



Be certain

Aim of lesson

To look specifically at the promises made to Abraham and David, as well as God's promises through the ages, to give us confidence that what God has said he will do.

Bible background

Genesis 12:1-3,7

Preparation required

There are a lot of references in this lesson so it will be a good idea to decide what you are going to expect the students to tell you from memory, what you want them to look up and what you might tell them about.

You may like to search the internet for up-to-date information about the numbers of Jews who have been awarded Nobel prizes, or who are otherwise famous.

Outline of lesson

Talk about the importance of keeping promises. We feel let down by friends who say they'll do something and don't do it and we then feel we can't trust them. Are we sometimes guilty of lightly making promises and not sticking to our word? We live in a world of change. Even words like 'good' (as in "I'm good") and 'wicked' have changed their meaning, but God does not change and he can be relied on to keep his promises.

In this lesson, we are going to look at the important promises made to Abraham and his family - including David - and how they affect us. At the same time we shall discover that so many promises of God have been kept. None have been shown to be disregarded by God. Therefore we can be sure that those not yet completed will be.

Abraham

Now look with the class at Genesis 12:1-3,7¹ (quoted from the NIV in the students' books). Get them to think about the promises and make notes in their books about whether they were kept or how they could be kept in the future.

- **'I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you'** - Israel was a great nation by the time of David but will not truly be great until they recognise the Lord Jesus - Zechariah 12:7-10.
- **'I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.'** - in his lifetime Abraham became very wealthy and well respected (Genesis 14:14-16; 24:34-35 for instance), but more is yet to come. Matthew 8:11.
- **'I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;'** Two examples may help:
 - For hundreds of years Spain provided a home for Jews who were persecuted in other countries. By the 15th century it had become one of the world's mightiest powers and most developed cultures in, and in 1492 it sent Christopher Columbus on a voyage that changed history. But the same year, it also expelled all its Jews and intensified the Spanish Inquisition against the many forced Jewish converts to Catholicism. Since then it has declined and is often regarded as 'the sick man of Europe.'
 - Germany and Austria were the cultural and intellectual heart of the world before World War II, but during that war most of the Jews in Europe were killed in concentration camps. Germany was divided for a generation, and while it now thrives materially, culturally it has become largely irrelevant.
- **'and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'** - This is the most important part of the promises for us. Paul tells us that all nations, including Gentiles like us, would share in the promises to Abraham (Galatians 3:8).
- **'To your offspring I will give this land'** - At the time of the promise, Abraham was old, had no children, and was surrounded by Canaanite nations; yet he built an altar to the Lord, showing that he trusted God. He later died and still did not own the land. He had to buy land to bury Sarah, (Genesis 23:8-9) but we are told in Hebrews 11:13 that he died in faith that he would receive it in the end.

If we look at Gal 3:15-16 and 26-29 we can see that we can become children of faith in Christ Jesus and share in this great promise.

Romans 9:7 tells us that not all Abraham's descendants are his real children; only those who share his faith.

¹ The promises to Abraham are of course expanded later, in passages like Genesis 13:14-17; 15:5; 17:2-6; 22:17-18. If you have time you may like to look briefly at these with the young people.

Isaac and Jacob

The main points of the promises are repeated to Isaac in Genesis 26:3-4.

Jacob obtained the blessing by deceit, but it later that God made promises to him - Genesis 28:13-15; 35:10-12.

Ever since the Jews have occupied a unique place in the world. In the world of science and the arts their achievements have belied their small numbers.

David

Introduce the promises to David by looking at Matthew 1:1 and pointing out that the family line from Abraham to Jesus Christ goes through David. As with a will, the promises are kept in the family.

Turn to 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and get the class to say which part of the promise of God to David shows that at least some of the promise would have to be fulfilled after David was dead (establish the throne forever). Part of the promise was kept twice – Solomon was born and Jesus was born but the kingdom God promised has not been properly set up and certainly has not gone on forever.

You could look at Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 21:9, or John 8:33,39 to see that the people in Jesus' day believed they were the 'children of Abraham' who is the father of the faithful; some of them also realised that Jesus was the 'seed' or descendant promised to Abraham and David.

Other promises

Throughout scripture God was continually making promises, too many for us to count. On the second page in the students' books is a list of references to God's promises and a list of references for their fulfilments. It isn't intended that the students should look them all up but to show how many there are to choose from. Explain that this is just a selection of promises we could have chosen and get them to choose a few to look up.

There are one or two interesting things to point out denoted by the references in bold type. Some promises (seedtime and harvest shall not fail) have been being kept since the day they were made and can never really have a fulfilment date.

The promises of Joseph's two dreams of the sheaves and the stars were kept in Egypt. However Rachel was dead by this time so perhaps there will be another time they will be kept. The Deuteronomy references are ones that have happened several times and probably will again in the future. For one of these there is no scriptural reference, but the students will probably know what happened in the Second World War. Notice that some of the promises are conditional.

You could ask the class if they can think of a time that God said something would happen and it didn't. Having established that God always keeps his promises there are some promises on the same page in the students' books that can encourage us. By this stage of the lesson the class will probably have looked up enough verses so maybe they could look at these and decide which they are most glad about. Or have they a favourite of their own?

Relevance to our lives

A promise is not the same as a prophecy although we can use the same argument about trusting God to keep his word and can use the same examples. But a promise is a much more personal thing and the promises we have in the Bible show us how much God wants to give to those who trust him. Abraham and David trusted God to do things which at the time seemed impossible and we can do the same.

Extension activities

- Read Romans 4 for links between Abraham, David and Jesus and the purpose of the promises—look especially at verses 3,6 and 13 to see that the faith of Abraham and David were crucial.
- You could read with the class 2 Peter 1:3-4 to emphasise how we have been included in these great and precious promises. The subsequent verses show us what sort of lives we should lead as a result.