

08.08 Three Visitors (Genesis 18:1-16)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visual aids found at the end of this lesson. Please credit sources for pictures.
- (optional) *Herein Is Love Commentary Series: Genesis, A Commentary for Children*, written by Nancy Ganz and published by Shepherd Press in 2002. Thoughts or quotations borrowed from her in the following story will be acknowledged as (*Ganz*).
- See “Activities” and “Handwork” for more suggestions.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach:

- *preincarnate*: incarnate means to be in flesh and blood; preincarnate is before becoming flesh and blood; this can be said only of Jesus—before He became a person on earth, He was with God as a spirit being
- *Jehovah/Yaweh*: LORD (notice the small capital letters—the way it is shown in most translations of the Old Testament); the covenant-keeping God
- *Adonai*: a name for God sometimes used in place of the word *Jehovah* but still showing reverence; this term is sometimes used of men and means a ruler
- *righteous*: to be righteous is to do right; a person who does right

Scripture: (ESV)

Genesis 18:1 And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth 3 and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4 Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, 5 while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” 6 And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs* of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” 7 And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8 Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

9 They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” 10 The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. 11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” 13 The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ 14 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.” 15 But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

16 Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. 17 The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, 18 seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? 19 For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

20 Then the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, 21 I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me.

And if not, I will know.”

22 So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. 23 Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? 24 Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” 26 And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

27 Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. 28 Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” 29 Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” 30 Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” 31 He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” 32 Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” 33 And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Introduction/Review:

[Teacher, first display the chart of the four names of God found below and teach with motions: *El Elyon*—reach up; *El Shaddai*—flex arm muscles; *Jehovah/Yaweh/ LORD*—hands over heart; *Adonai*—index finger pointed authoritatively.]

God had given promises to Abraham mainly about two things. What were they? [Land and descendants.] What was the problem about the land? [Abraham was living there like a sojourner, one living there temporarily.] God had promised, though, that in years to come his descendants would come to this very land and it would become theirs. What was the problem about the descendants? [Abraham had no children; however, when he tried to help God, he had a son, Ishmael, by Sarah’s servant, Hagar.]

Meanings of names are important in the Bible. What does Sarai mean? [Contentious.] Sarah? [Princess.] How about Abram? [Exalted father.] And Abraham? [Father of many nations.] Your name? [Students may answer if they remember the meanings of their names from the last lesson.]

During Abraham’s last encounter with God (when God had changed his and Sarah’s names), God had said old Sarah would have a son, Isaac, whose name means laughter, and all God’s promises to Abraham would be fulfilled through him, not through Ishmael. How did Sarah find out about this news? [Abraham had to tell her.] Do you think Sarah believed Abraham? I wonder if she needed a little more proof that this news was indeed true. She was about to get it.

Story:

Abraham was 100 years old. It was a hot day. He sat at the door of his tent, probably one of the best places to stay cool. Suddenly, he looked up and saw three men nearby. They were coming to visit him!

Abraham, the good host

As quickly as his 100-year-old legs would allow, Abraham jumped to his feet and ran to them from his tent. ✓ Whether he did it from polite custom or because he recognized something very special about these men, we don’t know, but he bowed himself to the ground before them and said, “O Lord (*Adonai*) [Teacher, show the *Adonai* card], if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought to wash your dusty feet and rest yourselves under the tree while I bring a morsel of bread so that you may refresh yourselves. After that you may pass on.”

The strangers answered, “Do as you have said.”

Abraham scurried to get the best meal possible for them. Going quickly to Sarah, he said, “Quick! Get some

fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.”

Then he ran to the herd and took a calf (it would make tender and good meat). He gave it to a young man to prepare quickly. When the bread and meat were prepared, Abraham took curds and milk (like cottage cheese), the calf, and the bread and set all this food before his guests. He stood like a servant nearby under the tree while they ate.

The LORD and the message

“Where is Sarah your wife?” a visitor asked. What? Did this stranger know the name of Abraham’s wife? Had Abraham told him? How did He know her name? You are about to find out why He knew her name.

Abraham answered, “She is in the tent.” Sarah, indeed, was in the tent, listening at the tent door behind them all.

The next words in the Bible are, “The LORD said—.” *Who* said? The LORD. [Teacher, display your *Jehovah* card.] This *was* Someone special; it was the LORD—*Jehovah*! Who were the other two men? Later in the next chapter of Genesis, we learn that they were angels, spirit beings who were manifesting themselves as men.

Why was the preincarnate Jesus there? What was He about to say? Listen: “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” Oh, now Sarah heard those words herself. Abraham didn’t need to tell her; she heard the words from God Himself!

Sarah, the unbelieving

Remember, Abraham and Sarah were very old. In fact, Sarah was 90 years old; so she laughed to herself ✓ in unbelief [Teacher, demonstrate a silent laugh], thinking, “I can’t have a child; I’m too old!” Nobody saw her or heard her laugh, for she was behind them.

But the LORD knew, and He said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ” (Gotcha, Sarah! You are found out.) *Jehovah* continued: “Is anything too hard for the LORD? I repeat; at the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Despite the unbelievably good news, Sarah, ✓ maybe recognizing *Jehovah* God Himself, was afraid and denied that she had laughed. She lied, saying, “I did not laugh.”

But the LORD said directly to her, “No, but you *did* laugh.”

The visitors and their mission

By this time the three visitors had finished their meal and were ready to head on out. Abraham, like a good host, went with them for a little way. Where were they planning to go? Well, they looked down toward Sodom, the city where Abraham’s nephew, Lot, lived. Were they heading for Sodom, that wicked city?!

As they walked, the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that he shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? I have chosen him so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice.” What did God know about Abraham? [That he would command his children and household to keep the way of the Lord.] God would do all He had promised, and Abraham would do what God asked.

Then the Lord (*Adonai*) told Abraham, “I am going to check out Sodom and Gomorrah. The outcry is great that their sin is very grave. I am going to look this situation over personally.”

Abraham and his bargaining

At this point, the other two angel-men went on their way toward Sodom. ✓ Abraham knew their intention—to destroy them for their wickedness. He got closer to the LORD, who remained behind, and asked, “Will

you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous people within the city. Will You then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? It would not be like You to do such a thing—to put the righteous to death with the wicked! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose there are forty-five righteous. Will you destroy the whole city if forty-five righteous ones are there?”

The Lord said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

Abraham dared to ask the Lord four more times, each time dropping his number, asking, “Suppose forty righteous are there?” then, “Suppose thirty righteous are there?” then, “Suppose twenty righteous are there?”

Each time the Lord answered, “For the sake of forty . . . thirty . . . twenty I will not destroy it.”

Isn't our God good? He was patient with Abraham's badgering. He was promising to spare the city for such a few number—20—people!

✓ Maybe Abraham was thinking, “I know Lot has two daughters. If they have husbands, that would be six in Lot's family. Surely Lot has had some influence for good in Sodom—maybe four others who live right. That would make a total of ten. I will ask one more time for God to save Lot.” Out loud he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again just one more time. Suppose ten righteous are found there?”

The Lord answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

That seemed to satisfy Abraham. So the Lord went His way (perhaps back to heaven), the angel-men continued on to Sodom, and Abraham returned to his tent, ✓ thinking, “I sure hope there are ten righteous people in Sodom. I wonder if there are. What will happen to Lot if there are not ten righteous?”

*That is a lot of flour if one seah is 7.7 quarts as per <http://biblehub.com/weights-and-measures/#dry>.

Lessons from this lesson:

- “Is *anything* too hard for the Lord?” (Genesis 18:14). No! Remember that when you struggle in school, when you have a conflict, when something seems impossible to you.
- “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). Yes! Remember that when people question whether God does things right—when difficult times make it seem as if He is not in control.
- God will punish the wicked. God will save those whom He has chosen.

Activities:

- Play dough: small cakes of bread; meat; a tent
- Sing stanzas 1–8 of “Abraham” found on the Songs page at teachingthebibletochildren.org.
- Sing “My God Is So Big”

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do. (repeat)

The mountains are His; the rivers are His; the stars are His handiwork too.

My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do.

- Review questions: (Game: Put a flannel- or paper-towel-backed small tent found below on a flannel board for each correct answer.)

1. How many visitors came to Abraham? [Three.]

2. Who were they? [One was *Jehovah*, the Lord; the other two were angels.]
 3. How was Abraham a good host? [He fixed a meal of calf, bread, and milk and curds for them.]
 4. Where was Abraham while the visitors ate? [Nearby under a tree.]
 5. Where was Sarah? [In the tent behind the men.]
 6. What did the Lord Jehovah say? [Sarah would have a son within a year..]
 7. What did Sarah do when she heard this news? [Laughed to herself.]
 8. True or false. Sarah laughed because she was so happy about the news. [False; she didn't believe.]
 9. Where were the angels going? Why? [To check out Sodom and Gomorrah; to destroy them for their wickedness.]
 10. Abraham kept asking, "If forty, thirty, *etc.*, people are righteous in Sodom, will You (God) destroy it?" What was Abraham's final number? [Ten.]
- Make a tent by stretching one or more blankets over a table or other furniture. Students might eat their snacks in the tent.
 - Play Name the Name game. Enlarge the names of God found below. Print on card stock. Cut apart and glue correct English word and meaning on the back of the Hebrew name. Invent motions to illustrate each name: *El Elyon*: point up; *El Shaddai*: muscle arm; *Jehovah-Yaweh*: hands on heart; *Adonai*: point finger out. Have students show proper motion when a card is flashed, either with the meaning or the name.
 - Sing "The Joy of the Lord Is My Strength" (May be found at <http://wordtoworship.com/song/3566>. The last two stanzas are not found in the original.)

Stanza 1: The joy of the Lord is my strength (repeat 3 times)

Stanza 2: He fills my mouth with laughter, "A ha ha ha ha." (repeat 3 times)

Stanza 3: "A ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha." (repeat 2 times; then sing, "Oh, the joy of the Lord is my strength.")

- If you did not give out cards to students with their names and meanings on them, do so this week.
- Play "Name Game" with the names of God. Enlarge the name and meanings found on the chart below. Print the Hebrew name on one side of a flashcard and the translation and meaning on the backside. Flash a name. Students give the meaning and motion. Then flash the meaning and have students give the Hebrew name and motion.

Memory Verse[s]:

Genesis 18:14, 25—"Is anything too hard for the Lord?" and "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Handwork:

- Make a tent. This website has a printable tent and people [Abraham, Sarah, and Baby Isaac, but you could use just the tent]: <http://www.sundayschoolkids.com/activities-ot/abraham-tent-instructions.htm>

***pre-incarnate
righteous***

***Jehovah/Yaweh LORD
El Shaddai
Adonai
El Elyon***

NAMES FOR GOD

<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
El Elyon	Most High God	Most High God
El Shaddai	God Almighty	All-Sufficient God
Jehovah/ Jaweh	LORD	Covenant-Keeping God
Adonai	Lord	Ruler



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