

Genesis 17; 18:1-15; 21:1-8

Aim of Lesson

To show how Abraham was prepared to believe God, even when God's promise seemed impossible.

Background study

Romans 4:16-24; Hebrews 11:11-12; 13:2.

Suggested outline of lesson

Introduce the lesson by discussing the promises that God had made to Abram, pointing out what had already been fulfilled and what was still to come. Make sure the children understand that the promise concerning the great nation that was to come from Abram necessitated the birth of an heir. Tell the children that Abram and Sarai had now been in Canaan many years, were very old (older than the scholars' own grandparents) and they had no children. Make the point that women do not usually have babies beyond the age of about fifty. Explain that this is all part of God's plan; that parents should be strong and able to care and provide for their children until they grow up. By now Abram and Sarai were well aware that it would no longer be possible for them to become parents.

However, God again repeated this remarkable promise: "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations". Read God's words aloud to the children (17:4-8). Explain that Bible names have particular meanings and that Abram is formed from two Hebrew words, meaning "exalted father". To confirm the promise he had made, God now changed his name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude". Sara's name was also changed to Sarah, which means "princess", a title of honour for "a mother of nations". Abraham's immediate reaction was one of incredulity, because of their great age, but the angel went on to specify that Sarah would indeed give birth to a son the following year, and indicated that he should be called Isaac, which means laughter - showing the joy he would bring to his parents.

Regarding the rite of circumcision introduced in this chapter, whether this is mentioned at all depends on whether you feel able to discuss it easily, whether the composition of the class is such as to accept it naturally, or whether questions arise which require straight answers. Should you find it appropriate to deal with the subject, it should be explained briefly, and in a matter-of-fact manner.

In describing the events of chapter 18, make full use of the opportunity to present a visual picture of the tent: Abraham seated at the opening, the burning heat of the midday sun, the shade of the oak trees, Sarah attending to her work in the tent, and the sight of three weary travellers approaching. Convey the busyness of the old couple and of the servants in generously providing for the needs of these total strangers. Explain that it was the custom in those times to offer hospitality to travellers in need of rest and refreshment.

Something the men said to Abraham made him realize they were no ordinary travellers. Help the children to understand something of the surprise that Abraham felt when these "men" gave him a message from God, and in so doing revealed that they were angels. Use this occasion to demonstrate that angels are not necessarily as they are commonly depicted by artists (i.e. ephemeral creatures with wings) but have often appeared as ordinary men. The writer to the Hebrews (Hebrew 13:2) refers to this incident, to commend Abraham's kindness, and to use it as an example of how believers should behave.

The messengers seemed particularly concerned to confirm to Sarah herself what God had already promised Abraham - that she should give birth to a son within a year. Later she was ashamed of her disbelief, for the angel had reminded them that nothing is too hard for God, who is the giver of all life. Refer to Romans 4, verses 20 and 21 to confirm Abraham's trusting acceptance of this assurance.

Ask the children to imagine the happiness shared by this childless couple when Sarah discovered that she was indeed expecting a baby as promised. Build up the feelings of excitement and expectancy. Describe the household busy with the preparations for this great event, the birth of the child wanted so desperately for such a long time. What an appropriate name Isaac was. Sarah had laughed at the prospect of becoming a mother but now she could laugh with the pure joy of fulfilment and motherhood.

Relevance to the children's lives

How did God prove, in this story, that he can do the impossible? Why wasn't it impossible for God? Abraham learned never to doubt God. Can we learn from this story how important it is to believe that God means everything he says?

Worksheets

The code reads 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we praise you for your power, knowing that nothing is impossible for you. Amen.

Memory verse

"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). "For with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:37).