

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



COFFEEHOUSE FIVE
THE GOD OF CHRISTMAS
THE PROMISED CHILD
GENESIS 18:1-15; LUKE 1:26-38
11/26/2017

MAIN POINT

We can trust God, no matter how impossible the situation, because God always keeps His promises.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Do you consider yourself someone who has commitment issues? Why or why not?

Why can it be difficult to commit to things, especially long-term? What role does doubt play in our hesitations to commit?

If God took something from you so that you had to live by faith in His promises, what would that likely be? Explain why this one area has been a hindrance to your living by faith in God's promises.

God's promises may as well be scrawled in stone, preserved for all of eternity to witness. That's how confident He is that He will keep His word, but the question is never really about His confidence—it's about ours. We can trust God, no matter how impossible the situation might seem, because God always keeps His promises.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read Genesis 15:5-6. If you were in Abraham's shoes, would you be able to believe God's promise?

Does God's reaction to Abraham's disbelief surprise you? Why or why not?

Why is it difficult to trust God's plan when you don't know the details?

Abraham exhibited trust in God not simply by believing facts about Him, but by trusting His character. Abraham's actions were a direct result of his faith. When God makes a promise, He's not only able to fulfill it, but He's also faithful to see it through. It's not always easy to believe God, especially when your circumstances indicate that He's unbelievable, but faith isn't based on what things look like at the moment: it's based on who God has proven Himself to be.

What are some of the outrageous promises of God that you're choosing to believe?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 18:1-15.

What does this story teach us about Abraham's character?

Why does Sarah laugh to herself, and why do you think she then lied about it?

In what area of your life do you most often doubt God's power? Why is that aspect of your life most susceptible to a lack of faith?

When our prayers are not answered the way we want, what are our typical responses? Why?

God often reminds us of His power when we are powerless. Financial, emotional, and spiritual strains can divide our faith as well as our families. During moments when doubt overshadows our faith, God may send messengers who remind us of His power. Abraham and Sarah entertained angels unaware. Oftentimes, believers entertain messengers thinly disguised as impossible problems where only the Lord's power can intervene. Be ready; in those moments God's power can intervene.

Isaac is not the only child whose birth was promised in Scripture. Throughout the Old Testament we read God's promises to the people of Israel that He would send the Messiah, the Anointed One, to save and lead His people. Centuries past, however, and the people grew weary of waiting for their Messiah to come. Then an angel appears to Mary, and God again revealed that He keeps His promises.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:26-30.

What qualities of God's character are on display in His choice of Mary?

In the angel's opening statement to Mary, he referred to her as "favored" (v. 28), and in verse 30, he added that it was God with whom she had found favor. Like the righteousness accredited to Abraham, God's favor was evidence of His grace in Mary's life.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 1:31-38.

What do we learn about the Messiah, the promised child, from the angel's comments to Mary in verses 31-33?

Read aloud some of the messianic prophecies from 2 Samuel 7:12-13; Isaiah 9:7; Isaiah 11:1-5; and Psalm 89:3-4. Discuss what these prophecies reveal about the Messiah's identity and function, and discuss the importance of Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilling these prophecies.

What are the implications of these pronouncements for you and me?

Read verse 34 again. How does Mary's reaction to the angel's news compare with Sarah's reaction in Genesis 18:12-15?

Knowing God's purpose and submitting to that purpose are two different matters. Mary was at that crossroads of decision where she had to submit or reject. Her response was forthright—she referred to herself as God's servant, or slave. Mary expressed complete submission to God as His will for her life. Mary's faith was a ready faith that not only

accepted God's will, but agreed wholeheartedly with what God was about to accomplish. Thus as Christians, we are to make ourselves available to serve God completely.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Read 1 Peter 3:18; Hebrews 2:9; and Romans 8:34. How do these verses let us know God will be faithful to fulfill His promises?

What are you trusting God with today? Are you anxiously or patiently waiting for God to fulfill His promises?

In what area of your life do you need to believe that nothing is impossible with God? What keeps you from believing this?

PRAY

Close your group time in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him. Thank Him for sending Jesus and for the salvation available through Him. Pray that God will open our eyes to Jesus' identity and His work in our lives through this study.

COMMENTARY

GENESIS 18:1-15

18:1-2. This is the last place where the language "appeared" describes theophany to Abraham (12:7; 17:1; 18:1; cp. 26:2, 24). In this case the theophany involves "three men" (v. 2), the only place in Scripture where such a trio of heavenly guests occurs. This alone underscores the magnitude of the two announcements that follow: Isaac's birth and the destruction of Sodom/Gomorrah. The "men" included the Lord (v. 22) and two angels (19:1). Reference to "Mamre" recalls earlier events in the lives of Abraham and Lot: their parting (13:18) and the elder's rescue of Lot from eastern kings (14:13,24). "Looked up and saw" often signals an important imminent event (24:63; 43:29; Josh. 5:13; Judges 19:17). Again, from Mamre the patriarch will show the same paternal concern for his nephew. Abraham "in the heat of the day" (v. 2) took refuge from the sun at the door of his tent; the sudden appearance of travelers standing "before him" suggests immediately that these guests were extraordinary. His haste in offering the courtesies of hospitality exhibited the same generous spirit he had shown in the past.

18:3-5. Abraham respectfully addresses one of the three men who evidently stood out from among the others, as indicated by the singular "my lord" and singular verb "do not pass by" (v. 3). His continued entreaty shifts, however, to the plural in number (vv. 4-5), referencing all three visitors. His request is delicately expressed, beginning his remarks with the honorific title "my Lord" in the Hebrew sentence and "please," occurs twice. His plea is predicated on the visitors' "favor" toward him; "if I have found favor in your eyes" prefaces an entreaty made by a subordinate person.

The custom of hospitality is illustrated by the visitors in chaps. 18-19 and the encounter of Abraham's servant with Rebekah's household (chap. 24). Stunning examples of breaches in hospitality include the wicked behavior of the Sodomites toward the visitors (chap. 19) and the Gibeahites toward the Levite and his concubine (Judges 19; cf. Luke 7:44-46). Provision and protection for guests characterized a good host, including care of their animals (24:19, 32; 43:24; Judges 19:21). The host provided water for refreshment (24:14; Judges 4:19) and the washing of soiled feet (v. 4; e.g., 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judges 19:21; 1 Sam 25:41; John 13:5; 1 Tim 5:10); a meal followed (v. 5; e.g., 19:3; 24:33; 43:16; Exod. 2:19-20), and overnight accommodations were provided for pilgrims (e.g., 19:2-3; Judges 19:6-20).

18:6-8. Abraham busily set his house in action, drawing on Sarah to bake bread and instructing a servant to prepare a lavish meal of meat, curds, and milk (e.g., Deut. 32:14; Judges 5:25; 6:18-19; Ezek 34:3). The tornado of activity ("hurried," vv. 6, 7; "quick," v. 6; "ran," v. 7) reinforces the picture of Abraham as the extraordinary host. The passage specifies that Abraham stands alertly nearby under one of the trees observing their meal (v. 8).

18:9-10a. Collectively, the trio ("they," pl.) asked Abraham of Sarah's whereabouts (v. 9). His response is terse in the Hebrew, "behold, in the tent," including perhaps a gesture toward it. The spokesman is the Lord, if v. 13 is our guide,

who dialogues with Abraham and Sarah in vv. 10-15. The certainty of the promise is further enhanced by a specific timetable, “this time next year” and by the statement of a son.

18:10b-15. The miraculous nature of the announcement is underscored by the Lord’s amazing discernment of Sarah’s private thoughts (vv. 12-15). Sarah’s position in the tent, “behind him” (v. 10b), and her internal monologue, “to herself” (v. 12a), indicate that by unusual means the visitor knew her heart, not having seen a facial expression or heard a chuckle. Such exceptional perception gave credibility to the visitor’s unlikely prediction of a child. The domestic intrigue of Abraham’s household involving rival siblings is intimated in Sarah’s actions in this passage by the hints “listening” and “laughed,” wordplays on Ishmael’s name (16:11) and on Isaac’s (21:6). Sarah will later defend her son by urging Ishmael’s expulsion, at which time the Lord directs Abraham, “Listen to your wife” (21:12; cp. 3:17). Isaac’s wife Rebekah, after “listening” (27:5), takes action to ensure that Jacob receives the firstborn rights in her household.

A normal biological conception was humanly ruled out due to Sarah’s post-menopausal age. The passage captures the impossibility of her pregnancy by three successive descriptions: the couple is “old”; “advanced in years”; and she is “past the age of childbearing.” “Old” and “advanced in years” later describe the aged patriarch in his last days (24:1; also Joshua, 13:1; 23:1-2) and David (1 Kings 1:1; so Jesse, 1 Sam. 7:12). Sarah’s bitter amusement over the announcement (v. 12; cf. 17:17) reflects from her viewpoint the audacity of the man’s claims; her inner thoughts poignantly confirmed that the couple had not engaged in sexual relations for years. “Pleasure” is used here for sexual delight and elsewhere of luxuries, delicacies.

Undeterred by Sarah’s secret doubts, the divine spokesman continues his speech with Abraham, reiterating the promise (vv. 13-14). His two questions of Abraham are rhetorical, requiring no response from the patriarch. Since the Lord can accomplish such a feat, Sarah’s skepticism is unfounded. The Hebrew for “hard” or “difficult” means “wonderful” in the sense of extraordinary (e.g., Jer. 32:17, 27). The works of the Lord are exceptional by human standards, evoking amazement by his people (e.g., Ps. 118:2-3). God’s knowledge of future events as well as the human heart was “too wonderful” to comprehend (Ps. 139:6).

Sarah’s interjection, “I did not laugh” (v. 15), shows that she, not Abraham, was the intended recipient of the man’s statement. His unusual knowledge startled her, and she was “afraid” of the man’s response (v. 15). The divine rejoinder is emphatic: “Oh, yes you did laugh”; the definitive tone of his answer ended the matter.

LUKE 1:26-38

1:26-27. The announcement of Jesus’ birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary’s husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

1:28-30. Mary was favored because the Lord set His undeserved grace upon her, not because she had earned good standing. Understandably, she was deeply troubled (Gk *diatarasso*; “confused, perplexed”) by Gabriel’s visit and greeting, wondering how she had come to receive such an honor. Gabriel’s admonishment that Mary not be afraid was the same thing he said to Zechariah (v. 13).

1:31-33. Mary’s conception would be miraculous because she was still a virgin (v. 34). The name Jesus is equivalent to the Hebrew *Yeshua* (Joshua), meaning “the Lord is salvation.” In Genesis 14:18, God is referred to as “God Most High.” Humanly speaking, Jesus’ lineage would be traced legitimately through the royal family of David because Joseph, Jesus’ adoptive father, was a descendant of David. This made Jesus heir to David’s throne according to God’s eternal covenant (see 2 Sam. 7:13,16).

1:34-35. The difference between Mary’s response (how can this be) and Zechariah’s (v. 18) is that Mary asked her question not from unbelief but from puzzlement (v. 38; see note at v. 20). The answer to Mary’s question about how she could get pregnant without being intimate with a man is that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her and cause her to conceive. Because the Holy Spirit was the agent of conception, the child (the holy One; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15) would be the Son of God.

1:36-38. If ever Mary was tempted to doubt God’s promise to her, she could recall Gabriel’s words that nothing will be impossible with God, as had been shown in the lives of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:14). Mary’s response is a classic model of humble commitment (I am the Lord’s slave) and willing obedience (may it be done to me according to your word).