

God's Covenant with Abraham

UNIT
2
LESSON
3

Bible Reference

Genesis 12:1–3; 22:1–19

To the Teacher

The story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac reflects the depth of Abraham's faith. Help students to understand some of the ramifications of that act of faith. God tested Abraham by commanding him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, giving Abraham an opportunity to demonstrate his faith. God was seeking a way to develop Abraham's faith to its fullest extent. This is what God wants from all of his children. We are to surrender completely to God, in faith, and to seek to do his will. We are called to have complete faith and trust in God, even when problems arise in our lives and everything seems to be going wrong. If we surrender completely to God in faith, as Abraham did, we will be blessed and in turn will become a blessing to others.

The sacrifice of Isaac was not completed, but God did sacrifice his own Son, Jesus Christ, on our behalf. As you present the various promises God made to Abraham, point out that God has fulfilled each one. The most important promise God made to Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, through which all people have been blessed through Abraham's seed.

Preparation/Materials

- * Foam trays, one for every two students
- * Small cups of sand, one for every two students
- * Plastic spoons, one for every two students
- * A hand lens, one for every two students
- * Unit organizer
- * Activity sheets 1 and 2, one each per student

Lesson Highlights

- * God made many promises to Abraham.
- * God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.
- * God provided a ram for Abraham and Isaac in response to their obedience to him.
- * God renewed his covenant with Abraham.
- * The story of Abraham and Isaac foreshadowed Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Background

God had called Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's household and to travel to a land God would show him. God promised that he would make of him a great nation, that he would bless him and make his name great, and that through him God would bless all the peoples on Earth. God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations and that Sarah would be the mother of nations. God specified that he would bless Sarah and give Abraham a son by her. Although first Abraham and later Sarah laughed at the prospect of having a child in their old age, Isaac's birth fulfilled this promise.

A number of years later, God told Abraham that he must sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son, the child of the promise through whom a great nation was to be born. Abraham surely wondered how God's promise could be fulfilled if this child was now to be killed. Through faith and trust that God would be faithful to his promise, however, Abraham set off, accompanied by Isaac. Abraham took everything they would need for a sacrifice of burnt offering—wood, fire, and a knife to slay the sacrifice. The fire probably consisted

of live coals in a clay pot. When they reached the mountains, Abraham asked his servants to stay behind as he and Isaac went up the mountain to worship. When Isaac remarked that they did not have a sacrifice, Abraham replied, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Then Abraham set up the altar and prepared it for the sacrifice. At some point Isaac must have realized that he was to be the sacrificial victim. Surely he could have run away from his aged father! Yet, like Jesus, he was willing to do his father’s will.

Just as Abraham was about to slay his son with the knife, the angel of the Lord stopped him, saying, “Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket and offered it as a sacrifice in place of his son. God’s ultimate

provision of a sacrifice for sins was fulfilled in the Lamb of God, his own Son. Abraham called the place of his sacrifice Moriah, which means “the LORD will provide.” Moriah is the same location upon which Jerusalem and later the temple were built. And it was there, at Jerusalem, that the Savior would die.

By making a covenant with Abraham, God promised to bless the patriarch’s descendants and to make them his special people. Circumcision of all male offspring was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Because Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac, God confirmed the promises he had made to the patriarch. Abraham would be blessed, and his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the seashore. The greatest blessing for Abraham was that Jesus, the Savior, would be born from his line. Through him all the nations of the world would indeed be blessed.

Lesson Steps



Bridge

1. Ask students to recall the stories of Abraham and Sarah. (They should recall that Abraham and Sarah were unable for many years to have children but that Sarah finally bore Isaac.)
2. Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a tray with a hand lens, a spoon, a white square of paper, and a small cup of sand.
3. Have students spoon out a small amount of sand onto the white paper and look at the grains of sand through a hand lens. Ask them to count as many grains of sand as they can in two minutes.
4. After the two minutes are up, ask each group how many grains of sand they counted. Add up the total for the class.
5. Have students estimate how many grains of sand would be in just their own cup of sand, and then in all of their cups combined. Ask them to imagine how many grains of sand there would be on a sandy beach. Then have them imagine all the grains of sand in the entire world.
6. Tell students that in today’s lesson God told Abraham that he would have as many descendants as the sand on the seashore.



Scripture Link

1. Have students read Genesis 12:1–3. Explain that Abraham was living in Ur when God called him to leave his home.
2. As a class, list the promises God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3.
 - “I will make you into a great nation.” God would bless Abraham’s descendants so that they would become a powerful nation. This was fulfilled when David became king.
 - “I will bless you.” God blessed Abraham because Abraham obeyed God.
 - “I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” Abraham was a great man of faith, an example for all believers. All people are blessed through Abraham because Jesus came from his line.
 - “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.” God would bless those who respected Abraham and followed his example. He would protect Abraham from those who would try to harm him.
 - “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, and we receive salvation through him.
 - Mention that circumcision of every male was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17).
3. Have students read the readers theater “Abraham, Hero of Faith” (activity sheet 1 from the student workbook, pages 17–18). Assign the various parts of the readers theater: six narrators, Abraham, Isaac, an angel, and the voice of God.

Abraham, Hero of Faith Name _____

Narrator 1: Isaac grew to be a young man. He was his father's pride and joy.

Narrator 2: When Isaac became a teenager, God called to Isaac's father, Abraham.

Narrator 3: Abraham heard God's voice and answered.

Abraham: Here I am.

God's voice: Take your son Isaac to the region of Moriah. While you are there, you are to sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains.

Narrator 4: Abraham didn't question God. He trusted God and knew that God would still find a way to keep his promise to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation.

Narrator 5: Early the next morning Abraham woke Isaac up.

Abraham: We're going on a trip. Hurry and get ready.

Narrator 6: Abraham saddled his donkey and took two servants along to help carry supplies.

Narrator 1: Abraham also carried enough wood for the burnt offering.

Narrator 2: It took the travelers three days to reach the area of Moriah.

Abraham (to his servants): Stay behind with the donkey while Isaac and I go to the mountain to worship.

Narrator 3: Abraham loaded the wood on Isaac's back, since Isaac was young and strong and able to carry the load.

Narrator 4: Abraham carried the fire and the knife for the sacrifice.


Narrator 5: They weren't too far up the mountain when Isaac thought of something.

Isaac: Where is the sacrifice for the burnt offering?

Narrator 6: Abraham didn't tell Isaac that Isaac was going to be the sacrifice.

Abraham: God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.

Narrator 1: Like his father, Isaac believed that God would provide what they needed.



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Narrator 2: The two continued until they reached the place where God had told Abraham to make his sacrifice.

Narrator 3: Abraham built an altar upon which to present the sacrifice to God.

Narrator 4: He carefully arranged the wood on the top.

Narrator 5: Now Abraham had the most difficult task.

Narrator 6: He carefully bound Isaac with ropes and placed him on top of the wood.

Narrator 1: Abraham was prepared to obey God's command and offer his son as a sacrifice.

Narrator 2: Isaac was prepared to obey God and be offered as a sacrifice.

Narrator 3: An angel of the Lord came to Abraham just before he offered the sacrifice.

Angel: Don't lay a hand on Isaac. Don't do anything to him. God knows that you love him and will obey him in all things. He knows this because you were willing to offer your son as a sacrifice.

Narrator 4: As Abraham looked up, he saw a ram caught in a bush.

Narrator 5: With Isaac's help, Abraham sacrificed the ram to God in place of his son.

Narrator 6: The angel of the Lord had another message for Isaac.

Angel: Because you have obeyed God, you will be blessed. Your descendants will number as many as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. All nations on Earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

Narrator 1: Abraham, Isaac, and the servants left Moriah and set out for home.

Narrator 2: Years later, God would fulfill his promise to Abraham.

Narrator 3: Jesus Christ would become the sacrifice for us all.

Narrator 4: He would take the place of all the animal sacrifices the people had offered.

Narrator 5: All people on Earth would be blessed through Christ.

Narrator 6: Christ has saved all of us from our sins and promised us eternal life if we believe in him.

Narrators 1–6: We have all been blessed through Christ's sacrifice.

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4. Have the students read “Mount Moriah” in the student text ****(page 000)****. Make sure students understand that on Mount Moriah God fulfilled his covenant to Abraham that his people would one day be a great nation. David, Solomon, and the people of Israel fulfilled part of God’s promise to Abraham.

MOUNT MORIAH

God told Abraham to go to the area of Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son Isaac. When Abraham got ready to sacrifice Isaac, he probably thought about God’s promise to one day make of him a great nation. He didn’t know that one day his descendants would include people such as David and Solomon.

Mount Moriah also became an important place for King David. During his reign David took a census of all of his fighting men. This was a sin because he was relying on the strength of his army instead of upon God. As a punishment, God sent a three-day plague to the people of Israel. David pleaded with God to save the people. God heard David’s pleas, and as the angel of death approached a threshing floor in Jerusalem at Mount Moriah, God told the angel to withdraw his hand. David saw God’s goodness and mercy and bought the threshing floor. He built an altar there and offered sacrifices to God, thanking God for hearing his cries and saving the people of Jerusalem.

David’s son Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah. Solomon placed the Altar of Burnt Offerings on the spot where David had offered sacrifices. The sacrifices of burnt offerings in the temple pointed to Christ’s later sacrifice, as did Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac.

Today on Mount Moriah stands the Dome of the Rock, which is not a mosque but a Muslim shrine completed in A.D. 691. Inside the dome you can see a rock that is believed to be the very place where Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac and where Solomon built his temple.

5. Show students the picture of the Dome of the Rock in the student text ****(page 000)****. For additional images, search “Dome of the Rock” on Internet sites, such as www.sacred-destinations.com. Seeing the possible location of today’s story will make the story more real to students.

Student Activities



1. Distribute the unit organizer. Have students fill out the third row.
2. Distribute activity sheet 2. As a class, discuss the questions on the sheet. Spend some time discussing question 7 and reviewing the rituals and purposes of Old Testament sacrifices.
3. Have the students complete the activity sheet with a partner, except for question 8.
4. Ask students to individually answer question 8 on the activity sheet. When they have finished, spend some time together in prayer. It might be fitting for you to begin the prayer and then give students an opportunity to express their thankfulness for Christ’s sacrifice. You should also conclude the prayer.

Abraham, Hero of Faith

Name _____

TURN in your Bible to Genesis 22:1–19 to help you answer the following questions.

1. Setting:
 - a. Place: The region of Moriah in the land of Canaan
 - b. Time: Sometime after 2000 B.C.
2. Characters: Key characters include God, Abraham, Isaac, the servants, and the angel of God.
3. Problem:
 - a. What was the problem from God's point of view? God wanted to test Abraham's faith.
 - b. What was the problem from Abraham's point of view? God had promised to build a nation from Isaac, but now God wanted Isaac sacrificed.
4. Events: God told Abraham to take his son Isaac to Mount Moriah and to sacrifice him. Abraham loaded his donkey with wood. Abraham left the donkey and the servants behind when they reached Mount Moriah. Abraham prepared to sacrifice Isaac.
5. Solution: God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. God restated his promise to Abraham. Abraham returned to Beersheba.
6. Themes: God tested the faith of his people. God provided a substitute for human sacrifice.

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7. Foreshadowing:

- a. Think about Old Testament sacrifices. Write down words that come to mind. Answers may include animals, wood, fire, and altars.
- b. Why did God's people make sacrifices? Answers may include that they made sacrifices to thank God for what he had done and that they did so because of their sins and wrongdoings.
- c. How was the sacrifice of the ram instead of Isaac like those sacrifices? The ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac. The sacrifices of the Israelites for their sins were made in place of their own eternal lives. In both cases, the sacrifices represented something else.
- d. What was the sacrifice in the New Testament that ended the need for Old Testament sacrifices? Christ's death ended the need for sacrifices. He paid the price once for all time for the sins for which the earlier sacrifices had been intended to atone.
- e. What words come to your mind when you think of that New Testament sacrifice? Answers may include thankfulness, sorrow for sin, and happiness.
- f. How is the story of Abraham's test like the story of that sacrifice? How is it different? Answers may include that in both cases a father gave his son. Both Christ and Isaac were prepared to make the sacrifice in obedience to their fathers. While Isaac did not complete the sacrifice, Christ did. Christ's sacrifice took away the sins of the world, while Isaac's would not have done so.
- g. How can you thankfully respond to Christ's sacrifice? Answers may include by obeying God's commands, by helping others, or by witnessing to others.

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Enrichment

- * **Drama.** Have two students act out a scene between Abraham and Sarah after Abraham returned from Mount Moriah.
- * **Music.** “We Are on Our Way” from *Songs for Life*; “You Are Our God; We Are Your People” or “The God of Abraham Praise” from the *Psalter Hymnal*.
- * **Writing.** Have students write interior monologues. They should relate what Abraham or Isaac might have been thinking during the events of this story.
- * **Writing.** Have the students rewrite the story as an interview with Abraham, Isaac, or the servants as they are returning from their journey to Mount Moriah, asking the characters about their emotions throughout this episode.

Esther's Request

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5
LESSON
3

Bible Reference

Esther 5–7

To the Teacher

God's providence is evident throughout these chapters. From the wonderful vantage point of hindsight, we can see how God was working in Esther's hesitation to make her request of the king on the night of the first banquet; in King Xerxes inability to sleep that night; in the king's request for the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be read to him; in having the particular record that was read be the one about Mordecai exposing the plot to kill the king; and in having Haman arrive at the king's court just in time to suggest what to do for the man the king delighted to honor. God's intervention in this marvelous book demonstrates the manner in which his will is carried out for his obedient children.

God also works on our behalf, and we can fully trust that he is in control of even the smallest details of our daily lives.

Preparation/Materials

- * Activity sheet, one per student
- * Unit 5 organizer

Lesson Highlights

- * Esther appeared before the king and invited Haman and the king to a banquet that evening—without revealing her request.
- * King Xerxes could not sleep that night. After a portion of the annals of his kingdom had been read aloud to him, he discovered that Mordecai had never been properly rewarded for revealing the plot to assassinate the king.

- * King Xerxes asked Haman what should be done for the man the king delighted to honor. What Haman suggested (assuming the recipient to be himself) is precisely what the king commanded Haman to do for Mordecai the Jew.
- * Esther held a second banquet, during which she divulged to King Xerxes Haman's plot to kill her own people, the Jews.
- * Haman was horrified to learn that he had unknowingly threatened the queen's life.
- * King Xerxes arranged for Haman to be hanged on the very gallows he had intended for Mordecai.

Background

After fasting for three days, Esther put on her royal robes and made her appearance before the king. When he saw her, he held out his gold scepter as a sign that he was pleased to see her. This indicated that she had found favor in his sight and was free to come before him. The king, realizing that Esther must have had an unusual reason for daring to approach him, asked her what she wanted, assuring her that her wish would be granted, up to half his kingdom. Esther asked the king to come with Haman that evening to a banquet she had prepared for them. Both willingly accepted the invitation. But either Esther lacked the courage to make her request that evening or sensed that the timing was inopportune. When the king asked about her request, she invited both Xerxes and Haman to dine with her again the following evening. At that time she would reveal her request to the king.

Haman left the banquet elated that he had been invited a second time to dine personally with the king and queen. This was indeed a great honor. His mood changed quickly, however, when he passed Mordecai, who did not

even rise in his presence and showed no sign of fear before him. Haman was filled with rage. When he arrived home and told his wife and friends of his frustration, they suggested that he construct a gallows and ask King Xerxes the next day for permission to hang (or impale) Mordecai. The gallows was erected, and Haman's wrath was appeased. The 75-foot height of the gallows was so great that the offender would attract the attention of all passersby.

After the banquet, God caused King Xerxes to have a sleepless night, during which he requested that the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, be brought and read aloud in his presence. Under God's direction the portion the reader selected was the account of how Mordecai had revealed the plot to assassinate the king. It was customary for Persian kings to promptly reward anyone who had performed some noteworthy act of service. The king was eager to know how Mordecai had been rewarded for his act of loyalty and was chagrined that nothing had been done for Mordecai.

No sooner had Mordecai's reward been discussed than Haman appeared in the king's court. Ironically, Haman, who knew nothing of the recent discussion, was coming to recommend that Mordecai be hanged. The king asked Haman what should be done for the man the king delighted to honor. The king wanted to confer great honor and respect upon Mordecai for the noble deed he had performed, but Haman suggested a procedure for how he himself would have liked

to be honored. Imagine Haman's mortification when he was ordered to lead the procession honoring Mordecai through the streets of Susa!

At the second banquet, Esther replied to the king's request, asking him to spare her life and the lives of her people. She disclosed her true identity to her husband for the first time. The king was furious when he learned that the life of his own queen was in danger because of a plot by one of his trusted officials. He left the banquet hall in anger and paced in the palace garden, no doubt considering what should be done with Haman.

Haman was stunned and terrified when he learned that the queen was a member of the Jewish nation whose destruction he had plotted. He realized that in his plan to kill Mordecai and the Jews, he had unknowingly threatened the queen's life. Just as he was falling down on Esther's reclining couch pleading for mercy, the king returned, construing Haman's behavior as an assault upon the queen. The Persians maintained strict rules about contact with a member of the harem by any male other than the king. Haman was in danger merely by being near her. According to the *Archaeological Study Bible*, "Persian protocol dictated that no one but the king could be left alone with a woman of the royal harem. . . . Once the king had exited, Haman should have left Esther's presence. That he moved onto her couch was unthinkable!" (page 726). The king was enraged. Even as the king spoke Haman's face was covered, signifying that he had been condemned to death. Haman was hanged (or impaled) on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai.

Lesson Steps



Bridge

1. Review the story of Esther 1–4. Have students recall Esther's discovery that Haman had written an edict that all of the Jews in the entire Persian empire were to be killed.

2. Ask students why Esther was afraid to go to the king and ask him to save her people. (Only those summoned by the Persian king were allowed access to him. Anyone who violated this policy could be punished by death. Also, King Xerxes was unaware of Esther's Jewish heritage, and the queen was probably uncertain about his response.)
3. Ask what Esther had asked Mordecai to have the Jewish population of Susa do. (She asked Mordecai to have the people fast for three days, after which she would go in to the king.)
4. Tell students that in Esther 5–7 they will find out what happened when Esther went to see the king.
5. Remind students that as they continue their study of Esther 5–7, they should be watching for the people and events God is using to keep the Jews safe. Tell students that the events in these chapters reflect God's perfect timing and show how he orchestrates even the smallest of details of our lives for his purpose.



Scripture Link

1. Have students read “Esther’s Request,” a readers theater based on Esther 5–7, in the student text ***(page 000)***. Assign the parts of narrators 1, 2, 3, and 4; King Xerxes; Queen Esther; Haman; Zeresh; Harbona; and an attendant. Have students read through their parts silently in preparation for reading fluently. Then ask the readers to read through the script, using their best oral expression.

ESTHER’S REQUEST

Narrator 1: Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace.

Narrator 2: When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he held out the gold scepter that was in his hand. Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

King Xerxes: What is your request, my queen? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.

Queen Esther: Let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared.

Narrator 3: So the king and Haman went to the banquet Queen Esther had prepared.

King Xerxes: What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.

Queen Esther: Let the king and Haman come again tomorrow to a banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.

Narrator 4: Haman was very happy. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and noticed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage. Haman somehow managed to restrain himself until he arrived home.

Narrator 1: Haman boasted to his friends and to Zeresh, his wife, about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways in which the king had honored him.

Haman: And that’s not all. I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me, along with the king, to dine with her again tomorrow evening. But none of this gives me real satisfaction as long as I see that disrespectful Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.

Zeresh: Have a gallows built, 75 feet high, and ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy.

Narrator 3: This suggestion delighted Haman, and he arranged to have the gallows built.

Narrator 4: That night the king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. While listening, he was reminded that Mordecai had exposed a plot to assassinate King Xerxes.

King Xerxes: What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?

Attendant: Nothing has been done for him, O king.

King Xerxes: Who is in the courtyard?

Attendant: Haman is standing in the court.

King Xerxes: Bring him in.

King Xerxes: What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?

Narrator 2: Haman, delighted, thought this over carefully before answering the king.

Haman (thinking): Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?

Narrator 4: Then he answered aloud.

Haman: Dress him in a royal robe the king has worn. Put him on a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest on its head. Let a noble prince lead the man on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

King Xerxes: Go at once. Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate.

Narrator 1: So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

Narrator 2: Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, and told Zeresh and all of his friends everything that had happened to him.

Zeresh: Mordecai is a Jew. Now you will surely come to ruin!

Narrator 3: While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

King Xerxes: Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.

Queen Esther: Grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.

King Xerxes: Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?

Queen Esther: The enemy is this vile Haman.

Narrator 1: Haman was terrified. The king stood up in a rage and went out into the palace garden to think about what he should do with Haman.

Narrator 2: Haman stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Narrator 3: Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling onto the couch where Esther was reclining, pleading for his life. The king saw this but misunderstood what Haman was doing.

King Xerxes: Will he even attack the queen while she is with me in the house?

Narrator 4: As soon as the words had left the king's mouth, his attendants covered Haman's face. Then Harbona, one of the king's servants, spoke.

Harbona: A gallows 75 feet high stands by Haman's house, O king. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.

King Xerxes: Hang Haman on it!

Narrator 1: So they hanged Haman on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

2. Ask the following questions.

- What did Esther request when she went in to see the king? (She asked the king whether he and Haman would attend a banquet she had prepared for them.)
- What did she ask for at the banquet? (She asked them to join her once again the next evening for another banquet, at which time she would make her request of the king.)
- How did Haman feel as he left the banquet? (He was thrilled about being asked to dine alone with the king and queen.)
- What made his attitude change? (He saw Mordecai, who did not kneel before him.)
- What did Haman's wife and friends tell him to do? (They told Haman to build a gallows 75 feet high, on which to hang Mordecai.)
- What happened to the king that night? (He couldn't sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read aloud to him.)
- What did he discover? (He discovered that Mordecai had never been recognized or honored for revealing the plot to kill King Xerxes.)
- Who showed up just as the king was planning to honor Mordecai? (Haman was coming to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged.)
- What happened next that humiliated and infuriated Haman? (He was forced to honor Mordecai by leading him through the streets of the city, dressed in the king's robe and astride the king's own horse.)
- What did Esther reveal at the second banquet? (She told the king that she was a Jew and begged for mercy for her people.)
- How did the king react when he realized that the life of his queen had been threatened? (He left the banquet in a rage and went out into the palace garden to think about how to respond.)
- What did Haman do? (He was terrified and went over to the queen to beg for mercy.)
- What happened to Haman? (He was hanged or impaled on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai.)
- How might events have turned out differently if Esther had made her request at the first banquet instead of waiting one more night? (The king might not have had a sleepless night, due perhaps to wondering what Esther wanted, the record of his kingdom wouldn't have been brought to him, and he wouldn't have realized that Mordecai had never been properly honored for revealing the plot to kill him. Xerxes wouldn't have been planning to honor Mordecai when Haman arrived, and Mordecai may have been killed.)

- Were these events just coincidences? (No, all of these events were part of God's plan and orchestrated under his control. God was in the details, inciting all of these people to react in just the way they did. His timing is always perfect!)

3. Have a student volunteer read Romans 8:28:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In this story, God worked for the good of his chosen people, the Jews. Explain that this is the new memory work, and have students begin memorizing it.



Student Activities

1. Distribute the activity sheet. Have students work individually or with a partner to answer the questions.

MY response

After studying Esther 5-7, tell what you have learned about how God uses people and events to accomplish his purposes. What does God care for you and about his plan for your life? How can you apply this lesson to your life? How has God touched your heart?

Answers will vary.

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).

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Name _____

Esther's Request

FILL in the blanks to complete the crossword puzzle. Then number the events in the correct order.

ACROSS >>

7. King Xerxes ordered Haman to put a royal robe on Mordecai, to put him on a horse, and to lead him through the streets of Susa.

10. When Esther told the king that Haman was the man responsible for the edict, Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

11. King Xerxes stood up in a rage and went into the palace garden.

3. As Haman returned home from the banquet, Mordecai refused to kneel before him.

4. Haman's wife, Zeresh, and all of his friends suggested that Haman construct a gallows on which to hang Mordecai.

5. The king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the Chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.

2. Esther invited Haman and the king to a banquet.

6. The king realized that he had never given honor or recognition to Mordecai for revealing the plot to assassinate him.

DOWN >>

1. King Xerxes held out the gold scepter to Esther when she entered the royal court.

9. Queen Esther asked the king to save her and her people because they had been "sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation."

8. At Esther's second banquet the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition?"

12. Haman was hanged or impaled on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai.

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2. After students have completed the activity sheet, ask whether any of them would like to share their personal responses to the story.
3. Have students take out the Unit 5 organizer and fill in the information for the characters Esther, Haman, and Zeresh, as well as the section of “God’s Perfect Plan” for Esther 5–7. You might prefer to decide as a class what to write for this section.
4. Remind students that God is in control of all things and that his timing is always perfect. Point out that God was working even in Esther’s hesitation to make her request of the king on the night of the first banquet, as well as in King Xerxes’ inability to sleep, in the king’s request that an attendant read aloud to him from the official record of his reign, in having the record that was read be the one about Mordecai exposing the plot to kill the king, and in having Haman arrive at the king’s court just in time to suggest what to do for the man the king delighted to honor.
5. Remind students that God is also in control of the events in our lives. We can fully trust that he is coordinating even the smallest details. His timing and his plans are perfect!

Enrichment

- * **Art.** Have students draw a comic strip or cartoon sequence of the story found in Esther 5–7. They can draw the scenes and characters and add speech balloons for the characters’ dialogue.
- * **Bible.** In view of the story of Esther, discuss the “coincidences” that were critical to circumstances turning out the way they did. Decide together whether it makes sense to suggest that the perfectly timed events in this story may be ascribed to chance. Conversely, ask students whether the characters in the story behave like robots, not acting as they freely choose to do. After some discussion, read and have students respond to the following excerpt from “Providence: God Guides This World” from *Concise Theology* by J. I. Packer: “The doctrine of providence teaches Christians that they are never in the grip of blind forces (fortune, chance, luck, fate); all that happens to them is divinely planned, and each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice, knowing that all is for one’s spiritual and eternal good (Rom. 8:28)” (page 56).
- * **Devotional material.** Read Meditation 25, “Hoisted,” or Meditation 26, “A Queen’s Plea,” from *Down to the Wire, Faith under Fire* by David Willingham.

Obeying from the Heart

UNIT
11
LESSON
6

Bible Reference

Matthew 5:17–24, 38–48

To the Teacher

Jesus' words often fly in the face of natural human behavior. His teachings are not easy to follow. At first students may suspect from Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount that God intends for them to live a passive life, allowing others do whatever they wish to them. During today's lesson, focus on the active role Jesus is asking his disciples to play. The decision not to fight back, not to allow anger to become destructive, is an active one. Throughout the lesson, students will have opportunity to respond to Christ's instructions.

Help students understand that anger is a natural human emotion, in and of itself neither positive nor negative, that can lead to either constructive or destructive behavior. Remind them that God himself becomes angry, even though he never sins in his anger. John R. W. Stott expresses this distinction, as well as the difficulty we find in striking the right balance: "Not all anger is evil, as is evident from the wrath of God, which is always holy and pure. And even fallen human beings may sometimes feel righteous anger, although, being fallen, we should ensure that even this is slow to rise and quick to die down" (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 83–84).

As you work through this lesson with your students, help provide opportunities for them to find positive, proactive ways with which to respond to challenges. Help them learn how to deal with difficult people and events in a Christlike manner. Also, remind students that although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount, obeying from the heart is impossible without the Spirit's power in our lives.

Preparation/Materials

- * Activity sheet, one per student
- * Prepare index cards with different situations or scenarios, one per group. (See Bridge)
- * Unit organizer page from previous lesson

Lesson Highlights

- * Jesus wants his followers to obey the law from their hearts.
- * Christians are called to be active, not passive, participants in the world.
- * Jesus' teachings guide us in how to respond to and treat others.

Background

The scribes and Pharisees were held up as models of righteousness in Jesus' day. They were the experts on the Mosaic Law, and they obeyed it—according to their own meticulous and exacting interpretation. Jesus, speaking with authority, exposed the sham of their legalistic understanding of God's Law, commanding his followers to obey from their hearts. External conformity to rules and regulations is no substitute for internal transformation of a person's heart to live for God's glory in all of life.

Jesus pointed his disciples to an authority greater than that of the rabbis and teachers of the Law. God, who handed down the Law, ultimately determines which people are responding appropriately. Under Jewish law, it was acceptable to hate enemies, generally seen as Gentiles; not so with Jesus. He called his disciples to lay aside their flawed interpretations and live up to God's perfect understanding of the Law he himself had issued.

Lesson Steps



Bridge

Divide the class into groups, giving each group an index card with a different scenario written on it. Instruct the groups to demonstrate for the class the wrong (but very likely the natural) way of reacting to this situation. (Note: Later on in the lesson they will demonstrate the Christlike reaction, so instruct them to hang on to the cards.)

- You hear one neighbor tell another that the kids in your family are lazy.
- Your older sister is in charge while your parents are out for the evening. She's supposed to make supper, but she tells you that you can either fix it yourself or go hungry.
- Your brother remarks in front of your friends that your new haircut reminds him of your grandma's dog.
- You aren't good at sports, and your team just lost because you dropped the ball. Some of your classmates call you a klutz.
- The kid down the street calls you a goody-goody when you tell him you're going to the church family night instead of to the theater to see a new movie.
- You discover that your friend has been gossiping about you behind your back.
- One of your classmates is throwing a party and is inviting everyone in the class except you and two other classmates.
- Your parents, who are tired and in a bad mood, yell at you for something you didn't do.



Scripture Link

1. Have student volunteers read aloud Matthew 5:17–20.
2. Explain that for many of the Jews, especially the Pharisees, it was important to keep the Law perfectly—in every detail. This was how they thought they could please God. They considered themselves the experts and models in the area of Law-keeping. Over a long period of time they had made up a lot of extra rules to make doubly sure they didn't break any of God's laws. In an effort to protect the heart of the Old Testament Law, they attempted to "fence" it in. Each fence was intended to protect the greater, underlying commandments. If you didn't break the smallest, least important of the commands, they assumed, you were in no danger of breaking the greater ones. Jesus, however, claimed that if you broke the least commandment you were also guilty of the greater. By putting all of the commandments on an equal footing, he made the lesser commands into greater commands.
3. Distribute the activity sheet.
4. Read the Bible passages and the extra information on the activity sheet together.
5. Ask, "Is Jesus telling you in these verses that you should allow yourselves to get beat up? Why or why not?" (No. Allow students a variety of responses as they struggle with this question.)

6. Tell students that Jesus wanted his followers to learn that obedience is not about complying with a long list of rules. Jesus wants obedience from our hearts.

Obeying from the Heart Name _____

READ Matthew 5:21–24 and answer the following questions.

1. How can anger be like murder? **Answers may include that anger kills the relationship between people, destroys another person's feelings, and causes damage to another person.**
2. What does Jesus say will happen to people who have a murderous anger toward others? **He says that those who are uncontrollably angry with others are in danger of hell.**
3. How might the Pharisees, who believed they could obey God perfectly, have reacted to Jesus' teachings? **Answers may include that they probably felt they had obeyed this law perfectly because they had not killed anyone. They were probably confused when Jesus seemed to expand the law to include anger.**

Jesus did not add anything new to the Law of Moses. He interpreted it the way God had always intended it. God wants his people to obey the Law from their hearts. He wants his people to do more than follow the letter of the law—instead, he wants them to follow the spirit of his commands.

Jesus taught his disciples to guard against destructive anger, which can damage people and their relationships with one another. The basic human emotion of anger is not bad. It's what we do after we become angry that can cause harm to ourselves and others.

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READ Matthew 5:38–42 and answer the following questions.

4. Is Jesus telling you in these verses that you should allow yourselves to get beat up? Why or why not? **No. Allow students a variety of responses in their discussion as they struggle with this question.**
5. Does getting even ever solve the real, underlying problem? **No. Revenge does not solve problems but instead creates new ones.**
6. What is a better way to deal with problems than trying to get even? **Answers may include talking out problems, confronting others with your feelings about the situation, or walking away and taking some time to cool off.**

READ Matthew 5:43–48 and answer the following questions.

Christians should be different from non-Christians. Jesus continued to instruct his disciples about these themes.

7. What was Jesus' command to his disciples? **Jesus commanded his disciples to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them.**
8. How can we imitate Christ's behavior in this area? **We can pray for those who make our lives difficult and be kind to all people.**
9. Do you think being kind to someone who is nasty to you will change the person's attitude toward you? If it doesn't, what difference does it make whether or not you are kind? **Encourage students to see that sometimes they are the person who first needs to change. Once their attitude toward the other person has changed, new possibilities and opportunities will emerge.**

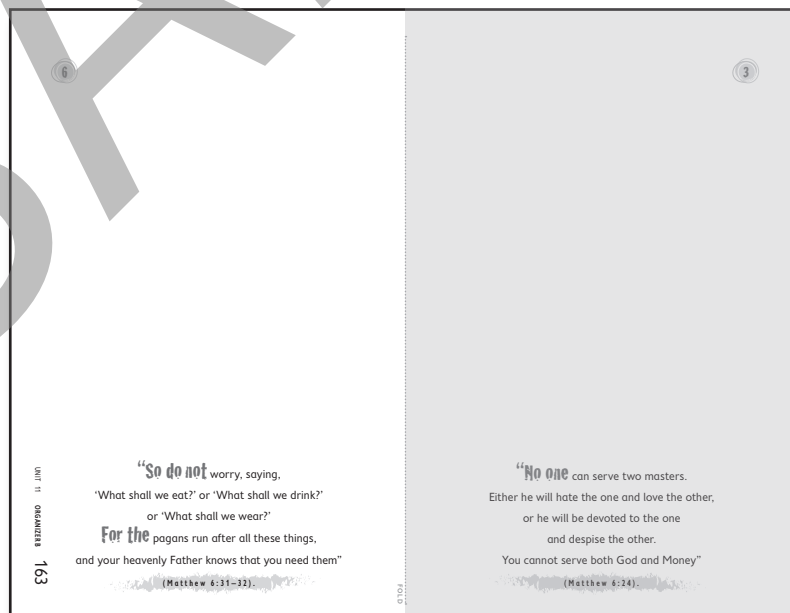
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Student Activities

1. Read the following information, and have students determine whether the “victims” Jesus talked about were acting in a passive or in an active matter.
 - Imagine you have hit someone with your right hand. He not only refuses to hit you back but turns his other cheek in your direction. (Demonstrate.) There are only two ways you can hit him again: with your backhand or with your left hand. (Demonstrate.) In Jewish law the left hand was considered unclean and would never be used to hit a peer. To hit someone with your backhand would have shown that you were petty or mean. How does knowing this information make the person who refuses to hit back active and not passive? (Students may respond that the person being hit is actively placing the hitter in an awkward and losing situation. The person being hit is defusing the situation.)
 - In Jesus' time most people wore two garments—a tunic and a cloak. Jesus told his audience that if someone sued them and took their tunic, they were also to offer him their cloak. This would have left the person being sued

uncovered. How does knowing this information make the person being sued active rather than passive? (The person doing the suing would look mean and petty by leaving someone else naked because of his or her demands.)

- The soldiers of the Roman Empire had the authority to force others to carry their bundles for one mile. No one could refuse a Roman soldier this request. But what happened to the power of the Roman soldier and the Roman government when a person agreed to carry the load for two miles? (The person carrying the load gained the upper hand. The Roman soldier was no longer humbling the person with his request. The law to carry a burden for a mile had become meaningless in this situation.)
- 2. Ask students to think of ways in which they can actively respond as Christians when others hurt or humiliate them. (Answers may include complimenting those people; finding other, more positive people to do things with; or refusing to respond in anger or with revenge.)
- 3. Instruct students to reconvene into their groups from the beginning of the lesson. Explain that this time around they will act out a Christlike response to their situation.
- 4. After the exercise is complete, ask students how they felt about their reactions the second time around. Was it hard not to fight back or get even? How did they feel when the other person “turned the other cheek”?
- 5. Ask what students have learned that they can apply to situations with their friends or family. (Ideally, they will say that they can be more Christlike and have learned new strategies for handling arguments and other problem situations.)
- 6. Ask students to think about the kinds of fights, name calling, or other such situations that happen frequently in their daily lives. Challenge them to prepare in advance some more Christlike responses or strategies they can use when these situations recur.
- 7. Allow time for students to work on the memory verse booklet. You may want to allow them to share what they have done thus far.



Enrichment

- * **Guest speaker.** Invite your school counselor or another Christian counselor to visit your classroom. Have the counselor do a presentation on how students can respond in a positive, Christlike manner to peers and others who may hurt or humiliate them. Help students develop coping skills to deal with such situations. A key topic might be the high incidence of bullying in schools today and strategies for appropriate responses.
- * **Music.** “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian,” “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace,” or “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” from the *Psalter Hymnal*.