

CHAPTER 2, GOD BUILDS A NATION**TIMELESS TRUTH: WHAT SIN CHANGES, FAITH OVERCOMES.**

CHAPTER SUMMARY (Have someone in your group read the summary section.)

"I will." These are words of covenant commitment and promise spoken by a sovereign God to Abraham. God's master plan to restore us to Himself gets a fresh start with these words. God is determined to fulfill His promise in spite of the frailties and failures of His people. God chooses to create a new nation through Abraham, revealing Himself to and working through this new community of faith. God promises Abraham saying "I will..."

- make your descendants into a great nation
- give this nation a land in which to dwell
- bless all other nations through the nation of Israel

And two thousand years later God's Son was born, a descendant of Abraham, thus fulfilling the covenant promise.

This chapter demonstrates a striking duality: God using broken people to fulfill His unbreakable promises. But on a day-to-day basis, God's people continue to make bad choices that expose their ever-present sin nature. Abraham and Sarah, waiting for years for the child God promised, opt for a workaround to conceive an heir through Sarah's servant, Hagar. Isaac and Rebekah raise a very dysfunctional family. Jacob perfects the "workaround method" by conniving and cheating his way through life.

But what sin changes, faith overcomes. In spite of their failures, God's people respond in faith. Abraham picks up stakes and travels to a foreign land just because God said to. He gives his relative Lot the choice real estate, having faith God would still bless him. Abraham and Sarah, through laughter and tears, finally see God fulfill his promise through the birth of a son, Isaac. In a dramatic episode, Abraham shows he is willing to go so far as sacrificing his only son, Isaac, just because he trusts God. This foreshadows the willingness of God to do the same to his own Son. The key verse of the chapter is: "*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*" Therein lays the Gospel itself.

His family continues to demonstrate faith. By faith, Isaac finds a wife for his son. Jacob comes to faith after literally wrestling with God. By faith, Esau also shows Jacob grace and forgiveness. With every story, we are reminded that God works through flawed people who take steps of faith.

Questions for discussion:

1. Abraham got ahead of things by speeding up God's promise with the birth of Ishmael (*The Story*, pages 13-14). Discuss a time when you prayed for something and then got ahead of God by trying to make it happen. What was the result? Were there consequences?
2. Isaac is referred to as the son that Abraham loved. Name someone you love. How difficult would it be to give up that person?
3. What did Abraham prove to God through his willingness to sacrifice Isaac? What did God prove to Abraham by His willingness to provide a substitute sacrifice?
4. Isaac is a picture of God's ultimate sacrifice. What does this tell you about God's desire to have a relationship with you? (See John 3:16)

1. Chapter 2 of God's story opens with God calling Abram to make the sacrifice of leaving a comfortable life: homeland, friends, family and steady income. Describe an experience when God has called you to do something similar. What was required of you to obey His instructions? What were the results?
2. God chose Abraham and his descendants to represent Him to others who did not yet know God. What parallels can you draw between Israel and the Church?
3. Consider God's interaction with each character in chapter 2 of *The Story*. What patterns can you identify? What do these patterns reveal about the character of God?
4. Abraham serves as the example of justification by faith. Faith could be described as "trust in action based on God's revelation." Identify acts which demonstrate Abraham's faith. What demonstrations of faith can you identify in your own life?
5. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for God to fulfill His promise of a child. Have you waited for a long period of time for God to act in a given situation? Are you waiting on something now? (Share the circumstance only if you are comfortable.) How might this example serve to encourage you? How can the group best pray for you?
6. Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant, was treated harshly by Sarah, causing her to flee on two different occasions. What do you learn about God from observing His interactions with her?
7. In Abraham's culture, a name said a lot about someone's character. God makes his relationship with Abram and Sarai official by making a covenant with them and changing their names to Abraham and Sarah. How has your character changed since your relationship with God began?
8. Jacob said to Esau, "*For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably*" (p. 24). By showing grace to Jacob, Esau demonstrated God's gracious character. To whom do you need to show grace?

I. Episode One: A Land for Abram

A. **Synopsis:** Abram is 75 years old the first time God calls him. God asks Abram to leave his present home and go to an unknown place that He would show him. So Abram gathered his family and belongings and eventually ended up in Canaan.

B. God

1. God initiated the relationship with Abram.
2. God gave Abram specific instructions.
3. God made specific promises to Abram in a covenant:
 - a. I will make you a great nation.
 - b. I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.
 - c. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.
 - d. I will bless all the peoples of the earth through you.

C. Abram's Faith Response

1. Abram was chosen by grace, not by merit.
2. Abram obeyed God's instructions by faith.
3. Abram built altars and worshiped.

II. Episode Two: An Heir for Abram

- A. **Synopsis:** Abram worried that he had no children of his own. He expressed his concerns to God, who promised that an heir would come from Abram's own body. Abram and Sarai used Hagar to produce a child, Ishmael. But Isaac, the child of promise, would come from Sarah's womb.
- B. **God**
1. God, taking the initiative, promised offspring.
 2. God declared Abram righteous because Abram believed Him.
 3. God gave the sign of the promise in circumcision, and changed Abram and Sarai's names.
- C. **Abram:**
1. Abram's righteousness was by faith. Believers have always been saved by grace through faith.
 2. Man and God have a restored relationship when man trusts God.
 3. Negatively, Abram and Sarai did not wait on God, but had Hagar bear a son, Ishmael. This resulted in tragic and broken relationships.

III. Episode Three: A Test for Abraham

- A. **Synopsis:** Another great act of faith is recorded in this third episode. Approximately forty years after Abraham's first encounter with God, God called him to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham took Isaac, two servants, and some wood and set out. Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac, but God stopped him. God provided a ram in the thicket to sacrifice instead.
- B. **God**
1. God initiated the relationship again and tested Abraham's faith.
 2. God provided a substitutionary sacrifice.
 3. God reiterated His promise to bless Abraham and all nations through him.
- C. **Abraham's Faith Response**
1. Abraham obeyed immediately and trusted that God could resurrect Isaac.
 2. Abraham's obedience was evidence of his mature faith.

IV. Applications and Implications

- A. God graciously seeks a relationship with us by revealing Himself to us.
- B. As fallen people, we do not seek God until He seeks us first. When He does seek me, I should respond by faith.
- C. Faith is always based on the Word (promise) of God or a revelation about His character. The believer is to trust God to be who He says He is and to do what He says He will do.
- D. Faith is believing and obeying God as He reveals Himself and His plan. Obedience is an outward expression of an inward faith.
- E. Following God takes my life in a different direction.
- F. Nothing we do merits God's favor. His grace seems perplexing because we do nothing to earn it.
- G. Faith in God is the only requirement for righteousness and salvation. Faith is a sinner's only hope for salvation.
- H. Our relationship with God does not necessarily get easier over time. It will continue to be tested.
- I. God can be trusted with our most precious "possessions."