

Finding Your Story in HIStory

All In
Acts 7:1-8

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Dr. Steve Horn

Text Introduction: My prayer for us in 2012 is that we find our story in God's story, in HIStory. So far we have learned from creation that God has a plan for our lives. That revealed plan shows us that God desires a relationship with us and that He decrees a purpose for our lives.

The second part of the story is the Fall. In the Fall, the constant central conflict of history is revealed—man's rebellion against God's plan for relationship with us. Instead of leaving us in that rebellion, God's story reveals that He wants to restore us back into relationship with Him. For that lesson, we turn to the story of Abraham.

Just to show you the connectivity of the Old Testament to the New Testament, I have chosen to use as our text this morning a New Testament summary of Abraham's life. It comes from one of the first deacons, Stephen, as he is asked by the high priest concerning Jesus.

Text: ¹ "Is this true?" the high priest asked.

² "Brothers and fathers," he said, "listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he settled in Haran, ³ and said to him:

Get out of your country
and away from your relatives,
and come to the land
that I will show you.

⁴ "Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this land you now live in. ⁵ He didn't give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, but He promised to give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him, even though he was childless. ⁶ God spoke in this way:

His descendants would be strangers
in a foreign country,
and they would enslave
and oppress them 400 years.

⁷ I will judge the nation
that they will serve as slaves, God said.
After this, they will come out
and worship Me in this place.

⁸ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision. After this, he fathered Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; Isaac did the same with Jacob, and Jacob with the 12 patriarchs.

Introduction: Gene Chizik is the Head Football coach at Auburn University. He has written a book, that chronicles his team's National Championship season in 2010, entitled *All In*. "All in" was a motivational phrase that he used during a speech to fans after a big win in 2009. The university's marketing team picked up on this phrase and used it as a slogan for the 2010 season. The actual origin of the use of this motivational phrase came from a team devotional delivered by an assistant coach based on Colossians 3:23. That verse says, "Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men."

Since Auburn's success, quite a few other teams have picked up this phrase as a motto for teamwork and commitment. "All in" was a phrase that I thought of this week in considering again the story of Abraham.

God's plan to restore fellowship with us is revealed in the story of Abraham. The story of Abraham has to be seen in at least three major movements.

Call to Move (Genesis 12)—When we meet Abraham, his name is actually just Abram. God called Abram to move. That does not seem like much unless you have ever moved. Each time I have moved, I've been really excited, because I felt like I was moving at the call of God, but I tell you, "Moving is absolutely terrifying." There are so many unknowns. For Abram, he didn't even know where he was going, but the Scripture says, "Abram went, as the Lord had told him."

Father of Many (Genesis 15)—Chapter 15 tells us that one day God visited Abram and announced to him that he would be the father of many. In fact, the way that God told him was to bring him outside. God told him to count the stars and said, "Your descendants will be just that numerous." The only problem was that Abram wasn't getting any younger (in fact old—well beyond he and his wife's child-bearing years) and they had no children.

Birth of Isaac and Invitation to Offer up Isaac (Genesis 21-22)—The promise in chapter 15 makes the story of chapters 21 and 22 all that more impossible to understand. In chapter 21, we learn that Abraham and Sarai finally have a child. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac is born. In chapter 22 as was just read to us, God requested that Abraham offer up that one and only son to Him as a sacrifice. Only at the last moment does God say, "Put down the knife, that's enough." (My paraphrase) "For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from Me." (Genesis 22:12b)

All in!

That's Abraham's story? So, what's your story? I don't know if you know it or not, though dramatic as Abraham's story is, your story is revealed in Abraham's story.

God's Plan to Restore Us is Revealed!

I want you to remember three words about Abraham.

- **Promise**—God promised Abraham land and descendants. He gave him a promise. When the writers of the New Testament wrote about God's relationship with Abraham, it is this word promise that is prominent.

Acts 7:5--⁵ He didn't give him an inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, but He promised to give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him, even though he was childless.

Hebrews 11:8-9, 11-13, 17-19--⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went out to a place he was going to receive as an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he was going.⁹ By faith he stayed as a foreigner in the land of promise, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, coheirs of the same promise.

¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself, when she was unable to have children, received power to conceive offspring, even though she was past the age, since she considered that the One who had promised was faithful.¹² Therefore from one man—in fact, from one as good as dead—came offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as innumerable as the grains of sand by the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith without having received the promises, but they saw them from a distance, greeted them, and confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac. He received the promises and he was offering his unique son,¹⁸ the one it had been said about, Your seed will be traced through Isaac.¹⁹ He considered God to be able even to raise someone from the dead, and as an illustration, he received him back.

- **Covenant**—But it wasn't just a word of promise, but God gave Abraham with each promise a covenant. It was God's special sign. This was not the first covenant God gave to someone. God gave Noah's family a promise that he would not flood the earth again, but He also gave them a sign of the covenant—a rainbow. With each promise, God gave Abraham, He gave to him a sign.
- **Provision**—The last word I want you to remember is "provision." God provides. Abraham came to know God as the one who provides. Why did God call Abraham to move? To show Abraham that He would provide. Why wait to Abraham becomes an old man to deliver the promise of children? To show Abraham that God is the one who provides. Why did God have Abraham bring Isaac up to the mountain for sacrifice? Again, it is to show Abraham that if you trust God, He will always provide.

Now, what about us? God promises us forgiveness and with that forgiveness, reconciliation back to God, and with that reconciliation comes the promise of eternal life. But, it is not just His word, but He gave us a sign. He gave us Himself. So what does Jesus say on the eve of His crucifixion when He is celebrating with the disciples the Passover Meal? "This is My body, which is given for you." And then taking the cup, He said, "This cup is the new *covenant* established by My blood; it is shed for you." He gave us a promise, but He gives us a sign to back up that covenant. Then, He provides that relationship by His own death and resurrection.

But, like Abraham we must believe. Like Abraham, we must be "All in." Our word for that is usually trust.

God's Plan Requires Trust! Why?

I want to give you three reasons why God's plan for your future and a relationship with Him always requires trust.

1. Your story is not the complete story.

Your story is intertwined with the rest of history. Your life is intertwined closely with the people that are part of your life. We also discover that our stories are connected with people that come before and after us. Abraham's story was connected to the whole nation of Israel. This reality forces us to trust in someone beyond ourselves.

2. Your story is not in your control.

Because our lives are connected to others, we quickly learn that our story is not in our control. They tell us that we are living on this planet with approximately 7 billion other people. Your decisions are shaping your story, but so are the decisions of 7 billion other people and other millions and billions of people who have come before us. So, if you feel like life is spinning out of control on you, it's not entirely your doing. You cannot control that spouse. You cannot control that child. You are not in control when the doctor walks in the room and says "We need to talk." We need to trust God. We better learn to trust God.

- ✓ Story from Steve Brown, in *Covenant Marriage*, p. 80. A British soldier in the First World War became discouraged and disenchanted to the point that he decided to desert. Slipping away, he walked for miles hoping to find water and a boat back to England. Suddenly, he came to what he thought was a signpost, but it was too dark to read. Climbing up the post to get a closer look, he struck a match and found himself looking squarely into the face of Jesus. Instead of a sign, he had climbed a crucifix that had been placed on the side of a road. His mind raced back to the Christ who had died for him, enduring the cross—Christ refused to give up. Inspired by what he saw, the man returned to the trenches and continued to fight.

3. Your story does not culminate in your death.

Trusting God for the things of this life helps us to trust God for the things beyond this life. Paul said this as is recorded in 2 Corinthians 1:9-10, "⁹ Indeed, we personally had a death sentence within ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and He will deliver us. We have put our hope in Him that He will deliver us again."

This life is not all that there is. Winston Churchill reportedly understood this. It is said that the prime minister planned his own funeral. According to his instructions, at the end of the service a bugler was to play taps, the universal signal that the day was over. Immediately following the playing of taps, another bugler played reveille, the song of a day begun.

We must trust God with our eternity. It makes no sense to trust God for the stuff of life, but not be willing to trust Him with our eternity.

So, I ask you, "Are you 'all in?'" This one thing I know, the Lord Jesus Christ in going to the cross was "All in" for us. Such sacrifice demands that we be "all in" for Him.