

LESSON 9: ABRAHAM (COVENANT WITH ONE TRIBE I)

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 7	:	Cover points 1 to 8
For Intermediate Level / Age 10	:	Cover points 1 to 10
For Advanced Level / Age 13	:	Cover points 1 to 13

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned from the account of Noah's story that the flood had wiped out all the people who refused to repent from their sins. But God saved Noah and his family and renewed His covenant with mankind. Unfortunately, mankind started becoming rebellious again by the time of Noah's grandchildren. In this lesson, we learn how God further expands His covenant with mankind through a man called Abraham.

Current lesson:

1. Read the passage from Genesis 12:1-8, 13:16-18, and explain to the students the promise that God had made to Abraham. In His covenant with Abraham, God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and make them His own people. In return, Abraham was to remain faithful to God so that he could be a channel of God's blessings to the rest of the human race. God later on reaffirmed the same covenant with Abraham's son, Isaac (Genesis 21:12; 26:3-4), and then subsequently also to Isaac's son, Jacob (Genesis 28:14-15).

As a sign of this covenant, God required for Abraham to circumcise the flesh of his foreskin. This requirement for circumcision applied to all his male descendants as well as his slaves. Newly born male babies would have to be circumcised at eight days old. Circumcision was a sign that the covenant between God and Abraham (as well as his descendants) was permanent. (Genesis 17:10-13)

2. Abraham's family was originally from Ur of the Chaldeans (ancient southern Babylonia) (Genesis 11:31), and they moved several hundred miles toward the northwest along the trade routes of the ancient world. Eventually they lived in Haran, a prosperous trade centre of that time.
3. At the age of 75, Abraham was called by God to leave Haran and go to an unknown land that God would show him. God promised to make Abraham and his descendants a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). In fact, several times in Genesis, Abraham was promised an heir by God. He was told he would have a son, and that son would have descendants more numerous than the sand on the sea shore. This promise seemed impossible because Abraham and his wife Sarah were childless, since Sarah was barren (Genesis 11:30-31; 17:15). But in faith Abraham obeyed God.
4. Abraham took his wife and his nephew, Lot, and they moved south along the trade routes from Haran, through Shechem and Bethel, to the land of Canaan which was populated by

fierce inhabitants. The circumstances were difficult, but Abraham had faith in God's promises.

5. After ten years of living in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah eventually became anxious about the promise of a nation being found in his descendants. They decided to take God's timing into their own hands, and Sarah arranged for Abraham to sleep with her Egyptian slave, Hagar, in order that Hagar might bear them a child. Hagar eventually got pregnant and bore Ishmael. At that time, Abraham was 86 years old.
6. It was only 14 years later that Sarah finally bore a son in her old (and barren) age, and he was named Isaac. Just prior to Sarah's pregnancy, God had told Abraham that he would be given a son through Sarah. Shortly before she conceived also, Abraham was visited by three "men" who told him that upon their return the following year, Sarah would have a son. Abraham was 100 years old by the time Isaac was born.
7. God has a perfect timing for everything that is to happen in our lives. Even if we do not know how or when His plan will take place, we need to be able to trust Him. Waiting with patience is a sign of trust in God.
8. When Ismael was 14 years old, Sarah saw him teasing the infant Isaac. Tension arose, because Sarah realised that she was not willing for Ishmael to share in Isaac's inheritance. She forced Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Even though Ishmael was not the promised son, Abraham still loved him, and God promised to bless him as well (Genesis 21:12-13). Ismael grew up, lived in the wilderness of Paran, became famous as an archer, married an Egyptian wife, and had 12 sons and a daughter.
9. Read Genesis 22:1-18 and explain the story to the students. When Isaac grew to be a young boy, God tested Abraham by telling him to take his son onto a mountain and offer him as a burnt sacrifice. This was a test that probably did not shock Abraham because the Canaanites practised child sacrifice (associated with one of their gods called Moloch). During the days of Abraham, people understood that a sacrifice had to be something painful, not just a cheap token. Hence, even though Abraham loved his son so much, he obeyed God with trust in His plan.

Abraham travelled for three days to the mountain that God commanded him to go to. Along the way, when Isaac asked where the animal was for the burnt sacrifice they were going to offer on the mountain, Abraham answered in faith that God would provide the sacrifice. But just as Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, he was interrupted by an angel of the Lord, and a ram caught in the bushes was provided as the sacrifice in place of Isaac.

10. Of course, God did not really mean for Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. He instructed Abraham to do this in order to foreshadow an important future event. A Father was going to sacrifice His Son one day. Just like Isaac who carried the wood up onto the mountain for his own sacrifice, a Son would one day carry his own wood of sacrifice up the slope of a hill to be sacrificed there. But that event would take place only 2,000 years later.

11. Abraham was a friend of God even though he was not a perfect man. He knows that God is a God of love who is true to His word. Abraham at his advanced age was truly old, yet God gave him children. Because of this, he knew by faith that Ishmael was safe even though he was forced to drive Ismael and Hagar away. In the same way, when he was asked to sacrifice Isaac, he knew by faith that Isaac would be fine. Even if he could not see how things would work out, he trusted that God was in control of everything.
12. Abraham demonstrates for us what faith in God means. Faith in God is more than just paying lip service. It requires our active cooperation with God's will by obeying His commands and instructions for us to perform certain actions with our lives and to live in a certain way. Faith involves doing what God says to do, not just believing with our minds.
13. In the case of Abraham, God required many sacrifices of Him, and ultimately a burnt sacrifice on the top of Mount Moriah. He also understood, as people of all generations did since Cain and Abel (sons of Adam and Eve who were born with Original Sin), that sacrifice was necessary whenever God called for it, and that it was up to God to dictate the terms of the nature of the sacrifice. God dictates the sacrifice, not the sinner.

Our friendship with God will cost us something that we need to be willing to give up for His sake. Like Abraham, we must be willing to obey without negotiating. Like Abraham who “rose up early the next morning... and took Isaac his son” to be sacrificed on Mount Moriah as soon as he received God's command to do so, we too have to be willing to act on God's command wholeheartedly, trusting that He always wants what is best for us.



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