

Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-9; 13:2-18

Aim of Lesson

To show that Abram had such faith in God's promises that he was prepared to leave his home and go wherever God led him.

Background study

Hebrews 11:8-10.

Find information about the ancient civilization of Ur, customs, worship, houses, etc. Find a map of the journey.

Suggested outline of lesson

Talk about promises and their importance. Ask the children whether they have made any promises, and whether they have kept them. Have others made promises to them? Discuss people's feelings when promises made to them are broken. Point out that promises are made to be kept and should be reliable.

Now build a picture of Abram's life in Ur. Archaeologists have established that Ur was a cultured, civilized and wealthy city where people learned to read and write, to trade and to build. Outside the city walls lived the shepherds with their tents, flocks of sheep and numerous camels, scattered across the plain. City-dwellers and herdsmen alike worshipped the moon. Nearby would be the ziggurat - a huge artificially constructed 'mountain' with a stairway leading to the top where the altar, surrounded by blue tiles to represent the sky, was dedicated to the moon god. Such idolatry was abhorrent to God, but in that city he saw one man whom he knew would respond to his call. When God comes into a man's life many things change, and this was the case with Abram. God commanded that Abram should leave Ur, and he made some promises to him dependent upon his obedience. Let the children find these in chapter 12, verses 1 to 3. Each one can be written on a chart as it is discovered:

1. I will make you a great nation
2. I will bless you and make your name great
3. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you
4. In you shall all families (nations) of the earth be blessed.

Help the children to realize that Abram, Sarai and Lot were real people with feelings of sadness and joy, anxiety and excitement. Lead them to imagine what it must have been like for the family to leave the security and comforts of the city and everything familiar, and venture into the unknown and a completely new way of life.

Discuss the preparations for the journey and the mode of travel. With the aid of a map, show the route they took, through part of the fertile crescent, close to the Euphrates. Abram was so convinced that he was doing the right thing that he persuaded his father, Terah, to go with him, even though Terah was an old man and (as events were to show) nearing the end of his life.

At this point introduce the names of Abram's wife and nephew. The younger children will find it easier to understand that Abram was Lot's uncle than that Lot was Abram's nephew. The journey would be long and arduous (try to estimate the duration), and perhaps fraught with danger, but they persevered, confident of God's guiding hand.

On the way they came to Haran, another city in the fertile plains, where they stayed for several years and prospered. Here Terah died, and then the journey recommenced. The text suggests that God's call was reiterated and that, when the family set out once more, they took with them many servants and many possessions.

Describe how Abram, on arrival in the promised land, showed his belief in and gratitude towards the one God by building an altar for the purpose of sacrifice and worship. It is suggested that the incident in Egypt is omitted so as not to detract from the aim of the lesson, though you may wish to include it.

Help the children to imagine Abram alone on the hilltop. From such a place he could enjoy a panoramic view of the country on every side. Consider Abram's feelings as he stood looking over the land that was promised to him and his children. Dwell upon the invitation to explore the land and upon the repeated and expanded promises, adding the new points to the list:

5. I will give all this land to you and your descendants for ever
6. Your descendants will be so numerous, it will be impossible to count them

Emphasise to the children the importance of these promises to Abram and Sarah, and to all the Jewish people.

Make it clear that, although Abram was now living in Canaan, ownership of the land was not yet his and he continued to live a nomadic existence. In thankfulness for God's favour, Abram again built an altar and worshipped the Lord. He was grateful for having been called out of Ur and Haran and brought to this special land where he could worship the true God in peace.

Relevance to the children's lives

Because he trusted God, Abram left his home at God's command, without even knowing where he was to go. Do people in authority - our parents, teachers, the police, and others - instruct us to do things without always telling us the reason why? Should we readily obey such instructions? Why? (Try to evoke a response such as, "because we trust the people who give the instructions".)

Worksheets

The hidden sentences are 'God always keeps his promises' and 'Always keep your promise too'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please help us to love you more than all our possessions, and to trust in the promises you have made. Amen.

Memory verse

"The Lord said to Abram ... 'Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you'" (Genesis 13:14 and 17).