

Aim of lesson

To help the young people to understand how God has chosen to reveal himself to mankind through the ages. To demonstrate that in the same way as God is in the angels, in the prophets and apostles, and ultimately in the Lord Jesus, so God will live in us if we let him.

Bible background

Exodus 19:16-25; Genesis 18; Exodus 3; Hebrews 1:1-5.

Preparation required

If you have not done so already, look at the Introductory notes which precede this lesson. Look through the students' notes and familiarise yourself with the points that each section makes. Depending on the size of the group and the abilities of the young people, you will need to decide whether to cover all the examples given, whether to divide them among the young people, and so on.

Suggested outline of lesson

A reminder

If the young people have just completed the series on Creation they will probably have thought about God's great statement in Genesis 1: 'Let us make man in our image' in the context of his eternal purpose. Ask them about this and remind them of what the passage means.

The nature of God

You may like to ask the young people about some people they know, whose personality is expressed in things they make or do. It could be someone who designs and makes things, where one can see in the things they make an echo of the sort of person they are: a blunt, honest person who makes solid, strong, plain things; a fussy person who makes little, delicate objects and so on. Alternatively you may think of someone's home, or car: a nervous person who worries about her health or who is concerned that nobody should dirty the carpet; a brash, outgoing person who drives a bright red car. There should be no shortage of examples: the point is that we can learn about people from things they do or own, and especially from things they make.

Begin by asking the young people what we know about God and his character. Make sure that the points mentioned below are discussed, even if the young people don't turn to the passages.

Job 36:26: God is great and beyond our understanding.

Isaiah 55:8-9: His ways and thoughts are above ours.

1 Timothy 6:16: God is immortal and lives in unapproachable light; no-one can see him.

Psalms 139:7-8: God is everywhere.

Take the young people to Exodus 19:16-25, and try to get them to imagine the scene. The people of Israel had to keep away from the mountain because of the presence of God; not only that, but (Exodus 20:18-19) they were terrified and pleaded with Moses to act as a go-between.

Manifestation

To introduce the subject take the young people to 1 Timothy 3:16, which reads in the Authorised Version 'And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory'. Look at some other translations to see how the verse is expressed.

Even if you are using a modern version which does not use the word, it may be appropriate to think about the term 'manifestation'. When something is manifest it is 'obvious, or clearly seen'. Its most common usage these days is probably in the manifestos of political parties, which may not live up to their name!

In the AV, 'manifest' is a translation of the Greek word 'phanerosis', and its meaning is not quite grasped by words like 'revealed'. The point about 'God manifestation' is that the invisible God, whom we cannot fully understand, has made himself 'obvious, or clearly seen' to us by revealing himself in various ways, and in particular through angels and prophets, and ultimately in the Lord Jesus. In the end he will be revealed in all his creation. That is the theme of this lesson.

If you have a large enough group you may like at some point to share the following sections among them. It is probably best to consider the first three points with the whole class.

God the Creator

In creation we see God revealed as the almighty designer and creator, causing his words to be put into effect as part of an overall design. In Genesis 1:26 'us' refers no doubt to the angels, maybe represented as Elohim or 'mighty ones' - a multitude united together with God and with a common purpose. God was in them, and they in him, to fulfil his purpose.

In the plains of Mamre

As you go through the following sections, get the young people to complete the sections in their notes.

Trace the account of the occasion when the LORD appeared to Abraham when he was 99 years old and living at Mamre - the area around Hebron.

- Genesis 18:1 The account is introduced with the statement that it is the LORD appearing to Abraham.
- verse 2 What Abraham sees is three men, who rest under the tree and eat a meal with him.
- verse 20 The LORD says that he will go to Sodom.
- verse 22 The men leave to go to Sodom, but Abraham remains standing 'before the LORD', and there follows the dialogue about whether or not Sodom will be destroyed.
- verse 33 The LORD goes on his way.
- Genesis 19:1 Two angels arrive at Sodom.

So, who was it that Abraham met? It was at the same time the LORD, three angels, and three men. We have to understand how it was that the Lord God walked on the earth, ate and drank with Abraham, and spoke to him about the imminent destruction of Sodom. This was not the Almighty in all his glory, but an angel, appearing as a man, with whom God was identified, and who represented him. Nonetheless the scriptures tell us that Abraham was speaking with the LORD.

Jacob the wrestler

Genesis 32:24-30: Jacob wrestled with a man, and with God, and 'saw the face of God'

Hosea 12:3-5: Hosea tells us that Jacob wrestled with God, with the angel, and spoke with the LORD God Almighty.

Again, the Almighty God appears as a man.

God revealed to Moses

In the same way God appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:1-16. Through the miracle of the burning bush God caused Moses to re-direct his ways towards carrying out God's will. Compare the descriptions of the being who spoke with Moses.

- Exodus 3:2 The angel of the LORD appears
- verse 4-6 God calls to Moses out of the bush and says 'I am the God of your father ...'
- verse 7 And the LORD said

verse 13 Moses asks God what his name is, and in reply is given the memorial name

verse 16 Moses is instructed to tell the elders of Israel that 'The LORD God' had appeared to him.

Once more, it is clear that an angel appeared to Moses, but that the angel concerned bore the name of God. When he spoke, it was the Almighty God speaking, and what Moses saw was a revelation of God.

Spend a few moments discussing with the young people the memorial name of God. It is in Exodus 3:15 that the name 'Yahweh' appears. Yahweh means 'He who is' (and who will always be). Note that it is 'Yahweh' that is the name of God, not 'Yahweh Elohim' - see Exodus 6:3, Isaiah 42:8. God's words to Moses are translated in the Revised Version and in all modern translations as 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham ...'.

God does not say that at some remote time in the distant future He will become something He currently is not: rather, He promises that He will continue to be indefinitely what He already is, the ever faithful God of the Fathers, and now the protector of Moses and His people.

Brother Alfred Norris, 'What is his name', Aletheia Books

The angel of God's presence

Exodus 13:21: God goes before his people and is revealed in a pillar of fire - a defence to his people as well as a guide.

Exodus 14:19: It is an angel who is in the pillar and who leads the people

Exodus 23:20-23: The angel bore God's name and was therefore to be obeyed. He was able to pardon (or not) their transgressions.

Exodus 33:14: God promises that 'his presence' will go with them

Deuteronomy 32:10-12: The LORD God led them through the wilderness

Psalms 106:9: [The LORD] led them through the depths

Isaiah 63:9: The angel of his presence saved them

The captain of the army of the Lord

Joshua 5:13 - 6:2: Joshua sees a man, who is the captain of the host of the LORD, and who (6:2) speaks for God.

The prophets

2 Chronicles 36:12: Zedekiah 'humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD'. There was no difference between Jeremiah speaking and the Lord God himself.

Jeremiah 2:2-3: Jeremiah was speaking the words, but he was speaking for God. Get the young people to imagine that they were standing in the market place listening to Jeremiah. It would be as though God was there himself speaking to them.

In these last days ...

Now take the young people to Hebrews 1:1-5, and use this passage to place the Lord Jesus in his proper place in the pattern of God's revelation of himself. What this meant is the subject of the next topic. Suffice it to say that in the same sense as God ate with Abraham at Mamre and spoke with Moses at the bush, God revealed himself as a carpenter in Nazareth and washed the feet of his disciples. This is not trinitarian language; the trinity teaches that there are - always have been - three Gods in heaven and that one of them came down to earth as the Lord Jesus.

We shall be like him

Remind the young people that God said in the beginning, 'Let us make man in our image'.

Now look with them at 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Peter 1:3-4 and 1 John 3:2, maybe sharing the passages between them and then comparing what they say. They speak of the present and the future; of a gradual transformation now which will be completed, in God's mercy, at the return of our Lord.

Maybe it is all summed up in 1 Corinthians 15:28 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all'.

Relevance to our lives

Although God is all-powerful and beyond our imagination, he has revealed himself to us in many ways. In understanding God's character we begin to appreciate more and more what God wants us to do and the importance of living lives which show some of his character through our actions. This helps us to examine our actions carefully and avoid doing things which clearly do not manifest God in our lives.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you that you have revealed so much of yourself to us in practical ways through the angels, in your prophets and in the Lord Jesus. Please help us to live our lives in a way that will please you and will allow some of your character to shine out to those around us. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

1. Ask the students to consider a list of the typical activities which they engage in during the week and to then discuss the list in terms of how they could manifest God in their actions. Are there any activities which do not give us the opportunity to manifest God?
2. Act out a typical daily activity at school, university or at work in a way which does not manifest God and then in a way which does.