

Genesis 22:1-19

Aim of Lesson

To show how Abraham's faith withstood a severe test. He was prepared to obey God's instructions without question.

Background study

Galatians 3:6-9; Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:21-23. Find a map of Canaan in patriarchal times, showing the location of Moriah.

Suggested outline of lesson

Talk about the childhood of Isaac who grew up under the care of loving and watchful parents. Contrast Isaac's way of life with that of children these days, pointing out his unique position in the household, his aged parents, and his nomadic existence. His family lived in tents, travelling on camels or donkeys, tending flocks and having no experience of modern housing, schooling, transport, entertainment or technology. Picture father and son together, with the still very active Abraham teaching Isaac about God, about God's promises and his own special place in God's plan, and at the same time passing on to him all his skill and knowledge as a master herdsman. The bond between them strengthened.

By the time he reached manhood, Isaac had developed physically, mentally and spiritually, and was very close to his father. Abraham must have been content, and confident that God's plan was being worked out. His son, whom he loved, was to continue with God's work for he (Abraham) soon must die.

Having painted an idyllic picture of the life they were leading, describe the shock to Abraham when one day he received a directive from God. Read the words of chapter 22 verse 2 together in class and make clear to the children what was meant by them. What was Abraham to think? What was he to do? God had given him this son in his old age for the express purpose of continuing the line and had stated specifically that through him the family would increase. Abraham would be perplexed. However, read together the subsequent verse, emphasizing the wonder of Abraham's firm resolve to do God's will. He never doubted God's goodness and wisdom.

Describe the quiet yet urgent preparations for a long journey being made in the camp whilst it was still dark. Provisions would have to be packed by the two servants and loaded on the donkey, together with a supply of kindling wood. Without disturbing the others, the party of four set out from Beersheba, northwards towards Mount Moriah. It would be necessary to camp out in the open each night, and possibly to rest in the shade during the hottest part of the day. Speculate about the thoughts that might have run through Abraham's mind during the three days' journey. His apprehension must have increased as they came within sight of the appointed place and, having instructed the servants to wait for them, the two of them went on alone. Isaac, the strong dutiful son, carried the heavy bundle of wood, while the old and resolute Abraham held the other necessary items.

Bring out the poignancy of Isaac's question, which must have momentarily disconcerted Abraham. But his quiet and wise reply provided the necessary reassurance and revealed his continued trust. It would appear that up to this point Isaac was unaware of his father's intention, but there was no mistaking the plan when the final preparations for the sacrifice were made. It tells us a great deal about the character of Isaac that he allowed himself to be bound and was prepared to obey his father even at the expense of his own life. Build up to the climax of the story, always conscious of the traumatic nature of the incident and the sensitivity of children. Do not detract from Abraham's complete readiness to make the sacrifice, for it was only at the eleventh hour that his hand was stayed.

Having built up the tension to this point, the children should feel relief that Isaac's life was spared. (We know that Abraham believed that, were Isaac to die, God could raise him up again). How joyfully and with what feeling of thanksgiving would Abraham have offered the captive ram. After worshipping at the altar, he named the place "The Lord will provide", which testifies to the whole point of the lesson and demonstrates the depth of Abraham's understanding of God's purpose. Abraham had been tested and had proved himself worthy of God's favour. An angel now expressed God's approval and again reiterated the promise of the everlasting inheritance.

How different would be the homeward journey from the heavy-hearted outgoing one. The bond between father and son would be even closer, and Isaac would have learned from the powerful demonstration of Abraham's faith and God's faithfulness that he, too, must fear and trust the Almighty.

Besides being true, the story is also a picture prophecy of another incident, which was to happen hundreds of years later, when another only son beloved of his Father showed complete obedience to his Father, carried wood on his back to an appointed hill and was sacrificed. On that occasion the son, Jesus, did die. Help the class to try and recognize the parallels between the two accounts. Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in obedience to God, to give hope of live everlasting to the world. He was then raised to life again and united with his Father.

Relevance to the children's lives

Abraham knew what God wanted him to do. What God asked of him was very difficult, but he was ready to do it. Are we asked to do difficult things for God? What might these things be? (Where children are not forthcoming, you should make suggestions for discussion such as owning up and facing punishment, doing right when others are doing wrong, forgiving someone who has wronged or hurt us, forgoing events which could clash with Sunday School, etc.)

Worksheets

The letters on the altar make the sentence 'Abraham trusted God'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for the example of Abraham. Help us to have the faith that he had, so that we will be obedient to your commands. Amen.

Memory verse

“Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you” (Genesis 22:16-17).