

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**The Story: Chapter Two - The Birth of a Nation**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - September 18, 2011**

The Story of God is filled with all kinds of incredible stories. In this one, the starring role of the mother of a nation chosen by God to be the blessing of the world and the matriarch of the Son of God is played by a woman almost 90 years old. That is an interesting read. This whole thing is interesting.

I tell you this story is the most remarkable story of all time. The twists and turns that surprise us and chagrin us and anger us and mystify us. We think in the creation story, the story of Noah and the story of the tower of Babel that it couldn't possibly get any more incredible. But it does beginning here in Chapter 12.

This little vignette we just saw is just what I am talking about; Incredible! You actually have to back it up just a little bit to get the whole picture of the drama. We read in Genesis 11:30 after reading about all kinds of parents and children and grandchildren about this one daughter in law this woman named Sarai – this name means 'Princess'. Look at verse 30 with me:

**Genesis 11:30**

Now Sarai was barren, she had no children.

This may be one of the great dramatic setup lines in the history of literature. Because from this line all the pathos, all the emotional energy is centered for the next 10 chapters, until finally Sarah gives birth to the one and only son Isaac. What perhaps you can't see imbedded in this little verse is all the shame and sadness that goes with the indictment – She had no children. It was the one thing that meant poverty to a family - no children. Even more specifically – no male children. In Middle East culture of that time you needed a big family to 'work the farm' so to speak and you needed a first born *son* to continue the family name and inherit the family wealth. To be a barren wife is to fail in the one most important thing in life – making babies - and every day was a disgrace. Might not be fair, but it was the value system of the time and it speaks into the drama and the promise of this second chapter in The Story.

The story of Abram and Sarai essentially begins with this promise to Abram that God will make him the father of a great nation. To the husband of a barren wife it must have felt like an empty promise. But what this teaches us is that God does what God does and God designs His plans for His glory. The Lord is sovereign in choosing:

***The Lord is sovereign in choosing***

**Genesis 12:1-4**

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country and your people. Leave your father's family. Go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation.

I will bless you. I will make your name great.

You will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you.

I will put a curse on anyone who calls down a curse on you.

All nations on earth will be blessed because of you."

So Abram left, just as the Lord had told him. Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran.

And Abram was 75 years old when God chose him to be the father of a nation. One more example of the incredible aspects of this story as it unfolds. Why pick an old man for this job; it doesn't make sense to me. But thankfully God does not consult me when He makes his plans. He simply chooses.

Jewish traditions and manuscripts tell us that Abram's father, Terah, worshiped many gods, perhaps the god of the moon. But seemingly Abram had it in his heart to be a worshiper of the one true God. And so God chose Abram to be the father of a nation that would be a blessing to the world.

Hundreds of miles he walked and the passage in the New Testament book of Hebrews that celebrates the great people of faith notes that Abram went 'going not knowing'. About 400 miles they had to walk to reach the land that God intended to give to Abram and his descendants. A land called Canaan. They finally stopped on a high place where some giant oak trees stood guard over a valley called Shechem.

And once again God spoke to Abram. He said again: "To your offspring I will give this land." And Abram constructed an altar to God in celebration and remembrance.

This God we serve is sovereign. Do you know what that means? Neither do I! But what it seems to me is that He is always in control. His will is all that matters. Sometimes I wonder why he picked Abram to build a nation around. He clearly is a work in progress.

But I wonder? Maybe he asked all kinds of people to 'go not knowing' only God knows where. To another land far away. Maybe he asked 50 to go . . . but only one had the faith to go.

You know what – this sovereign God . . . he chooses who he wants to choose.

But not only does God choose whomever He wants to choose but he can bless and make promises any way he wants to. The Lord is sovereign over blessings and promises.

### ***The Lord is sovereign in blessings and promises***

#### ***Genesis 13:14-18***

The Lord spoke to Abram after Lot had left him. He said, "Look up from where you are. Look north and south. Look east and west. I will give you all of the land that you see. I will give it to you and your children after you forever.

"I will make your children like the dust of the earth. Can dust be counted? If it can, then your children can be counted. Go. Walk through the land. See how long and wide it is. I am giving it to you."

So Abram moved his tents. He went to live near the large trees of Mamre at Hebron. There he built an altar to honor the Lord.

Things got hard then. There was a terrible drought. Abram and Sarai now maybe 85 and 73 years old respectively, had to go to Egypt to make a living and long story short, it turns out, they did very well. Abram made some very bad mistakes, just ask Sarai, but God was merciful to them and blessed them with great wealth. In part to get them to move away; the Pharaoh of Egypt gave them sheep and oxen and donkeys and servants and camels. They left dirt poor and came back very, very rich. Abram makes a terrible mistake and God turns it into an incredible blessing. I am telling you the God we serve is very mysterious. So Abram had returned to his new home and once again God visits him.

***"Look up from where you are. Look north and south. Look east and west. I will give you all of the land that you see. I will give it to you and your children after you forever.***

God gives blessings and extends promises as he pleases. He is sovereign remember. Has it confused you in the past when some who don't seem to deserve to be blessed are and others who are genuinely salt of the earth people just seem to struggle? It confuses me too. Still God continues with his promises and finally at maybe age 90 Abram kind of loses his cool.

**Genesis 15:2-6**

But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, *(I like that our key word for today is God as the Sovereign God and Abram calls him El Elyon).*

What can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

It was as though God said to Abram, "I choose the blessings. I choose the timetable of the blessings. I even choose the blessings for my purposes." In this passage He was speaking to my heart too. My tendency is to think of the blessing of God only from my perspective, how I think the blessings should be doled out.

That line: "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness" is a huge line when it comes to Our Story in the context of The Story. Later in the New Testament Paul will return to this passage specifically to make his case for our salvation and our righteousness as a result of faith in God and faith alone.

Then in this chapter God makes a covenant with Abram. A promise that God does not require Abram to walk. I find it all fascinating!

So as we wrap up our thoughts for today, we simply must look at one last vignette in this story. We have seen that God is sovereign in choosing and now we see that he is sovereign in his blessings and promises. Now we discover that God is sovereign in his testing.

***The Lord is sovereign in testing*****Genesis 21:1-2**

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

Finally after 35 years of waiting, Sarah becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son. The 'oh so important' first born son. But then only one chapter later we see God ask the unaskable:

**Genesis 22:1-2**

Some time later God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," Abraham replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son. He is the one you love. Take Isaac. Go to Moriah. Give him to me there as a burnt offering. Sacrifice him on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Many years had passed again. Abraham (God had changed his name from 'Abram' meaning 'exalted father' to 'Abraham' meaning 'father of multitudes,' Isaac had grown up to maybe a child of 8, 12 perhaps as old as 16. Everything is going swimmingly. The hope of a nation gets up every morning and milks the cows. Sarah's shame is vindicated. Abraham the proud father of a son that looks just like his father.

But then "Go and take this son, this promise in my old age, this flesh of my flesh and sacrifice him" . . . "Kill him", he said. You can't imagine the confusion and the pain. Abraham must have

walked up to the top of Mt. Moriah numb. I imagine that if you asked him years later he would not have been able to even remember the journey. The last part up the mountain it was just Abraham and the boy. Isaac asked "Where is the lamb, the sacrifice?"

It took Abraham five minutes to answer, to find his voice. Without looking at him, Abraham said, "God will provide the sacrifice." Isaac must have wondered.

Abraham tied him to the pyre and raised the knife to sacrifice him. Racing through his mind is, "What becomes of the promise?" "All of this for nothing!" "What will I tell my wife?"

Abraham had only one hope. That God would raise him from the dead. Abraham must have known that there was not another child in Sarah. If God was to make good on his promise he would have to raise this child from the dead. Then at the last possible moment, God cried out just as the blade reached its apex in the air. He said, "Stop, don't hurt the child." He said, "Now I know you will obey me and would sacrifice your son, your only son." And there was a ram caught in a thicket. The child was spared and the promise fulfilled. It was all a test, a terrible test of faith in God and God alone.

We can't imagine the sorrow and the love that mingled down Abraham's brow at that moment of passion. Abraham was chosen. Abraham was blessed. And Abraham was tested.

**Hebrews 11:1-3**

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

**Hebrews 11:8**

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

**Hebrews 11:17-19**

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

**Romans 4:1-3**

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

The implication is that God told this whole story so that we could all see that justification before God is not by works but by faith alone.

**Conclusion**

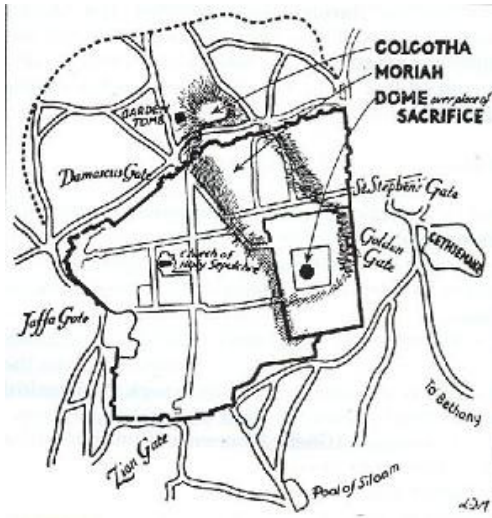
Maybe you are thinking what kind of God could ask a man to sacrifice his own Son. Abraham must have been feeling so conflicted. I would imagine that Abraham might have said to God, "I can't kill the boy. You do it. You can't understand the pain of a father sacrificing his own Son."

God would have answered him, "I cannot kill the boy for you, you must do the deed yourself."

"Did you see?" Abraham might have said. "Did you see my son even carried on his back his own wood on which he would be killed up the mountain?"

To this God says, "I know. I feel your pain. Do you feel mine?"

Jesus, God's only begotten son, carried the wood on which he would die up the hillside just outside the city walls. You see where Abraham went to sacrifice his son, Mt. Moriah is more of a small mile long mountain range.



It is on this same little range that the city of Jerusalem would be built by King David some thousand years later and the Temple of God would be built on this Mt. Moriah range by David's son Solomon. The mountain range is half inside the walled city and half outside the walls. Just to the north of the city, near the Damascus gate at a high point of that little range, it is there on a hill 500 years after the temple was built, from where all of Jerusalem is visible, a hill called Golgotha, that the first and only son of God was sacrificed by his Father. Coincidence? No, the Story of God is moving towards a climax foreshadowed in this very first book of the Bible.

### **Prayer**