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Welcome to The Story—
God’s Story

This book tells the grandest, most compelling story of all time: the story of a true God who loves his children, who established for them a way of salvation and provided a route to eternity. Each story in these 31 chapters reveals the God of grace—the God who speaks; the God who acts; the God who listens; the God whose love for his people culminated in his sacrifice of Jesus, his only Son, to atone for the sins of humanity.

What’s more: the same God is alive and active today—still listening, still acting, still pouring out his grace on us. His grace extends to our daily foibles; our ups, downs, and in-betweens; our moments of questions and fears; and most important, our response to his call on our lives. He’s the same God who forgave David’s failures and rescued Jonah from the dark belly of a fish. The same heavenly Father who shepherded the Israelites through the wilderness desires to shepherd us through our wanderings, help us get past our failures and rescue us for eternity.

It’s our prayer that these stories will encourage you to listen for God’s call on your life, as he helps write your own story.

Max Lucado and Randy Frazee
Preface

*The Story*, through its unique and easy-to-read format, opens a door to God’s truth. It’s a door that every person is consciously or unconsciously searching for. A door that leads to freedom, hope and God himself! The Bible is filled with exciting and intense stories of love, war, birth, death and miracles. There’s poetry, culture, history and theology. It’s a suspense novel, a book of sociology, a history lesson — all woven around one eternal conflict: good versus evil. This story offers a glimpse of people in a different time and place who are yet very much like us today.

As you read *The Story* you will encounter not only the story of humankind but also the story of who God is and what he has done for us — for you. This story makes the insistent claim that a loving God has sought you and provided a way of redemption — a way for you to enter a relationship with him.

*The Story* includes the actual, God-breathed words of the Bible. The 31 chapters that comprise *The Story* contain portions of Scripture that were thoughtfully and carefully excerpted and then placed in chronological order. Transitions, which appear in *Italic*, were written to summarize omitted Scripture text in order to help the storyline read smoothly. The texts were chosen to retain the overall flow of the narrative, so that when you read this story, you will get a sense of the “big picture” of the Bible. Line spaces were added when text was omitted, and a chart at the back of this book will let you know what portions of Scripture were included.

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Other helpful material placed at the end of *The Story* include an epilogue that gives you an idea of the global impact this story has had on the world, a discussion guide with questions for you to reflect on personally or with a group and a cast of characters with brief descriptions so that you can tell who’s who at a glance.

The Scripture text used in *The Story* is taken from the New King James Version (NKJV). Our goal was to make the Bible read smoothly and easily, so that you can read it just like you’d read a novel. But *The Story* you’re reading isn’t any ordinary story. You are reading a story that has the power to change who you are, what you think and how you view life. You are exposing yourself to deep, transforming truth.

So sit back and enjoy the truest, greatest story ever written.
Timeline of The Story*

1 **Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It**
   - Creation
   - Noah and the Flood
   - Abram born (2166)

2 **God Builds a Nation**
   - Abram moves to Canaan (2091)
   - Isaac born (2066)
   - Abraham offers Isaac (2050)
   - Rebekah gives birth to Jacob and Esau (2006)
   - Abraham dies (1991)
   - Rachel gives birth to Joseph (1915)
   - Isaac dies (1886)

3 **Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh**
   - Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt (1898)
   - Jacob and family settle in Egypt (1876)
   - Jacob dies (1859)
   - Joseph dies (1805)

4 **Deliverance**
   - Moses is born (1526)
   - God sends the plagues (1446)
   - The exodus, Red Sea crossed (1446)
   - Wilderness wanderings, God sends quail and manna (1446–1406)

5 **New Commands and a New Covenant**
   - Moses receives the Ten Commandments (1445)
   - Moses spends 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai (1445)
   - Aaron and the golden calf (1445)
   - Building of the tabernacle (1445)

*Dates are approximate and dependent on the interpretative theories of various scholars.*
6 **Wandering**
Wilderness wanderings, God sends quail and manna (1446–1406)
Spies sent to Canaan (1443)
Aaron dies (1406)
Israelites camp in the plains of Moab (1406)
Moses dies (1406)

7 **The Battle Begins**
Joshua appointed leader (1406)
Israelites enter Canaan (1406)
Conquest of Canaan (1406–1375)
Joshua dies (1375)

8 **A Few Good Men ... and Women**
Judges begin to rule (1375)
Deborah’s rule (1209–1169)
Gideon’s rule (1162–1122)
Samson’s rule (1075–1055)

9 **The Faith of a Foreign Woman**
Time of the judges (1375–1050)
Naomi and Ruth return from Moab
Ruth meets Boaz
Boaz marries Ruth

10 **Standing Tall, Falling Hard**
Hannah gives birth to Samuel (1105)
Samuel ministers under Eli
The Israelites ask for a king
Saul’s reign (1050–1010)

11 **From Shepherd to King**
Samuel anoints David (1025)
David kills Goliath (1025)
Saul repeatedly tries to kill David
Saul dies (1010)
David named king (1010)

12 **The Trials of a King**
David’s reign (1010–970)
David commits adultery with Bathsheba
Solomon’s reign (970–930)
Building of the temple (966–959)
13 The King Who Had It All
   David dies (970)
   Solomon’s reign (970–930)
   Solomon displays great wisdom
   Building of the temple (966–959)
   Solomon marries foreign wives and betrays God

14 A Kingdom Torn in Two
   Division of the kingdom (930)
   King Jeroboam I of Israel reigns (930–909)
   King Rehoboam of Judah reigns (930–913)
   King Ahab of Israel reigns (874–853)
   King Jehoshaphat of Judah (872–848)

15 God’s Messengers
   Elijah’s ministry in Israel (875–848)
   Elisha’s ministry in Israel (c. 848–797)
   Amos’s ministry in Israel (760–750)
   Hosea’s ministry in Israel (750–715)

16 The Beginning of the End (of the Kingdom of Israel)
   Fall of Israel (722)
   Exile of Israel to Assyria (722)
   Isaiah’s ministry in Judah (740–681)
   Hezekiah’s reign (715–686)

17 The Kingdoms’ Fall
   Manasseh’s reign (697–642)
   Amon’s reign (642–640)
   Josiah’s reign (640–609)
   Jeremiah’s ministry in Judah (626–585)
   Jehoiakim’s reign (609–598)
   Zedekiah’s reign (597–586)
   Ezekiel’s ministry (593–571)
   Fall of Jerusalem (586)

18 Daniel in Exile
   Daniel exiled to Babylon (605)
   Daniel’s ministry (605–536)
   Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (605–562)
   Daniel and the lions’ den (539)
   Fall of Babylon (539)
19 The Return Home
First return of exiles to Jerusalem (538)
Ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (520–480)
Exiles face opposition in building the temple
Temple restoration completed (516)

20 The Queen of Beauty and Courage
Ahasuerus’s (Xerxes’) reign in Persia (486–465)
Esther becomes queen of Persia (479)
Esther saves the Jews from Haman’s murderous plot
Days of Purim are established

21 Rebuilding the Walls
Second return of exiles to Jerusalem under Ezra (458)
Last group of exiles return to Jerusalem under Nehemiah (445)
Exiles face opposition in rebuilding the wall
Jerusalem’s wall rebuilt (445)
Malachi’s ministry (c. 440–430)

22 The Birth of the King
Mary gives birth to Jesus the Messiah (6/5)
Joseph, Mary and Jesus’ flight to Egypt (5/4)
Jesus’ visit to the temple (AD 7/8)

23 Jesus’ Ministry Begins
John the Baptist begins ministry (26)
Jesus baptized (26)
Jesus begins ministry (26)
Wedding at Cana (27)
The woman at the well (27)
John the Baptist imprisoned (27/28)

24 No Ordinary Man
Jesus begins ministry (26)
Jesus uses parables to teach (26)
Jesus gives Sermon on the Mount (28)
Jesus sends closest followers out to preach (28)
John the Baptist dies (28/29)
Jesus feeds 5,000 people (29)
Jesus proclaims himself as the bread of life (29)
25 Jesus, the Son of God
   Jesus begins ministry (26)
   Jesus teaches at the Mount of Olives (29)
   Jesus resurrects Lazarus (29)
   Jesus drives the money changers from the temple (30)
   Judas betrays Jesus (30)

26 The Hour of Darkness
   The Lord’s Supper (30)
   Jesus washes his disciples’ feet
   Jesus comforts his disciples
   Jesus is arrested
   Peter denies Jesus
   Jesus is crucified

27 The Resurrection
   Jesus is buried (30)
   Jesus is resurrected
   Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and the disciples

28 New Beginnings
   Jesus’ ascension (30)
   Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
   Paul believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah (35)
   James martyred, Peter imprisoned (44)
   Paul’s first missionary journey (46–48)

29 Paul’s Mission
   Paul’s first missionary journey (46–48)
   Jerusalem Council (49–50)
   Paul’s second missionary journey (50–52)
   Paul’s third missionary journey (53–57)

30 Paul’s Final Days
   Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome (59–62)
   Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome and execution (67–68)
   John exiled on Patmos (90–95)

31 The End of Time
   John becomes a disciple (26)
   John exiled on Patmos (90–95)
   Revelation written (95)
IN THE BEGINNING God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good.
Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day.

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind”; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over
every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

God had created a beautiful world and filled it with glorious, diverse creatures. Of all his creation, he singled out two humans to build a relationship with—Adam and Eve. These two people were blessed to share their paradise with each other and God, so why would they want anything else?

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field
which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”

So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”

Then the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”

And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the LORD God said to the serpent:

“Because you have done this,
You are cursed more than all cattle,
And more than every beast of the field;
On your belly you shall go,  
And you shall eat dust  
All the days of your life.  
And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel.”  

To the woman He said:  

“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception;  
In pain you shall bring forth children;  
Your desire shall be for your husband,  
And he shall rule over you.”  

Then to Adam He said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’:  

“Cursed is the ground for your sake;  
In toil you shall eat of it  
All the days of your life.  
Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,  
And you shall eat the herb of the field.  
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread  
Till you return to the ground,  
For out of it you were taken;  
For dust you are,  
And to dust you shall return.”  

And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.  
Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.  
Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” —
therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering\(^1\) of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin\(^2\) lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”

Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

The tragic accounts of the mistakes and poor choices of Adam and Eve, and their firstborn son Cain, are echoed in the later stories of hardship and tragedy for their children and their children’s children. As people began to populate the globe, leaving the area of Eden and traveling as far as feet and beast could carry them, humanity’s legacy of hate, anger, murder and deception play out as people continue to neglect their relationship with God. Eventually, nearly everyone just plain forgets their Creator and the whole point of being alive. For most

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1. **Offering:** Something given to God in an act of thankfulness, worship or payment for disobedience. In the Old Testament, there were five kinds of offerings: burnt, grain, fellowship, sin and guilt. The death of Jesus in the New Testament is the ultimate offering that paid the full price of sin. This word is synonymous with *sacrifice*.

2. **Sin:** Evil, moral shortcoming, wrongdoing or disobedience. This term refers to any action, thought or attitude that does not meet the standards set by God.
people, life becomes one big party with no thought of consequences ... except for one man.

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.

And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark — you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds

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*Covenant:* An agreement or promise between two parties. A covenant was intended to be unbreakable.
after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.”

Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.

Then the Lord said to Noah, “Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.”

“For after seven more days I will cause it to rain on the earth forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made.”

Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters were on the earth.

So Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the flood. Of clean animals, of animals that are unclean, of birds, and of everything that creeps on the earth, two by two they went into the ark to Noah, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. And it came to pass after seven days that the waters of the flood were on the earth.

On the very same day Noah and Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark — they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life. So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the Lord shut him in.

Now the flood was on the earth forty days. The waters increased and lifted up the ark, and it rose high above the earth.
The waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth, and the ark moved about on the surface of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died. So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air. They were destroyed from the earth. Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.

Then God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters subsided. The fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were also stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained. And the waters receded continually from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters decreased. Then the ark rested in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month. In the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

And it came to pass in the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, that the waters were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked, and indeed the surface of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried.

Then God spoke to Noah, saying, “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that
they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every animal, every creeping thing, every bird, and whatever creeps on the earth, according to their families, went out of the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.”

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.”

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

And God said: “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

“The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”
The earth recovered from this great flood. Animal and plant life flourished. Noah’s family repopulated the earth. The cycle of life continued, and people remembered God. Ancient businesses grew, homesteads and farms developed, and trade routes brought wealth and opportunity for travel. It was time for God’s next move, time to build a nation in a land that would become the cultural and ethnic home to … well, that part of the story is yet to come.

Abram (whose name God later changed to Abraham) had all the wrong qualifications for being a founder of God’s nation: His relatives worshiped other gods in a country far from what would become the promised land; Abram and his wife, Sarai (whose name God later changed to Sarah), were way beyond childbearing years and Sarai couldn’t get pregnant—no children meant no people to populate God’s nation. No problem. God promised the impossible to Abram, and Abram watched as the impossible occurred. Here’s how it happened.
God Builds a Nation

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.
By faith\(^1\) Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites \textit{were} then in the land.

Then the \textbf{LORD} appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the \textbf{LORD}, who had appeared to him.

Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together.

And the \textbf{LORD} said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are — northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, \textit{then} your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”

Then Abram moved \textit{his} tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which \textit{are} in Hebron, and built an altar there to the \textbf{LORD}.

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as \textit{in} a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker \textit{is} God.

\(^1\text{Faith: Complete trust. True faith is much deeper than mere intellectual agreement with certain facts — it affects the desires of one’s heart.}\)
Lot made some bad decisions and found himself in deep trouble. He took up residence near Sodom. In retrospect, it was a poor choice of real estate. Soon the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah and three other kings squared off in battle against an enemy army. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost, and the cities were looted. Lot and his family were among the captives.

When this news reached Abram, he pulled together 318 trusted men and without hesitation set out to rescue his nephew. Their night attack caught the looters by surprise. Abram freed the captives and recovered the spoil. Meeting a priest by the name of Melchizedek, he gave him a tenth of the spoils and delivered to the king what rightfully belonged to him.

Despite Abram’s growing sense of God’s power, one problem remained that even the Almighty seemed unable to solve. It was Abram’s greatest worry and the main topic of his dialogues with God.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.”

And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Abraham, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred
years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Abram believed that the promised child would come from his own body, but as far as he and Sarai knew, God didn’t specify that Sarai would be the mother. In a move common during this time, they decided that Sarai’s slave, Hagar, would be a surrogate mother for the promised child. However, after Hagar conceived, she and Sarai quarreled, and Hagar was sent away, helpless and pregnant to wander in the wilderness. Just as she despaired of her life, God spoke to her.

The Angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand.” Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude.” And the Angel of the LORD said to her:

“Behold, you are with child,
And you shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
Because the LORD has heard your affliction.
He shall be a wild man;
His hand shall be against every man,
And every man’s hand against him.
And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?” Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered.

So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.
When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

And God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

“And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.”

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*Circumcised, circumcision:* A surgical removal of the foreskin of the male genitals, performed on the eighth day following birth. In the Old Testament this ritual symbolized the baby’s entrance into the Hebrew community. Biblical uses of the term are often metaphorical, referring to the obedience of the heart represented by the outward symbol of circumcision.
And the LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude — innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him — whom Sarah bore to him — Isaac. Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, “God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.” She also said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? For I have borne him a son in his old age.”

God gave Abraham a child of promise. But Abraham had a child already through Hagar — Ishmael. What would become of him?

So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac.” And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham’s sight because of his son.

But God said to Abraham, “Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed

3Isaac: Isaac means “he laughs.”
shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bond-
woman, because he is your seed.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a
skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy
to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in
the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used
up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went
and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for
she said to herself, “Let me not see the death of the boy.” So she sat
opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept.

And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God
called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, “What ails you,
Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is.
Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make
him a great nation.”

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And
she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.
So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness,
and became an archer.

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abra-
ham, and said to him, “Abraham!”

And he said, “Here I am.”

Then He said, “Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom
you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a
burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,
and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and
he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the
place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham
lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to
his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go
yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”

So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on
Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the
two of them went together. But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!”

And he said, “Here I am, my son.”

Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”

So he said, “Here I am.”

And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.

And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, “In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son — blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will
multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Eventually Sarah died, and Abraham bought a field and buried her, wondering all the while what would become of him and Isaac and God’s promise. Abraham had taken another wife, a woman named Keturah, and had more children. Yet his entire estate went to the special son of promise, Isaac. Abraham died when he was 175 years old and was laid to rest next to Sarah. But the story is far from over.

Isaac married Rebekah. As was the custom, she was chosen for him, but he truly loved her. Twenty years after the wedding, the couple was still childless; but in response to many prayers, Rebekah gave birth to twins. Esau, the elder brother, grew up to love the outdoors and hunting; he was his dad’s favorite. Jacob, the younger brother, was quiet and stayed at home; he was clearly his mother’s favorite. The two boys vied for the inheritance rights, and Jacob proved to be a master manipulator and schemer.

One day Esau came home famished, demanding some of the stew Jacob was cooking. Seeing an opportunity, Jacob “sold” a meal to his brother in exchange for Esau’s birthright — the double share of inheritance due to Esau (because he was the older brother).

Sometime later, as Isaac lay in bed, weak and blind, he asked his hunter son for a tasty meal of char-grilled wild meat. After the meal, Isaac would officially pass on his blessing — and God’s favor — to Esau. This was to be Esau’s long-awaited big day.

Rebekah overheard Isaac’s plan and came up with a plan of her own. She dressed her favorite son, Jacob, in Esau’s clothes and covered his hands and neck with goatskins to resemble Esau’s hairy skin. She quickly cooked up some meat and sent Jacob, posing as Esau, into Isaac’s bedroom. Isaac, squinting his eyes and touching Jacob, wondered if this was really his hunter son. Twice deceitful Jacob lied to his aged dad. Isaac
ate. After kissing Jacob and smelling his scent, Isaac was convinced he was talking to Esau. Then Isaac gave the blessing, also confirming the double share of the material inheritance, to Jacob, irrevocably and completely.

Soon after, Esau arrived with his own platter of grilled meat, only to discover that mom and brother had robbed him of his entire future. Angry to the point of fury, he planned to kill Jacob. Rebekah intervened once more and sent Jacob to live with relatives until Esau’s anger abated.

Forced vacations may sometimes result in pleasant surprises. In this case, Jacob fell in love with his boss’s (and uncle’s) daughter Rachel, and worked for her family until she could become his wife. As part of the deal to marry Rachel, Jacob first had to marry her older sister, Leah. For twenty years Jacob tended flocks and farmland, and finally he took his large family home to meet Esau once again. But Jacob was careful to approach Esau with respect and humility. The wounds between them were deep and long, and he wasn’t sure if Esau was friend or foe.

Then Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, “Speak thus to my lord Esau, ‘Thus your servant Jacob says: ‘I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.’”’

Then the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he also is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.” So Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two companies. And he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the other company which is left will escape.”

Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you’: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown
Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, ‘I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

So he lodged there that same night, and took what came to his hand as a present for Esau his brother: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milk camels with their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten foals. Then he delivered them to the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass over before me, and put some distance between successive droves.”

And he commanded the first one, saying, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, saying, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going? Whose are these in front of you?’ then you shall say, ‘They are your servant Jacob’s. It is a present sent to my lord Esau; and behold, he also is behind us.’” So he commanded the second, the third, and all who followed the droves, saying, “In this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and also say, ‘Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he said, “I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.” So the present went on over before him, but he himself lodged that night in the camp.

And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, “Let Me go, for the day breaks.”

But he said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

So He said to him, “What is your name?”

He said, “Jacob.”
And He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”

Then Jacob asked, saying, “Tell me Your name, I pray.”
And He said, “Why is it that you ask about My name?” And He blessed him there.
So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

Now Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and there, Esau was coming, and with him were four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maidservants. And he put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, “Who are these with you?”
So he said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and bowed down. And Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed down. Afterward Joseph and Rachel came near, and they bowed down.

Then Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company which I met?”
And he said, “These are to find favor in the sight of my lord.”
But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”
And Jacob said, “No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me. Please, take my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” So he urged him, and he took it.
Then Esau said, “Let us take our journey; let us go, and I will go before you.”

Then God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother.”

And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone.” So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.

Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, “Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.”

Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, “Do not fear; you will have this son also.” And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died),
that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard about it.

Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

**Jacob**

>*These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.*

**The sons of Rachel:** Joseph and Benjamin.

**The sons of Leah:** Issachar and Zebulun.

**The sons of Leah’s servant Zilpah:** Gad and Asher.

**The sons of Rachel’s servant Bilhah:** Dan and Naphtali.

**The sons of Leah:** Simeon, Levi, Judah.

*Reuben the firstborn.*
God’s story of promise and prosperity moves from Jacob to his son Joseph. Of Jacob’s 12 sons, Joseph was clearly Jacob’s favorite, leading the rest of Jacob’s boys to resent their younger brother. Jacob only heightened the family stress when he gave a beautiful coat to Joseph. And Joseph didn’t help matters when he twice told his older brothers that he had a dream that they would someday bow to him. Finally, the brothers had heard enough from their arrogant little brother. They hatched a conspiracy. For seventeen-year-old Joseph, it would be a very bad day indeed.