



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for September 16, 2007
Released on Wednesday, September 12, 2007**

“Abraham, Sarah and Isaac”

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 51:1–5.

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 15:1–6; 18:1–15; and 21:1–8.

PRINTED TEXT: Genesis 15:5, 6; 18:11–14a; and 21:1–8.

TIME: about 2085 B.C.; 2066 B.C., and 2065 B.C.

PLACE: Canaan

LESSON TEXT

Genesis 15:5, 6

5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Genesis 18:11–14a

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD?

Genesis 21:1–8

1 And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

5 And Abraham was a hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

7 And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age.

8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

Retell the facts of God's promise to Abraham for offspring.

Explain the significance of the miraculous conception of Isaac.

Identify one area in his or her life to trust in God's care more fully.

Show that our God is a covenant-keeping God and that He does the impossible for all who will trust Him.

LESSON OUTLINE

ABRAM ASSURED (Gen. 15:5—6)

SARAH SURPRISED (Gen. 18:11—14)

ISAAC INTRODUCED (Gen. 21:1—8)

INTRODUCTION

"Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" This question really is a no-brainer to answer because the response will *always* be an absolute, "No!"

This question was put to me a few years ago by a spiritual leader to whom I had gone to receive counsel for a particular domestic concern. After listening to all that I had to say about my situation—the good, the bad, and the ugly of it all; this man of God simply asked, "Kimbly, is anything too hard for God?" I was stumped! What kind of question is *that* to be asking? Just about everyone knows that the answer, of course, is no.

There was a praise report that followed that individual episode, but soon after it there came other life episodes that required more fasting and more praying on my part, and the seeking of more wise counsel from godly persons. But, this is simply the cycle of life that believers as well as non-believers must deal with. The difference for us, however, is that we—the body of Christ—have Someone mediating on our behalf (that is, Jesus Christ); and we have Help during those very low points in our lives (that is, the Holy Spirit); in fact, we even have Someone who stands in control of the whole situation while we are "going through" (that is, God). And, at the other side of each of our challenges there lies a "praise report" that accompanies our glorifying God for His wonderful grace and mercy.

To be sure, God is the Creator of all things that we see and know, and the Creator of many more things that humankind has not yet acquired the intelligence to discover and understand. He is able to do what He wants, when He wants, and to whomever He wants because everything—including His human creation—belongs to Him.

Abraham and Sarah again witnessed first-hand what God could do by way of a physical miracle; that being the conception and birth of their biological son, Isaac,... at the ripe old ages of 100 and 90, respectively. We are reminded in today's lesson that God keeps His promises no matter how impossible they might seem to man.

I like God's response to the questioning "laughs" of Abraham (see Gen. 17:17) and Sarah (see Gen. 18:12—15) concerning a child being born between the two of them.

Their uncertainty was expressed in the form of laughter. God, in Genesis 17:19, tells Abraham that Sarah would deliver a son who he was to name "Isaac." This is quite a play on words because "Isaac" can literally be translated to mean "He (God) Is Laughing (Now)" (see Gen. 21:3, 6). Can't you just imagine God already knowing that Isaac would be born, and how Abraham and Sarah initially reacted to this announcement and then to Isaac's conception and birth, and finally how they later celebrated this birth with a great feast? God is so faithful to keep His promises!

We can trust Him today... *right now* with any concern or problem that we may have. We can even trust Him with our very souls! If you have not already gained eternal life through Jesus Christ by admitting that you are a sinner and in need of His forgiveness, why not do it today? Is anything too hard for the Lord?

LESSON BACKGROUND

As last week's lesson ended, we saw that man was created in God's image (Genesis 1:27); God then declared all He had made to be "very good" (v. 31). Placed in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve lived in innocence for an unknown period of time before Satan entered the picture and man disobeyed God and fell into sin (3:1-19).

Genesis then tells the sad episode of Cain and Abel and the increase of sin on the earth (4:1-16). Within ten generations of Adam, man had become so evil that God determined to destroy the world because of its wickedness (6:5-7). Noah and his family had the daunting task of beginning again after the great flood (9:1).

Another notable matter in the first pages of Genesis is the Tower of Babel (11:1-9).

While the first eleven chapters of Genesis provide us with important historical information, they also serve as an introduction to the importance of Abraham and his descendants, a topic that occupies much of the rest of the Bible. According to Archbishop James Ussher, the time from Adam to Abraham was nearly two thousand years. While other scholars propose different chronologies, all recognize that a significant period of time elapsed between Adam and Abraham.

QUESTIONS

I. ABRAM ASSURED (Gen. 15:5–6)

1. Why did God have Abram consider the stars?

A major obstacle facing Abram in the fulfillment of God's promise of bountiful descendants was the fact that both he and Sarah (still known as Sarai at this point) were old and childless. At this point in his life, Abram was beginning to wonder how God would fulfill His promise. It seemed that his steward Eliezer would inherit everything, even though he was not a son (Gen. 15:2).

The Lord reassured the patriarch, Abram (soon to be called Abraham), concerning Eliezer, "This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (Gen. 15:4). "Eliezer of Damascus" is only mentioned by name in this text, and is speculated to have been the same *unnamed* servant of Abraham who went on the quest for a wife for Isaac (see Genesis 24:2–4).

To further reassure Abram of His promise of many descendants, God told him, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. 15:5). In other words, as numberless as the stars of heaven are, so would the descendants of Abram be. "The word by which

God created the stars would also guarantee Abram's seed" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge commentary*, Cook).

2. What does it mean that Abram "believed in the Lord" (Gen. 15:6)?

In spite of what seemed to be overwhelming evidence that Abram would have no natural heir, "he believed in the Lord." This, of course, does not mean that Abram had not previously believed in the Lord. His departure from Ur (12:4), construction of altars to the Lord (12:7; 13:18), and trust in God during troubled times all indicate a genuine faith in God. As with us, Abram's faith was tested. Doubts can easily arise at such times.

In the New Testament, however, Abraham is set forth as a man of great faith, not a doubter (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6–9; Heb. 11:8–12; Jas. 2:21–24). Consequently, Genesis 15:6 is quoted three times in the New Testament (in Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6; and Jas. 2:23).

3. How is faith connected to righteousness?

God did not declare Abram to be in a right relationship with Him because he performed some meritorious work or in some other way earned favor with God. Rather, because Abram "believed... [God] counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Abram was justified by faith, and so are believers today. "Abram's faith is recorded here because it is foundational for making the covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant did not give Abram redemption; it was a covenant made with Abram who had already believed and to whom righteousness had already been imputed (or assigned). The Bible clearly teaches that in all ages imputed righteousness (i.e., salvation) comes by faith" (Walvoord and Zuck).

Thank God that this includes us today! How do you qualify to become righteous through Jesus Christ? You must believe Jesus Christ is who Scriptures say He is. You must believe that He died for your sins—and admit that you are a sinner. You must believe that Jesus rose from the dead and is one day coming back again for His own.

4. How is this related to Paul's doctrine of justification by faith?

Since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and none are righteous (vs. 10), the only way we can be justified is by being declared such by God alone. This is the concept of imputed righteousness; that is, God declares us righteous by faith.

"In the New Testament, justification is the declarative act of God by which, on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law which pertain to them. Justification is a forensic act imputing the righteousness of Christ to the believer... It is a matter of declaring the person righteous, as a judge does in acquitting the accused" (Erickson, *Introducing Christine Doctrine*, Baker).

II. SARAH SURPRISED (Gen. 18:11–14)

5. Why did Sarah laugh regarding God's promise?

When the Lord reassured Abraham that a son was to be born, Sarah was eavesdropping. Already alluded to were the couple's advanced age (see Gen. 17:17). While Abraham may have been able to sire a child, Sarah was beyond child-

bearing age. "Therefore Sarah laughed within herself" (18:12) at the prospect of becoming pregnant at her age. Of course, Abraham was "old also."

Sarah laughed to herself, thinking no one else heard. The Lord, however, knew Sarah's thoughts and asked Abraham why she laughed. To laugh at the promises of God is to doubt them. Similarly, Zacharias doubted that he and his wife could have a child in their old age (Luke 1:18). Mary, however, responded to a similar message by saying, "Be it unto me according to thy word" (vs. 38).

6. What response did God make to Sarah's laughter?

Rhetorically, the Lord asked, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14a). "This account is a call to believe that God can do the impossible. He confirmed His promise by a personal visit—and ate with them—to announce that the time was at hand. It was the annunciation of a humanly impossible birth. When something as incredible as this is declared, the human response is consistent: like Sarah, people are taken off guard, laugh, and then out of fear deny that they laughed" (Walvoord and Zuck).

While not all the promised of Scripture apply directly to us today, we can be certain that when God makes a promise to His people, it will be fulfilled. Christians know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

III. ISAAC INTRODUCED (Gen. 21:1–8)

7. How does Genesis 21:1, 2 help ensure a proper view about God and time?

I must have been difficult for Abraham and Sarah to continue believing that God was going to fulfill His promise of an heir. However, "the Lord visited Sarah" to fulfill His promise, and the result is a miraculous pregnancy.

The concept of *time* is important to us because for us time runs out. But time never runs out for God. God is not bound by time. He has always existed, and He will always exist.

Though God exists above time, He chooses to work within time. We see that with Abraham and Sarah. We also see it with Jesus: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). We can be sure that God is working in our time and will provide for our needs at the right time, in the right way.

8. Why was Abraham's child named "Isaac?"

Throughout the Bible, names are quite significant. The name given at birth may reflect something of the circumstances of the birth or the aspirations of the parents for that child. Or a name may be changed because of a change of character. In this case, the son of Abraham and Sarah was given the name "Isaac," which means "laughter" or "he laughs."

There are two views concerning God's purpose in giving the child this name (see Gen. 17:19). First, some think that the name "Isaac" would be a constant reminder of the skepticism of both Abraham and Sarah as they contemplated the birth of this child (17:17; 18:12). Others, however, believe that the child was so named to reflect the joy experienced by this aged couple.

"The name Isaac ('he laughs') is cleverly explained in this passage. Sarah said that God gave her laughter, that is, joy. Her laughter of unbelief was no changed to

rejoicing through the provision of her son. Everyone who would hear about this would laugh, that is rejoice, with her" (Walvoord and Zuck).

9. Why was circumcision commanded?

Earlier, God had given the rite of circumcision as a sign of the covenant He was making with Abraham and his posterity (or future generations) (see 17:9–14). This was not a new rite, for it was practiced by others in the ancient world. It was, however, given new meaning as a sign of the covenant. "Elsewhere Scripture refers to circumcision as a symbol of separation, purity, and loyalty to the covenant" (Walvoord and Zuck).

Scripture gives no reason why circumcision was performed on the eighth day, the very day that Jehovah commanded Abraham to circumcise Isaac" (McMillen, *None of These Diseases*, Revell).

10. What does the New Testament have to say concerning the rite of circumcision?

In later Jewish history, the rite took on a meaning far beyond what God originally intended. In the early days of the church, some claimed that redemption could be extended only to the circumcised. The Judaizers said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Paul made it clear that the circumcision of the new covenant was spiritual, not physical (Rom. 2:25–29; Gal. 5:1–4; Col. 2:11–14).

"It is important to note that circumcision was not a "sacrament" (or reparation or atonement for anything). The performing of it did not convey spiritual blessing to the recipient. An eight-day-old baby boy would not even understand what was going on; and when he got older, the ritual would have to be explained to him. *It was the obedience of the parents that was important*; for if they did not obey God in this manner, their son would be cut off from his people" (Wiersbe).

11. What kind of celebration was held when Isaac was weaned?

No longer laughing in doubt, Sarah now laughed with joy. As unbelievable as it seemed, all those who heard the incredible news about Abraham and Sarah would laugh with joy too. *Besides, there was living proof that God had worked a miracle: young Isaac was on the scene to refute anyone who would not believe in Abraham and Sarah's promise-keeping God!*

When the time came for Isaac to be weaned (usually at about age three), a great celebration was held. The occasion must have been particularly joyous as they recalled the Lord's faithfulness to His promises. –John Alva Owston

CONCLUSION

A. The Importance of Abraham

The promises to Abraham focused on two points: (1) Abraham's posterity was to be made a great nation and be given the land of Canaan as a possession (see Genesis 17:8), and (2) in Abraham (and through Christ) all the families of the earth were to be blessed (see John 8:56–58; Galatians 3:16).

In this light, Genesis 12:2, 3 can be seen as the theme of the entire Bible: God would make a great nation of Abraham, and God would bring blessing to the nations through Abraham and his offspring. We as Christians believe that Abraham is the

“father of the faithful” and that everyone in Christ is part of the offspring of Abraham.

Paul’s writings are very important for forming our self-understanding as Christians. Paul was a Jewish Christian, and he was extremely knowledgeable about the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament. Paul was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5). We may be surprised, then, when we learn who Paul thought was the primary hero of the Old Testament. We may expect this person to have been Moses, the great lawgiver and founder of the nation of Israel. Indeed, Paul had great respect for Moses. But Paul’s “leading man” was Abraham. This is because Paul understood Abraham to be the primary example of the person of faith.

In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul lays out a devastating argument against the necessity of circumcision for Christians. This amounts to a repudiation (or denial) of the whole idea of being considered righteous because of keeping the Jewish law, an idea that was being debated in the first-century church.

Paul notes that Abraham was reckoned as righteous because of his faith (Romans 4:3–5; compare Genesis 15:6). But in a nice piece of detective work, Paul also notes that this reckoning occurred *before* Abraham was circumcised (Romans 4:10–12; compare Genesis 17:24). Abraham’s right standing with the Lord was not the result of works, but the result of his faith.

This may seem like a complicated argument from the ancient world that has little relevance for us today. But such a conclusion would be to miss Paul’s point. It is because of this system of “righteousness through faith” (as opposed to “righteousness through works”) that all Christians are saved.

We cannot earn our salvation. It is a gift, given freely by God to those who believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, as they follow the biblical plan of salvation. It is this mighty truth that allows Paul to say, “they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7).

PRACTICAL POINTS

A man of true faith believes God, even when He promises things that are difficult to comprehend (Gen. 15:5–6; Heb. 11:6).

God does not very often work on our timetable (Gen. 18:11–12).

Nothing we can think of is impossible with God (Gen. 18:13–14; see Matt. 19:26).

God always keeps His promises in His time (Gen. 21:1–2).

True thankfulness to God is best shown by complete obedience (vs. 3–4).

We should never cease to marvel at God’s goodness and power (vs. 5–7).

Your future is secure when you are in God’s hands (v. 8).—*Don Kakavecos*

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Abraham is still a model of faith.

PRAYER

God of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, we trust in You to be our shield and our protector. We trust in you to be our rewarder and the guide for our future. May we, like Abraham, be counted as righteous in Your eyes because of our faith. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In our lesson next week (September 23, 2007), we will see how sometimes God deals graciously with even our enemies. Read Genesis 21:9–21 in preparation for the lesson entitled, "Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael." The Golden Text is Genesis 21:12–13. *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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