



Nation

A narrative based around the faithfulness
of God, humanity's impatience
and the birth of a Nation.

THE BIBLE

Genesis 11-18, 21-22

Prepare for the Story

ICEBREAKER

- Share about a time when you did something entirely on faith. What were the circumstances? What did you feel prompted to do? What happened after you acted on faith?

Rewind the Story

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Cain & Abel – Am I my brother's keeper?
- The Flood – God's desire to cleanse creation
- Wisdom of Job – Why do bad things happen to good people?

Hear the Story

Scene One: The Tower of Babel

Noah's descendants forgot about God and how He had spared them in the flood. They made plans to construct a great city out of brick. They said, "Let's build a monument to ourselves that reaches to the heavens to show how great we are."

God saw how the people gathered together to honor themselves instead of Him. At that time, everyone on the earth spoke the same language.

So, God gave people different languages to make it harder for them to join together in rebellion. Then, He scattered them all over the earth.

Scene Two: Covenant

A few generations later, God made a special promise to a man named Abram. This promise was called a covenant, representing the deepest of all agreements between two people. God made this covenant with Abram ... *"I will make you the father of a great nation – famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. I will bless the entire earth through your descendants."*

God told Abram, *"Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land that I will show to you."* Then God led Abram and his family to a land called Canaan. There, God told Abram, *"Look as far as you can see in every direction. I am giving this land to you and your descendants."*

Some time passed, and Abram and his wife, Sarai, still did not have a child. Abram asked God, *"What good are all of your blessings if I don't even have a son?"* *"I am getting old, and soon I will have to give my inheritance to one of my servants."* God replied to Abram, *"No, you will have a son who will inherit everything that I have promised you."*

Then God took Abram out beneath the night sky and said, "Look up into the heavens and count the stars. Your family will be like this – too many to count!" So, Abram believed what God had said, and he was called "righteous" because of his faith.

Scene Three: Doubt and Laughter

Many years passed, and Sarai became impatient with not having a child. She asked her servant, an Egyptian woman named Hagar, to be a substitute mother for her. Abram agreed with this plan. Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to a boy named Ishmael.

But Hagar and Sarai's relationship became strained. During Hagar's pregnancy, she began to despise Sarai. In return, Sarai treated her servant Hagar terribly. Eventually, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away and not allowed to live with Abram's family.

When Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him again, saying, *"I am the mighty God; serve me with your entire life and live purely. I will keep my covenant with you for many generations to come. I am changing your name to Abraham, which means, 'father of many nations.' Remember this ... I will always be your God, and you will always be my people."*

Then God added, *"I am also changing your wife's name to Sarah, which means, 'mother of many nations.' Very soon, she will be blessed with a son. You are to name this son Isaac."*

Both Abraham and Sarah laughed to themselves in disbelief of God's promise. Abraham wondered, *"How can I become a father at 100 years old? How can Sarah have a baby when she is almost 90?"* Sarah thought, *"How could a worn-out woman like me have a baby? And my husband is even older than I am!"*

Then Abraham asked God, *"Can your blessing be passed on to Ishmael?"* But God said, *"Why did you laugh? Is anything too hard for me? About a year from now, you will have a son. Surely, I will bless Ishmael, but it is through Isaac that I will pass on my promise and covenant, not through your servant's child."*

Sure enough, a year later, exactly as God had said, Sarah gave birth to their first son, naming him Isaac, which means "laughter." The birth of Isaac was the beginning of God fulfilling the promise He made to Abraham.

And you won't believe what happened next ...

Scene Four: Sacrifice

Years later, God gave Abraham a test. He called out to him, *"Abraham!"* *"Yes, I am listening!"* he replied. God said, *"I want you to take your son Isaac, who you love, up to the top of the mountain and offer him as a sacrifice."*

The next morning Abraham got up early, saddled his donkey, and chopped some wood for the offering. After everything was ready, Abraham and his son Isaac took two of their servants and set out for the mountain.

About three days into their journey, they saw the mountain in the distance. Abraham told his servants, *"Stay here – Isaac and I are going up on the mountain to worship, then we will come right back."*

Abraham took the knife and the fire from the servants, and he placed the wood for the sacrifice on Isaac's shoulders. As they were walking up the mountain, Isaac became curious and asked, *"Father, we have the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb we are going to sacrifice?"* Abraham told him, *"God himself will provide a lamb."* When they arrived at the top of the mountain, they built an altar and placed wood on it.

Then Abraham tied Isaac up and laid him on the altar over the wood. He took the knife and lifted it up to kill his son as a sacrifice to God. At that moment, the Angel of God shouted to him from heaven, *"Abraham! Abraham!"* *"Yes, I'm listening!"* he replied. The Angel said, *"Put down the knife. Do not hurt your son. It's clear that you trust me because you didn't hesitate to give me what you love the most."*

Then Abraham looked behind him and saw a ram with his horns caught in a bush. He caught the ram and offered it to God as a substitute for his son. So, Abraham named that place at the top of the mountain *"God will Provide."*

Soon after that, God said to Abraham, *"Because you didn't refuse to give me your son, who you love, I will bless you greatly! Your family will multiply into many – like stars in the sky and the sand on the beaches! Your descendants will defeat their enemies on every side. The entire earth will be blessed through your family because you chose to obey me."*

Then Abraham and Isaac went down the mountain, met up with their servants, and returned home.

Retell the Story

- What did Noah's descendants do?
- What did God do in response to this?
- What promise did God make to Abram?
- How did Abram & Sarai react to this? What did they do?
- Who was born in this story?
- What did God ask Abraham to do?

- What happened when they got to the top of the mountain?
- What did God say to Abraham because of his faith?

Discuss the Story

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?
- Why did God stop the people from building a monument to themselves?
- What was God's relationship with Abraham?
- What was Abraham's relationship with his son Isaac like?
- Why do you think God renamed Abraham and Sarah?
- What was Abraham risking in order to obey God?
- This is not the first place we have seen sacrifices. Where else have we seen it, and what might God be teaching through sacrifice?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?

- From this story, what do you notice about God's character or his qualities?

Join the Story

1) Building Towers

In our story, the descendants of Noah decided to build a city with a tower to heaven. Read Genesis 11:4-8. What do you think the humans were really trying to accomplish? Why do you think God thought it was necessary to prevent their work? What do you think this tells us about how God desires for humans to relate to Him?

2) Working Around God

In our story, Abram and Sarai grow impatient, waiting for God, so they take matters into their own hands. Abram and Sarai's servant Hagar have a son named Ishmael. Read Genesis 17:17-21. Some traditional accounts trace the ancestry of Mohammed (the founder of Islam) back to Ishmael. If this is true, what might the consequences of Abraham & Sarah's choice have been? What might this teach us about choosing to work around God?

3) Promises & Commands

God let Abraham and Sarah wait a long time before He fulfilled His promise to give them a son. Then after years with their son, God gave Abraham a very difficult command. What do you think this was like for Abraham? Which is tougher for you: believing in God's promises or obeying His commands? Why do you think both are important in our relationship with God? In what ways can we get better at believing God's promises and being obedient to His commands?

Pray

God,

Thank you for being patient with us. Thank you for being faithful even when our trust in you wavers. Give us courage to trust you even when facing the unbelievable, and give us strength to obey even when things feel unbearable. Amen!