



LESSON 9

Abraham and Sarah doubt God

GENESIS 16:1-6; 17:15-21; 18:1-15



Those who doubt God experience great pain.



“Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son”
(Gen 18:14).

Supporting Truths

1. Doubt is thinking that God might not be able to do what He says He will do.
2. Doubting God causes suffering.
3. God patiently strengthens those who are weak in faith.
4. Trusting God means trusting God’s methods and God’s timing.
5. Trusting God means trusting God’s Messiah.

Objectives

1. Describe how Abram and Sarai showed that they doubted God’s promise.
2. Describe some of the pain Abram and Sarai caused by doubting God.
3. Explain how God patiently strengthened Abraham and Sarah’s faith.
4. Show how Abraham and Sarah believed the promise but not the method or timing.
5. Explain that the Messiah was a descendant of Isaac.

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON



Abraham and Sarah doubt God • Genesis 16:1-6; 17:15-21; 18:1-15

Lesson Summary

God strengthened the faith of Abraham and Sarah by promising something that seemed impossible to them. He promised a son, but He required them to wait twenty-five years before the child was born. They thought they were too old, so they tried to make God's promise happen in their own way. Sarah persuaded Abraham to have a child with her maid Hagar, and Abraham asked God to let this child, Ishmael, be the promised son. But their doubt only caused pain. In response, God was patient and faithful. He strengthened their faith and reminded them that nothing is too hard for God.

Spotlight on the Gospel

God promised to make a great nation through Abraham, but how could this happen when Sarah was barren and very old? Abraham and Sarah doubted, causing pain by doing things their own way. But God confirmed His promise that Sarah would have a son, and through that son would come Jesus. Now we are faced with the same choice as Abraham: will we come to Jesus and be saved in the way God promises, or will we cause great pain by trying to find salvation our own way?

LAST WEEK



**God makes a promise
to Abram**
Genesis 11:27-12:9

THIS WEEK



**Abraham and Sarah
doubt God**
*Genesis 16:1-6;
17:15-21; 18:1-15*

NEXT WEEK



**God judges Sodom and
Gomorrah**
Genesis 18:16-19:29

PROMISE

Lesson Commentary

Those who doubt God experience great pain.

God chose to call Abram to be the father of His chosen nation, even though Abram's wife was **barren** and could not have children (Gen 11:30). God would have to overcome this obstacle, because the salvation of all humanity depended on God's promise to Abram (12:2). Through Abram all the families of the earth would be blessed (12:3). So why did God choose a man with a barren wife? God chose Abram so that he might learn to fully trust in God and not in his own strength or resourcefulness. God's choice of Abram teaches us, too. It teaches us about the painful consequences of doubting God and reveals the faithfulness of God, giving us hope that God will also be faithful and patient with us as we, like Abram, learn to fully trust God.



THINK ABOUT IT

Abraham was declared righteous by God through faith alone.

Abram and Sarai caused pain through impatience (16:1–6)

As time went by and Abram had no son, he began to wonder how God would keep His promise. So Abram asked God if his servant

would be his heir, since he had no son of his own (15:2–3). God answered that Abram would have a son of his own to be the heir. Abram believed God, and God counted Abram's faith as righteousness (15:6).

But time passed, and ten years after the first promise of many descendants (16:3), Abram still had no son. This time Sarai took matters into her own hands. She assumed she would never have children, since she was about seventy-five years old (16:2). So she offered her maid, Hagar, to Abram to have a child for her (16:2). This was not unusual in that time; ancient legal codes allowed a maid to have children for her mistress. Even so, it was not what God had planned. Just as Adam followed Eve into sin, so Abram followed Sarai. He

failed to take initiative to lead in faith as husbands ought to do (Eph 5:22–33). Without seeking God's counsel, he had a child with Hagar.

This action was not so much an act of unbelief as it was of impatience, for Abram "did not waver in unbelief" (Rom 4:19–21). He knew God would give him a son, but God had not yet specified that the son would come through Sarai. So the lack of faith was a failure to wait for God to act (Ps 27:14). That is why these chapters in Genesis so often mention the timing. God is faithful, but He acts in His own timing (2 Pet 3:8–9).

When we trust human efforts instead of God's plan, we cause much pain (Jer 17:5). Abram and Sarai's sin made their home miserable. Hagar despised Sarai (Gen 16:4), Abram shirked responsibility (16:5–6), and Sarai treated Hagar harshly (16:6). But the pain caused by their sin was not limited to their immediate family. Ishmael's descendants would cause great pain to Isaac's descendants (16:12), and this conflict continues even today in the Middle East.

Abraham doubted, but God strengthened his faith (17:15–21)

Abram was impatient with God, but God was patient with him. He did not cancel His promise to Abram (Gen 12:2–3). Instead, He was faithful, and He patiently gave Abram reasons to strengthen Abram's faith. God did this by making a covenant with Abram (17:2). A **covenant** is an agreement between two or more people, like a promise. This time God changed his name to Abraham, which means "father of many" (17:5). God also clarified exactly how these descendants would come: they would come through Sarah's own son (17:16). That is why God also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, which means "princess," because through Isaac she would become the mother of nations, and kings would come from

THINK ABOUT IT

What devastation could have been avoided if Abram and Sarai had left the matter in God's hands?



STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON



Abraham and Sarah doubt God • Genesis 16:1–6; 17:15–21; 18:1–15



THINK ABOUT IT

It was 25 years before Abraham and Sarah received the son of the promise.

her (17:16). This has come true, for the greatest king, Jesus Christ, came from her, and through Jesus all nations are blessed.

This promise was difficult for Abraham to believe

at first. Abraham had been 86 years old when Ishmael was born (16:16), and now he was 100 and Sarah was 90 (17:17). God required him to wait for many years, teaching him to wait for God's timing and not his own (Ps 27:14). So Abraham again suggested what he thought was a better plan: he asked if Ishmael could be the one to fulfill the covenant (Gen 17:18).

Fortunately, Abraham asked God about his plan this time instead of acting on his own. God rejected Abraham's plan, but He graciously chose to bless Ishmael too for Abraham's sake (17:19–21). God proved that He was **faithful**. He was trustworthy, doing exactly what He said He would when He promised to bless Abraham and his descendants (12:2). At first Abraham had **doubted**: he thought God might not be able to do what He said He would do. But in the end Abraham responded in faith by obeying God's command for circumcision (17:23). God was causing Abraham's faith to grow, little by little.

Sarah doubted, but God strengthened her faith (18:1–15)

Abraham and Sarah had grown in faith. They realized that their plans with Hagar and Ishmael were not good, and they no longer argued when God rejected Ishmael as the covenant son (17:21–22). Also, when God and two angels appeared in the form of three men, Abraham and Sarah demonstrated their godliness by being exemplary hosts, hurrying to offer a feast without even knowing who the strangers were (18:1–8). Hospitality

in that culture, even among the pagans, was viewed as a great virtue.

This hospitality took place at the oaks of Mamre (18:1), where Abraham had settled after Lot took the well-watered lowlands (13:18). The mention of this place is a reminder that despite his errors, Abraham was consistently a man of faith. As a result of his faith, one of his descendants, King David, would be crowned king at the same location, which by then had been named Hebron. While many modern readers skip past the names of places, Moses wrote the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) to people about to enter this very land. The places were reminders of God's faithfulness.

To continue strengthening their growing faith, God now revealed the time frame: the child would come within one year (18:10). Just as He did with Abraham and Sarah, God often tests His people by waiting to act until they have learned to trust Him. Thankfully, God does not wait for us to be perfect. Sarah laughed; she still did not understand how she could have a child now that she was so old (Gen 18:12). She still needed to grow in faith. God's response to Sarah is the lesson He had been teaching from the time He first chose a man with a barren wife: "Is anything too difficult for the LORD?" (18:14). Nothing is. God is **omnipotent**: He is able to do just as He pleases (Ps 115:3).

The story ends without resolution: the son is yet to be born. But God was teaching Abraham and Sarah to believe even when the promise was a long time coming. God was patient with Abraham and Sarah, and this gives us hope that He will be patient with us, too. We all face the same choice as Abraham: will we come to Jesus and be saved in the way God promises, or will we cause great pain by trying to find salvation our own way?

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

Abraham and Sarah doubt God • Genesis 16:1–6; 17:15–21; 18:1–15



Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. What was the promise that God gave to Abram?**
God promised Abram many descendants. They would number more than the stars in the sky.
- 2. How did Abram and Sarah try to help God with His promise?**
Sarah suggested that Abram marry Hagar and have a son with her.
- 3. What happened in Abram's family when Hagar became his wife and found out that she was going to have a baby?**
Hagar was rude to Sarah, and Sarah was mean to Hagar.
- 4. What did Sarah do when the angel promised her a son?**
Sarah laughed because she and Abraham were too old to have a baby.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What does the Bible say Sarah did to solve the problem of having no children?**
Sarah told Abraham to have a child with her servant, Hagar.
- 2. What should Sarah have done to solve the problem of having no children?**
Sarah should have trusted God's promise.
- 3. Why were Sarah and Abraham wrong to have Hagar have the baby?**
When God says that He will do something, we should trust Him that He will do it. Abraham and Sarah were not patient.
- 4. Who did God promise would bear Abraham a son?**
God promised that Sarah would have a son (Gen 17:16).
- 5. How did Abraham feel about God's promise of a son?**
Abraham doubted that God could keep His promise because he thought it was physically impossible to have children.
- 6. How did God respond?**
God strengthened his faith by promising him that Sarah would give birth to a son that he was to name, Isaac.
- 7. How did Sarah feel about God's promise of a son?**
Sarah doubted God and laughed at the promise.
- 8. How did God respond?**
God strengthened her faith by reminding her that nothing is too difficult for the LORD.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

THE WAITING GAME

Have the children stand in a circle an arm's length apart from one another. Tell them that you will be playing some music. When the music starts playing, they should start dancing. When the music stops, they must freeze and wait until the music starts again before they dance. Explain to them that in today's lesson, they will learn the importance of being patient.

MAKING LUNCH

Let the children make different food items from Play-Doh. Pretend to prepare lunch for three guests. Ask the children whether they wait patiently at home when their mothers prepare lunch. Make long tubes of Play-Doh by rolling it with your hands. Make a round face and add eyes and a mouth. Talk about waiting with a happy face or a sad face. Knowing that God keeps His promises gives us a happy face.



ILLUSTRATE

TRUSTING

Set an empty chair before the children. Ask whether they believe that the chair will hold them if they sit in it. Ask for a volunteer to come sit in the chair. While the child is sitting, talk about how we can know God and believe in Him, but we must act on that belief by putting our trust and faith in Him. God promised Abraham and Sarah a son, and they should have trusted God to provide them with a child. Their action should have been to remain dedicated to each other in their marriage and wait for God to produce the child.

PATIENT BAKING

During the Bible lesson, bring out a snack and show it to the children. Promise them that they will get to eat this snack at the end of class. They will have to wait for the snack just as Abraham had to wait for God's promise of a son. Ask the children whether they will wait patiently or will be impatient like Abraham and Sarah.



APPLY

HAPPY HEART

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft page, red or pink colored paper, yarn, hole punch, scissors, cotton balls.

Directions: Make two copies of the Happy Heart craft page on colored paper. Cut out the two heart shapes for children. Pass out two heart shapes to each child and help children punch holes on the black dots. Place heart shapes over each other and help children thread the yarn through the holes tying the two shapes together. After about two thirds of the holes are threaded fill the heart with cotton balls. Finish threading the holes, tie off yarn, and trim off extra yarn.



Happy Heart
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

LEARNING TO WAIT

Set a kitchen timer or an alarm clock for 30 seconds. Tell the children to sit quietly in their seats until the timer goes off. See how many are able to do this. After the timer or alarm goes off ask the children what it was like to wait. Did they feel impatient? Explain that in today's lesson they will learn how hard it was for Abraham and Sarah to wait for a baby, and how they made mistakes when they became impatient.

DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH

Divide the class into groups of 8–10 children. Direct each group to sit in a circle. Give each group index cards containing goofy statements designed to make the hearer laugh. The object of the game is for each child to make the child on his right laugh while saying the statement on his card. However, he has only three chances to make the other child laugh. After all children have participated, children may vote on the “best laugh” from their group. Use this game to emphasize Abraham and Sarah's response to God's promise that they would have a child in their old age.



ILLUSTRATE

EGG CHALLENGE

Bring in a few hard boiled eggs and one regular egg. Begin the challenge by cracking open the regular egg over a bowl while the children watch. Then ask for a volunteer to crack open the next egg over his head. Give the child a hard boiled egg and ask him to trust you that this egg will be different. Explain that Abram had to trust God that He would give him a son even though it looked like he couldn't have children.

WAITING FOR A TREAT

Give each child a candy or small snack at the beginning of the lesson. Tell the children to put the treat under their chair and to leave it there for the entire lesson. During the lesson ask the children if it is hard to be patient. Explain that Abraham and Sarah had to wait 25 years for a son. After the lesson is finished allow the children to eat their treat.



APPLY

ABRAHAM AND SARAH PUPPETS

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: 2 craft pages, 2 brown paper bags, wiggly eyes, yarn, glue, and crayons.

Directions: Tell the children that they will be making two puppets, one of Sarah and one of Abraham. Give each child two brown paper lunch bags and four wiggly eyes. Have the children glue two wiggly eyes to each lunch bag and then color in a nose, mouth, and clothes. (The mouth should be on the overlap of the bag.) Next, have the children glue clumps of black yarn, about three to four inches long, on the Sarah puppet. This will be her hair. For Abraham, have them glue clumps of brown yarn, about two inches long, around the mouth. This will be his beard. Glue more brown hair on the top and sides of the upper part of the bag. This will be Abraham's hair. Finally, glue a strip of ribbon across each puppet's “hair” to serve as a headband.



Abraham and Sarah Puppets
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1

AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

HOW OLD?

Survey parents as they drop off their children for class. Have them tell you how old they were when their child was born. Graph the results of this survey on the board. Discuss your results. What was the average age of mothers and fathers when these children were born? How old were the youngest parents? How old were the oldest parents? When is a person too old to have children? In today's lesson we will learn that Abraham and Sarah thought they were too old to have a baby.

SIGN LANGUAGE FOR "WAIT"

Learn how to say the word "wait" in sign language. Teach this sign to the children and talk to them about waiting. Abraham and Sarah waited almost 25 years to have a baby. Tell them that Abraham and Sarah were very, very old. In today's lesson, we will learn that God said Abraham and Sarah would have only a little longer to wait.



ILLUSTRATE

AGING ABRAHAM

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

To help the children understand the time that elapsed between the original Abrahamic Covenant and the birth of Isaac, fill out the "Aging Abraham" chart as you teach through the lesson. Ask the children how many years passed between the original covenant and Isaac's birth.

BABY BOY

Have someone bring his baby son to class. Have this person tell the children that this is his baby son. Ask the children whether any of them are sons. All the boys in the class once were baby sons who grew to be bigger boys. We are all children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Explain to the class that God's promise to Abraham involved a baby boy.



APPLY

PROMISES, PROMISES

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 1.

Use the "Promises, Promises" work sheet to take an inventory of all God's promises to Abram. Label each promise by circling the letter for one of three categories:

- L—Land;
- D—Descendants;
- O—Other.

You may wish to do this as a group activity. Then put a check mark by the promises that could not be fulfilled unless Abram had a son.