THE STORY CHAPTER 2

God Builds a Nation

September 17-18, 2016

Appearing on the Big Screen…

In the Upper Story, God creates the Lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God’s vision and are escorted from Paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God’s story of how he kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with him.

God builds a brand-new nation called Israel. Through this nation, he will reveal His presence, power, and plan to get us back. Every story of Israel will point to the first coming of Jesus-the One who will provide the way back to God.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

**2**I will make you into a great nation,

    and I will bless you.

I will make your name great,

    and you will be a blessing.

**3**I will bless those who bless you,

    and whoever curses you I will curse.

And all peoples on earth

    will be blessed through you.”

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*p. 13, Genesis 12:1-4*

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Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

*P. 15, Romans 4:18-21*

“I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

**8**But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, **How can I know**… that I will gain possession of it?”

*Genesis 15:7-8*

So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

**10**Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. **11**Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

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When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces.

**18**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.

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Travis Eades, Campus Pastor

Oak Hills Church

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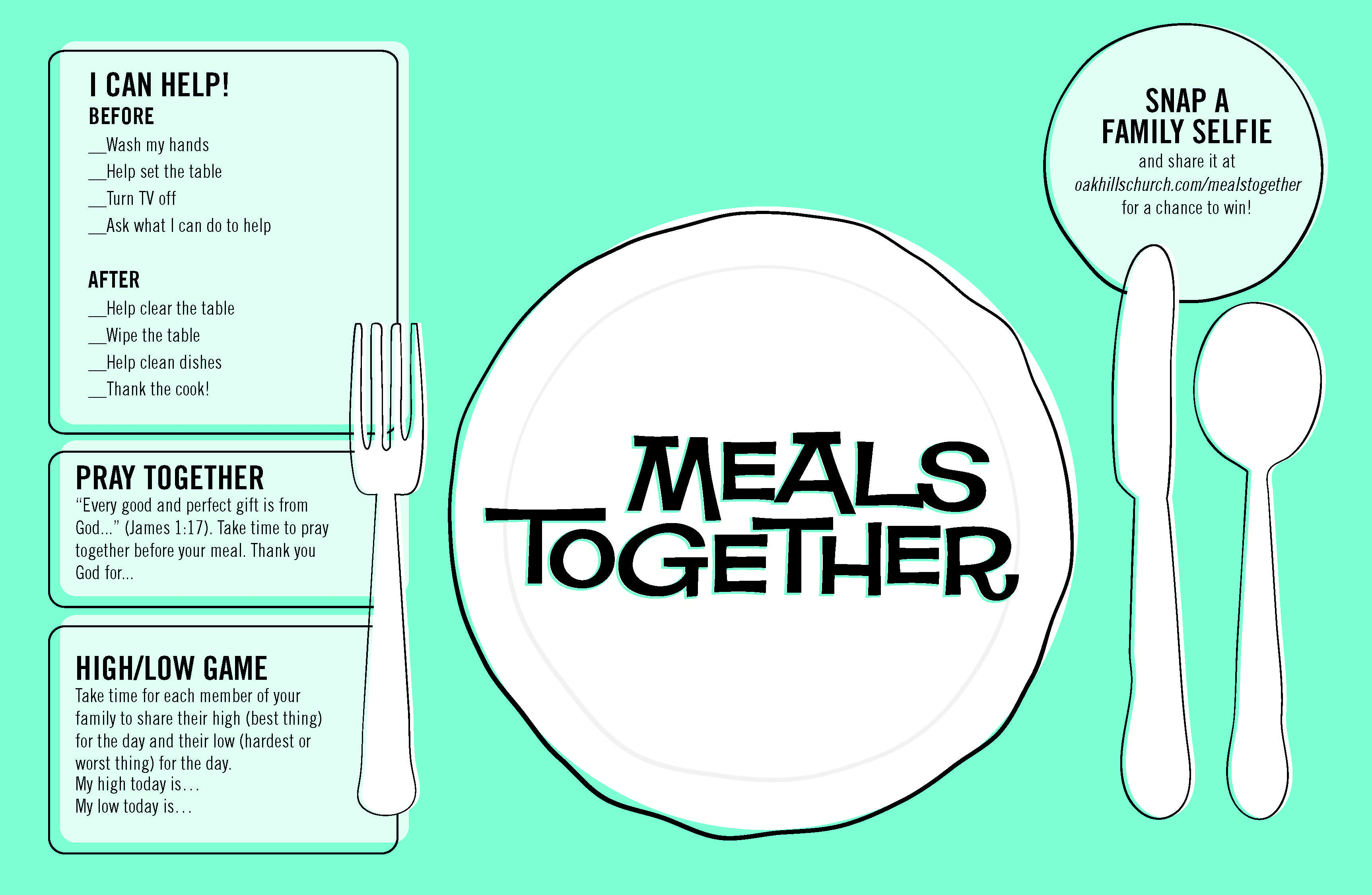
**To view The Story Chapter 2 sermon video,** [**CLICK HERE**](http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=542)**.**

**Opener**

Welcome everyone! If this is your first time to Oak Hills, we are especially honored you’ve come our way. For those of you tuning in from all around the world – Welcome!

If this is your first time to Oak Hills, we want you to know we’re thrilled you’re here. We are in the second week of a series we’re calling The Story. Children, students, adults, are all getting in on the action.

Families are doing something new we’re calling “meals together.”



We have a placemat that has instructions before, during, and after the meal. I noticed it said, “Kids clean up” and I was like, “ummm…Sign us up!”

*NOTE: The Meals Together program is part of the Oak Hills Home Life initiative which they are doing in partnership with Home Pointe Ministries. This placemat is proprietary to Home Pointe Ministries, and cannot be duplicated. Go to* [*www.drivefaithhome.com*](http://www.drivefaithhome.com) *for more information.*

Another great resource we don’t want you to miss is our new Story App. If you go into your app store, simply search for “sharethestory” and you’ll see this:



In fact, I guess you could just download it now. That’s what I did during Randy’s message last week.

**Introduction**

I for one am excited to be exploring God’s Story this year. This will be my second time to go through it but even this past week I saw something I’ve never seen before. It just blew me away.

A good story has that kind of power. The setting, the characters, the, “Oh, I didn’t see that coming.”

A big story this past week was the launch of the new Apple iPhone 7. Have you noticed how when you get a new phone or you do an update, Apple has all these terms and conditions. How many times have you just scrolled down and hit AGREE. We don’t even know what we’re agreeing to! Could’ve just signed away my first-born. I don’t care. Just give me some 2.0. Maybe you heard about the first people who got in really big trouble not reading the apple terms and conditions?—Adam and Eve. Didn’t see that coming did you?

But God saw it coming. And he has a plan and purpose to bring us back to him. From Genesis to Revelation this is the unfolding of God’s Upper Story. Connected to his Upper Story we are all living out our individual day-to-day Lower Story.

Last week, Randy took us through the first 11 chapters of Genesis. If you missed last week, let’s catch each other up by reading aloud the first movement of The Story. Ready?

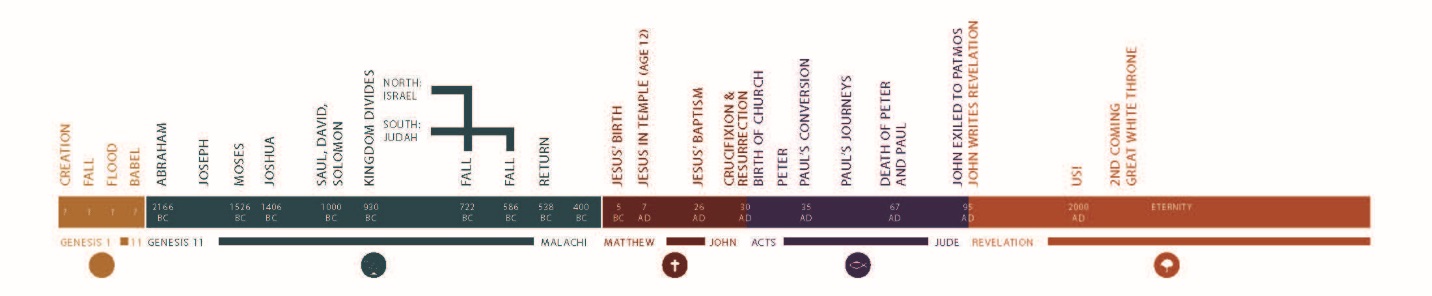
In the Upper Story, God creates the Lower Story. His vision is to come down and be with us in a beautiful garden. The first two people reject God’s vision and are escorted from Paradise. Their decision introduces sin into the human race and keeps us from community with God. At this moment God gives a promise and launches a plan to get us back. The rest of the Bible is God’s story of how he kept that promise and made it possible for us to enter a loving relationship with him.

*Prayer*

**Question: “How Can I Know?”**

*Refer to the timeline from last week’s message.*

*NOTE: Randy had a 12-foot-long poster made of the complete timeline of The Story, showing the 5 Movements. The files for the timeline, which include the original Adobe Illustrator files and a version that can be projected as a slide, are available on the Communications page in the Online Resource Library.*

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So far we have worked our way through, say it with me, Creation, Fall, Flood, and Babel. Today the story continues as we move into the second movement of Abraham, around 2166 BC.

Let’s read the second movement aloud together:

God builds a brand-new nation called Israel. Through this nation, he will reveal His presence, power, and plan to get us back. Every story of Israel will point to the first coming of Jesus, the One who will provide the way back to God.

A few days ago I was driving home like I’ve done many times. I pulled up to a stoplight and my truck just died. The check engine light wasn’t on, the oil level looked good, the battery was new, there wasn’t any moisture in the gas tank. No, my problem was much worse...I didn’t have any gas *in* the tank.

I had done something I hadn’t done since college. I ran the tank dry! I called Alisha, told her where I was, and she said, “I told you this was going to hap-…,” I said, “Not helpful right now. Could we have this conversation later?”

I was in the middle of a big intersection with hazard lights on, cars zipping around me giving me the look. You know the look. I’m sinking into my seat.

Oh but it gets worse. When it came time for me to break out that red gas can, a bus full of middle schoolers came through and wouldn’t you know it, the light turned red and they pulled right up behind me and stopped. I thought this is going to be brutal. Down came the windows. That was the longest red light ever. Let’s just say they had a lot of fun at my expense.

No one wants to stall out on the road but it can be downright debilitating when you stall out in life. Things are going well and all of a sudden you’re just stuck. Life happens, a job is lost, a marriage fails, health is in decline. You’ve prayed to God but that prayer remains unanswered.

Maybe on the outside everything looks great but on the inside, you’ve been stuck for a while. You want to believe that God has a purpose and plan but you find yourself asking the question, “How can I know?”

Then today’s story is for you. It doesn’t run on fuel but it does run on faith. In the Upper Story we start to see God’s presence, power, and plan to get us back as he builds the nation of Israel. And every nation has to start with someone.

Turn to page 13 in your Story book or Genesis 12. This is where we’re first introduced to Abram.

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

**2**I will make you into a great nation,

    and I will bless you.

I will make your name great,

    and you will be a blessing.

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    and whoever curses you I will curse.

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**4**So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran.

*p. 13, Genesis 12:1-4*

If you’re new to the Bible, and you don’t know the end of the story, you might be doing the math. Abram is going to populate a great nation but he’s 75 years old. Hmmm. His name will eventually get longer, but his years are getting shorter.

This is one of the themes you’re going to see throughout the Bible. God uses the most unlikely people to accomplish his purposes. That is certainly the case with Abram. Not only are he and his wife Sarai getting up there in age, but also Sarai has never even given birth. Abram’s father Terah was an idol maker. Surely there’s someone more qualified. Someone younger. No offense to any 75-year olds, but I would be afraid he wouldn’t even survive the trip. Much less populate a new nation.

But this is exactly who God chooses. Why? What does Abram have that God is going use to move his Upper Story forward? Top of page 14 in your Story books or Hebrews 11:8 gives us a clue:

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.

*p. 14, Hebrews 11:8*

There it is. Abraham had faith and obeyed. And because Abraham obeyed, all his troubles went away and they lived happily ever after.

No, that’s not what happened. It was just the opposite. Abram and Sarai would experience famine and have to move again. They would experience separation from family that had traveled with them. But surely hardest of all was when they experienced…well, nothing. God had promised a child and 24 years later…nothing.

Maybe you know how they felt. Maybe you’re still waiting for an answer to your prayer. I would struggle with 24 days but 24 years? Surely there was little faith left in Abram’s tank.

Let’s see for ourselves at the bottom of page 15, Romans 4:18-21:

**18**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

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Well there went that theory. That’s 25 years after God made the promise. 25 years before Abraham would hold Isaac in his arms. Yet Scripture tells us Abraham did not waver and his faith, get this – was actually strengthened. Who is this guy?

* Is Abraham some kind of super-Christian? No, he was a Jew. That can’t be it.
* Maybe he grew up in the perfect home. No. Dad was an idol maker and he lived in a land that worshipped false gods.
* Maybe he had really supportive friends. Hard to say. In that day the inability to bear children was seen as punishment. And they did move a lot.
* Maybe he just had some divine power I don’t have.

I don’t know but whatever it was, I don’t seem to have it and we still haven’t answered the question, “How can I know?” How can I know God will keep his promise? What did Abraham know that allowed him to trust that deeply?

**Answer: Have Faith in God**

And that’s when I saw it. It had been there all along. I just somehow missed it. 6 chapters and 10 years earlier. I found the answer to the question, “How can I know?”

Come back next week and I’ll tell you… No, I wouldn’t do that to you.

Here it is. Now this is not in your Story book but this was so good I had to share it with you. If you have your Bible, turn to Genesis chapter 15. If not, don’t worry; the Scripture will also be on the screen.

God has come to Abram in a vision 15 years after the initial promise is made but still 10 years before the promise is fulfilled. He takes Abram outside and has him look up in the sky. God tells Abram that his offspring will be as many as the stars in the sky. But he doesn’t stop there. He gives him an additional promise in verse 7. God says,

“I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

**8**But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord,

and notice these next four words,

**How can I know**… that I will gain possession of it?”

*Genesis 15:7-8*

Now we’re talking. I can relate to this guy. Abraham, full of faith, brings this question to the only One who could provide an answer. And here’s his answer:

**9**So the Lord said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

**10**Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.**11**Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

*Genesis 15:9-11*

Now this may not seem like much of an answer to us but in ancient times, it would’ve been understood…a blood covenant was about to be made. A binding contract.

Tim Keller points out that from history and archeology, we know many times this type of covenant was used between a king and a lesser king, or a conquered king, or a servant. They would slaughter the animals and cut them in half so they could walk down an aisle between them. What they were saying is, may what has happened to these animals happen to me if I break this covenant.

Now that’s intense. I’m thinking we should try this at the next wedding I perform. Forget the flower petals. I’ll be needing a heifer, a goat, a ram, and a couple of birds. Might be difficult to get past the building committee but I think it could bring some levity to our agreements.

Now here’s how this typically went down. Both the king and the other party would walk through but many times it would just be the other party.

Abram falls into a deep sleep and a thick and dreadful darkness comes over him. And I want you to pay close attention to verse 17-18:

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. **18**On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.

*Genesis 15:17-18*

Do you see what just happened? God is saying if I don’t keep this covenant, if I don’t build this nation, may it be to me, may this curse fall on me.

And here’s the part I hadn’t seen before. Did you notice who didn’t walk between the pieces? Abram remains on the sideline and God walks through alone. Do you see what that means? That means God is saying if I fail, may it be unto me, but Abram if you fail, if the nation of Israel fails, may it also be unto me. May my body be broken and my blood be poured out. Can you see where this is headed?

How can I know? Because this is exactly what would happen. God was not done testing Abraham’s faith. He would tell him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Abraham would obey but God would rescue Isaac. Some 2000 years later in that same location, God would sacrifice his only son. This time there would be no one would come to the rescue.

God would honor the covenant he made with Abraham and through his son would extend a new covenant to us. And like Abraham, we receive this new covenant through faith.

Want faith like Abraham? Then you must do what he did. He trusted, he obeyed, and he wasn’t afraid to ask God, “How can I know?”

God answered by placing his very deity on the line and Abraham found a place to place all his hope.

And perhaps the best news of all…you can too.