

THE STORY
STUDY 2
CHAPTER 2

1. Abraham left his homeland and family to follow God. What did God say his reward would be?

I think it is important to set the context of exactly what how big the command was:

Abraham was settled in his homeland, where his family had lived for generations.

Abraham was asked to leave his land and his “father’s household”

God did not tell Abraham to where he was headed – simply the enigmatic “to the land that I will show you.”

There is no reason to surmise that Abraham would have had any experience of God at this stage.

Neither are we told how God communicated to Abraham.

Abraham had to make a decision – truly a faith decision.

We need to understand the “reward” in the context of Abraham’s faith.

If he obeyed, then the reward:

- I will make you into a great nation
- I will bless you
- I will make your name great
- You will be a blessing
- I will bless those who bless you
- I will curse those who curse you
- All peoples on earth will be blessed through you

If you count, the personal pronoun is used in respect of God 5 times. The other 2 statements assume God to be the prime mover!

Why the emphasis on God’s initiative at this stage in the Story?

Because up till now humanity has demonstrated unequivocally that left to their own devices they are incapable of obedience.

- Adam and Eve
- Cain and Abel
- Humanity and Noah
- The Tower of Babel

Four opportunities afforded humankind. Four ruined opportunities. God has now stepped in and takes the initiative – as seen in the frequent use of the pronoun “I”.

2. What might God be asking you to give up to follow him?

You might start by discussing some of the places to which God might be leading us.

God is not necessarily, nor even likely, leading us to the mission field or the pastoral ministry.

Having said that, God does of course lead some people to those areas of service. But don’t let the conversation start there!

Ask for suggestions as to where God might be leading us:

- Befriending an awkward person at work
- Inviting folk you don’t know well to tea after church
- Greater commitment to your own personal devotions
- Offering yourself to an area of service in the church, in the community
- In the area of giving to the Lord’s work
- Dealing with areas of your thought life
- Offering forgiveness to someone who has hurt you

There are many directions in which God may be asking us to follow him.

Each one will require a “giving up.”

- Befriending an awkward person at work / *giving up personal prejudice*
- Inviting folk you don't know well to tea after church / *giving up personal time*
- Greater commitment to your own personal devotions / *going to bed earlier, getting up earlier – giving up sleep*
- Offering yourself to an area of service in the church, in the community / *giving up personal time, making a commitment which could on some occasion prove inconvenient*
- In the area of giving to the Lord's work / *living a simpler lifestyle, withholding from purchasing certain things – luxuries or otherwise*
- Dealing with areas of your thought life / *greater personal discipline, not reading certain material, watching certain programmes*
- Offering forgiveness to someone who has hurt you / *letting go of your hurt, letting go of your “right” (which isn't yours) for revenge.*

3a. *What made Abraham righteous in God's sight?*

3b. *How is this fact relevant in your life?*

3a. Defining what “righteous” means in this context is important.

It can refer to an ethical quality in a person's life.

It can also have the theological meaning of “being in right standing with God.”

In **Rom1:17** Paul says: *“In the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith ... the righteous will live by faith”*

We could say that like this: *“In the gospel a way of being in right standing with God is revealed – a way of being in right standing that is by faith ... those who are in right standing with God will live by faith”*

So question 3a is this NOT: *What made Abraham ethically righteous in God's sight?*

From his life he was anything but ethically righteous – he lied about his relationship with Sarah – he did that twice. He thought he would do God's job from him using Hagar, etc.

This question is about Abraham's right standing with God – that God would be willing to deal with Abraham.

And the answer is this: Faith. Abraham *believed* God and it was *credited to him* as righteousness.

His right standing with God was credited to Abraham.

3b. We are called to live by faith – in the Story there is a foot note on page 14: *Faith: complete trust. True faith is much deeper than mere intellectual agreement with certain facts – it effects the desires of one's heart.*

From Abraham we learn that we cannot earn a “right standing with God.” But we can have it credited to us by living in complete trust – firstly that what Jesus did he did for us. And then daily trusting God.

4a. *Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac?*

4b. *What did Abraham – and Isaac – learn from this experience?*

4a. We have just spoken about faith – complete trust. Deeper than intellectual agreement with the facts – affects one's heart's desires.

All along Abraham – with difficulty – had been trusting God for a son, without which those original promises could not be fulfilled. His faith was justified. Sarah had Isaac.

This was to be an even bigger test of faith – could Abraham trust God enough to believe that though he offer as a sacrifice Isaac, that God could still honour his promise?

That calls for a special faith.

Just a comment: We are horrified at this incident – and indeed rightly so. Let's not forget that Abraham was living in a vastly different cultural milieu – nations living in those days offered their

first born sons to their “gods” so Abraham, with a primitive knowledge of God, would not have thought it strange.

Which brings us to the answer to ...

4b. This is the most important lesson: our God is not like the other “gods.”

Remember God took a people as they were – just like their neighbours. And God patiently worked with them, teaching them, disciplining them, revealing more and more of who he is. And this was an important lesson: I am not like the other “gods.”

But Abraham and Isaac would have learned that God is worthy of their trust.

Abraham would have seen in a tangible way that he (Abraham) was able to trust God – an encouragement to him surely.

5. How did Jacob prepare for his meeting with Esau?

Repentance:

- This involves recognising that what we have done is wrong.
- It involves acknowledging to the person we wronged that what we have done is wrong.
- It involves “bringing forth fruit consistent with repentance.”

I think that what we are seeing in Jacobs life is repentance. I am sure there was also an element of self preservation! “I will pacify him with these gifts ... later on when I see him perhaps he will receive me.” We could be cynical about that, but I think Jacob genuinely wanted to get to see Esau to apologise – e.g., when Esau said he didn't want the gifts, Jacob insisted he take them – showing a certain genuineness.

Jacobs encounter with the angel of the Lord also demonstrates a seriousness. In the OT a name was more than a handle by which a person would be known. It was often a reflection of the character of the person. The fact that the angel of the Lord changed Jacobs name, which means “one who deceives” to Israel “one who struggles with God” recognises, I think, the change which had taken place in Jacob.

6. What attitude did Jacob have when he wrestled with “the man” who Jacob eventually realised was actually God?

We have just spoken about the attitude of repentance demonstrated by Jacob. This encounter is an explanation of that, it shows God ensuring the reality of the repentance, it shows some elements of repentance.

What is your name? – Jacob is asked. Remember what his name is? One who deceives. The man wrestling with Jacob – we recognise him to be God – asks Jacob what his name it. Giving his name is a confession – I am Jacob. I am the deceiver.

To answer the question – with what attitude to Jacob wrestle? He was repentant, but needed to be given the opportunity to repent.

Jacob was forgiven. We know that because the Lord gave him a new name.