believe what God said. It would take them a little while, it would still be hard, pain was still going to be a part of their story, but they believed it. And when we get to Genesis 21 notice what happens in the fulfillment of this promise. The Lord came to Sarah as He did as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Why? Because if God promised it, He'll do it. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. At the appointed time, God had told him at the appointed time. It seemed about 80 years too late, but it was the appointed time that God determined, and that God had spoken. Abraham named his son, who was born to

him, the son, just to be clear, the one Sarah bore to him, and he named it what Isaac. God had already told him you were to name him Isaac, the son of promise. And I love this moment, because for Abraham and Sarah, what they recognize was a pain. It was a part of their story, but pain was not their name. Delay was part of the story, but delay didn't have the final word. Doubt didn't have the final word. I imagine, as they're holding Isaac, they were thankful that God overrode all their plan B's and plan C's that God's plan prevailed, and they recognized me. We doubted, we even tried to negotiate, but God was faithful. He was faithful to the end. Here is the promise, and the way of God is better because He's faithful. Yeah, since we're talking about names, the name Isaac means laughter, that's what it means, laughter, which is interesting, because laughter has been woven all throughout the story. When God shows up to Abraham and tells him this promise, guess what Abraham does? He laughs, and guess what, Sarah does when she's told that in her 90s she's gonna have a kid, she also laughs, just like you and I would, but that laughter wasn't a laughter of joy, that was a laughter of cynicism and disappointment, and a whole lot of hurt. That's where that laughter came from. You know what they say, when things are so bad and so sad, all you can do is what? Laugh, because if you don't laugh, you're going to cry, but if you can just laugh about it, then you may not get to your real feelings and the real emotions underneath it all. So they were laughing because it had been so painful, it had been so long. But have a kid and he's called laughter, but not the same kind of laughter as they had before, because every time they would call Isaac his name, they would recognize that God didn't just fulfill a promise. God redeemed their sorrow into laughter. God transformed their pain into joy, and now they could laugh because they had experienced the grace of God. They experienced the miracle of God. God transformed their pain and their place of disappointment, their deepest cycles of sorrow into joy. In fact, Sarah would go on to say this in Genesis 21 verse six. Sarah said, God has made me laugh a different kind of laugh, and everyone who hears will laugh with me, not at me, but they'll laugh with me. She also said, Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children, and yet I have borne a son for him in his old age. This is what only God can do 1025 years of waiting and pain and sorrow into true joy. Why? Because if God had promised it, He was able to do it. I don't know where you are at in the story. Many of you are in Genesis 15, and you were waiting in the midst of unanswered prayers and disappointment, a lot of heartache, and you're wrestling, wondering, How long am I a scorn to others? And you may not get to Genesis 21 today, or anytime soon. I don't know, it could be 25 years, it's reality. I don't know what God's going to do, and what's your Genesis 21 look like. It's nice when you got the bow at the end of the story, but there's a lot of waiting and praying and tears in between 15 and 21 But my prayer, as I was praying for you, that if you're in Genesis 15, that the Holy Spirit will help you just get to Genesis 17, because that's actually the turn of the story. Everything changed, not because the circumstance changed, or because Isaac came. Everything changed when they were renamed by God long before Isaac came, Yahweh came, and long before they saw the answer to their prayer, their heart was beginning to heal, and their hope was beginning to restore and be resurrected. Why? Because they felt the presence of God rejuvenating and resurrecting hope again, everything changed the name the moment their name changed. Why? Because God changes your identity before He changes your circumstance, so you don't have to wait until your identity or your circumstance changes for your name to change. So, my prayer is, if you can get to Genesis 17 and you can hear what He says of you, you hear the name He calls you before you see your life change, before you see the issue change, if you can hear what He says and what He calls you, perhaps that's the moment where everything changes, and can I just tell you, in the New Covenant, we have something even better than God's name being in a Roman with our name, because in the New Covenant, we don't just have His name, we have His very spirit living inside of us. We didn't just get a name transfer, we got a spirit transform, and the very spirit of the resurrection has been given to you and I, so that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Amen. So, if the breath of God is within us, if the spirit of the resurrection is within us, perhaps dead bodies can come again, perhaps dead hopes and dreams can come. Alive in him again, because we have his spirit inside of us. So, what is it that God has promised that you've turned away from? That today is a moment of renaming the greatest promise of all happened in Genesis three, where God promised that a Messiah would come, and then it was 4000 years between promise and fulfillment, and in the 4000 years people thought God forgot that He had changed His plan, but we are here today because God kept His promise, and the Bible says in Galatians, at the appointed time, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those of us who were under the law. God kept His promise. If anything is true in the Gospel, it is to say that God always keeps His promise, and if He kept that promise, won't He keep every other promise He has made. Amen. Yes, he will. Would you bow your heads with me? What is it that he says that's different than what you see? What would it look like for the breath of the living God to be infused into everyday life till we're dependent on Him as our own breath, and maybe if you've been trying to muster up enough willpower and strength to change a circumstance, today is an invitation. Turn away from human efforts to trust fully in God, who keeps His promise. So, Father, today I pray that my brothers and sisters, wherever they might be in the story, can get to Genesis 17. Hearing what you say is true of us before we see it in reality, getting a name change, an identity change that ultimately would change our destiny. So, Father, we thank you for the grace of God that brings the dead to life, and today could be a

place of miracles if we can hear what you say to be true about who we are. So speak, Holy Spirit, may we breathe in Yahweh, the breath of the living God, over circumstances that seem for God, will you breathe life again of our hearts that are so broken they've lost hope of resurrection? Will you breathe life again? Remind us that it's not performance or human efforts that move the story forward, it is the presence of the living God woven into the depths of our soul. So we thank you that you changed our name before our circumstances change, and if you said it, you'll do it, because you are faithful to keep your promise. All this in the mighty name of Jesus, we pray. And the church said together, Amen, Amen, Amen. Aren't you thankful for a God who keeps His promise? Amen.