

The Book of Genesis, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Isaac Born and the Binding of Isaac

Genesis 20:1–22:24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This section moves from the joyful fulfillment of the promise in Isaac's birth to the staggering test of the binding of Isaac. Doctrinally, it teaches the faithfulness of God to keep His promises against all odds and after long delay, His patient grace toward His failing servants, His compassion for the outcast, His character as the God who provides, and, supremely, in chapter twenty-two, the nature of testing faith and a foreshadowing of the gospel itself. The binding of Isaac is one of the clearest Old Testament pictures of the Father giving His own Son.

Handle Genesis 22 with great care, as it raises a genuine doctrinal and pastoral difficulty. Make four things clear. First, God never desired the death of Isaac; from the start it was a test (22:1), and God intervened to stop Abraham. Second, God utterly opposes child sacrifice; through the prophets He condemns it as a detestable thing that 'never entered my mind' (Jeremiah 19:5; see also Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). Third, this was a unique, unrepeatable test of a unique man at a unique point in redemptive history, not a pattern for us. Fourth, the whole scene is a divinely intended foreshadowing: a father offering his beloved, only son; a son carrying the wood up the hill; a substitute provided so the son goes free; all pointing to God the Father, who 'did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). Abraham's faith, Hebrews tells us, reasoned that God could even raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

Formationally, the passage calls students to trust God's faithfulness in long waiting, to take honest stock of recurring sins, to rest in God's compassion when they feel cast out, and above all to hold their dearest treasures with an open hand, loving God supremely. Lead them, finally, to the cross, where the Lamb that God provided is His own Son, given in our place.

Question 1

Student Question:

After twenty-five years of waiting, "the Lord visited Sarah as he had said," and Isaac was born (21:1–7). What does the long-awaited birth of Isaac teach us about the faithfulness of God to keep His promises, even when fulfillment seems impossible and long delayed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After twenty-five years, the promise is fulfilled: 'The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised' (21:1). The repetition of 'as he had said' and 'as he had

promised' is the point. God's word proved true. What He says, He does, even when it takes a quarter century and a miracle.

Help students feel the length of the wait. Twenty-five years is most of an adult lifetime. Through all those years of apparent silence and delay, God had not forgotten and had not failed. The delay was not denial; it was the unfolding of God's perfect timing.

Draw out the doctrine of God's faithfulness. 'God is not man, that he should lie... Has he said, and will he not do it?' (Numbers 23:19). The birth of Isaac stands as a monument to the reliability of God's promises. If He kept this impossible promise, He will keep the others.

Note the joy of fulfillment. Sarah's bitter laugh of disbelief becomes a joyful laugh of wonder: 'God has made laughter for me.' When God fulfills His word, the long ache of waiting gives way to praise. This encourages us to wait in hope, knowing that God's promises end not in disappointment but in joy.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's faithfulness to keep His promises, however long delayed (Genesis 21:1).
- Delay as the unfolding of God's timing, not denial.
- The reliability of God's word (Numbers 23:19).
- Waiting in hope that ends in joy and praise.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the text stress that it happened 'as he had said'?
- What does Isaac's birth teach about trusting God's promises?
- How does the fulfillment turn Sarah's laughter from doubt to joy?

Question 2

Student Question:

*Where are you still waiting on God for something He has promised or you have long hoped for?
How do you keep trusting His faithfulness and His timing when the waiting stretches on?*

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies the long wait for Isaac to the student's own season of waiting. Almost everyone is waiting on God for something: an answered prayer, a change of circumstance, a hope long deferred. The wait can wear down faith and tempt us to conclude that God has forgotten.

Help students reframe waiting in light of God's faithfulness. The God who kept Abraham and Sarah waiting twenty-five years was faithful the whole time. Waiting is not evidence of God's absence; it is often the arena in which faith is deepened and God's timing is perfected.

Address the temptations that come in waiting: giving up hope, taking matters into our own hands (as Abraham and Sarah did with Hagar), or growing bitter. The call is to keep trusting God's character and timing, even when we cannot see the end.

Invite a concrete reflection: what the student is waiting for, and what it would look like to wait in active, hopeful trust rather than despair or self-reliance, leaning on the faithfulness of the God who keeps His word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting God's faithfulness and timing in long seasons of waiting.
- Waiting as the arena where faith is deepened.
- Resisting despair, self-reliance, and bitterness in the wait.
- Hope grounded in God's proven character.

Discussion Prompts

- What are you still waiting on God for?
- How does Abraham and Sarah's long wait encourage you?
- What does hopeful, trusting waiting look like for you?

Question 3

Student Question:

Just before Isaac's birth, Abraham again lied about Sarah out of fear, repeating an old sin, and yet God protected them and kept His promise (20:1-18). What does this teach us about God's faithfulness even when His people fail, and about our tendency to repeat the same sins?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter twenty contains a discouraging echo: Abraham, in a new place, again passes Sarah off as merely his sister out of fear, the same sin he committed in Egypt years before. The great man of faith repeats an old failure. And once again God intervenes, protecting Sarah and preserving the promise despite Abraham's fear-driven scheme.

Be honest about what this shows. Spiritual maturity is not a straight line, and even great saints can stumble over the same sin more than once. Abraham's repeated failure is a humbling reminder that none of us outgrows our need for grace, and that yesterday's faith does not guarantee today's faithfulness.

But fix attention on the deeper theme: God's faithfulness is greater than our failures. The promise did not depend on Abraham's flawless record; it rested on God's commitment. God protected Sarah, rebuked Abimelech, and kept His plan on track. This is grace, and it is our only hope.

Help students hold both truths without distortion. God's faithfulness is not a license to keep sinning; Abraham's repeated lie brought real danger and shame. But neither does our failure cancel God's promises. He works His purposes through flawed people who are still learning to trust Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Even great saints can repeat old sins; maturity is not a straight line.
- Our ongoing need for grace; yesterday's faith not guaranteeing today's.
- God's faithfulness greater than our failures, preserving His promise.
- Grace as no license to sin, yet our failure not canceling God's promises.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Abraham's repeated lie reveal about spiritual growth?
- How is God's faithfulness shown despite Abraham's failure?
- How do we hold God's grace and the seriousness of sin together?

Question 4

Student Question:

What recurring sin or pattern do you find yourself stumbling over again and again? How does God's patient faithfulness encourage you, and what would genuine growth in that area look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honest self-examination about recurring sin. Like Abraham with his fear-driven deception, most of us have a besetting sin we stumble over repeatedly, a pattern of anger, lust, dishonesty, worry, pride, or escape that resurfaces no matter how often we resolve to be done with it.

Help students name the pattern without despair. The goal is honesty, not condemnation. Recognizing a recurring sin is the first step toward addressing it. Hiding it or pretending it is gone only gives it room to operate.

Offer both comfort and challenge. The comfort: God's patient faithfulness does not abandon us when we fall again; His mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). The challenge: God's grace is meant to lead us to repentance and growth, not to passive resignation. Real change usually involves confession, accountability, removing triggers, and dependence on the Spirit.

Invite a concrete step toward growth in the specific area: a confession to make, a person to enlist for accountability, a practical safeguard to put in place, trusting God's faithful grace to help.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest examination of recurring, besetting sin.
- Recognizing the pattern as the first step toward change.
- God's patient mercy, new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).
- Grace leading to repentance and growth, not resignation.

Discussion Prompts

- What sin or pattern do you find yourself repeating?
- How does God's patient faithfulness encourage you there?
- What concrete step toward growth could you take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

When Hagar and Ishmael were sent away and ran out of water in the wilderness, God heard the boy's cry and provided for them (21:14-21). What does God's care for the outcast Hagar and Ishmael reveal about His compassion and His faithfulness to His word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When tension in the household led to Hagar and Ishmael being sent away, they soon ran out of water in the wilderness, and Hagar, unable to watch her son die, wept. And God heard. 'God heard the voice of the boy,' opened Hagar's eyes to a well, and promised to make Ishmael a nation (21:17-20). Once again, God shows tender care for the outcast.

Draw out God's compassion. This is the second time God has met Hagar in a wilderness, and again He proves to be 'the God who sees' and hears. He cares for those pushed to the margins, even those outside the central line of promise. Ishmael was not the child of promise, yet God did not abandon him; He kept His word concerning him.

This reveals God's faithfulness and His heart. He is faithful to every word He speaks, including His promises about Ishmael. And His compassion reaches the desperate and the discarded. 'The Lord is near to the brokenhearted' (Psalm 34:18).

Help students see the breadth of God's care. The God of the Bible is not concerned only with the prominent and the chosen; He hears the cry of a frightened mother and a dying boy in the desert. No one is beyond the reach of His compassion.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's tender compassion for the outcast and the desperate (Genesis 21:17-20).
- God as the One who hears and sees those at the margins.
- God's faithfulness to every word, including His promises about Ishmael.

- The Lord's nearness to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

Discussion Prompts

- What does God's care for Hagar and Ishmael reveal about His heart?
- Why is it significant that God cared for those outside the line of promise?
- How does this broaden your sense of God's compassion?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where do you feel like you are in a wilderness, cast out, running dry, or at the end of your resources? How does God's provision for Hagar and Ishmael speak to your trust in His care for you there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question lets students bring their own wilderness to God. Many feel, at times, cast out, running dry, or at the end of their resources, abandoned by people, overwhelmed by circumstances, unsure how they will make it. Hagar's story speaks directly to that desperation.

Help students personalize God's provision. The God who heard Ishmael's cry and opened Hagar's eyes to a well is the same God who hears them and can open their eyes to provision they cannot yet see. Sometimes the well is already near; we simply have not seen it through our tears.

Encourage honest crying out. Hagar wept and God heard. We are not asked to pretend we are fine; we are invited to bring our desperation to a God who hears the cry of the helpless and provides.

Invite a concrete application: where the student feels in a wilderness, and what it would look like to trust God's compassion and provision there, watching for the 'well' He may open, rather than despairing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bringing our wilderness experiences to a God who hears.
- Trusting God to provide and to open our eyes to unseen help.
- Honest crying out rather than pretending we are fine.
- God's compassion for the desperate as ground for trust.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you feel like you are in a wilderness right now?
- How does God's provision for Hagar and Ishmael speak to you there?

- What would trusting God's compassion in that place look like?

Question 7

Student Question:

On the mountain, when Isaac asked where the lamb was, Abraham said, "God will provide," and God did, providing a ram in Isaac's place; Abraham named the place "The Lord will provide" (22:8, 13–14). What does this reveal about God as the One who provides, and about obeying before we can see how He will provide?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

On the mountain, Isaac asks the heart-stopping question: 'Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' And Abraham answers in faith, 'God will provide for himself the lamb' (22:8). He does not yet see how, but he trusts that God will. And God does: at the last moment, a ram is caught in a thicket, and Abraham offers it in place of his son, naming the place 'The Lord will provide' (Jehovah-Jireh, 22:14).

Draw out the truth about God's provision. God is Jehovah-Jireh, the One who sees the need ahead of time and provides for it. The provision came after Abraham's obedience, not before; he had to walk up the mountain trusting before he saw the ram. Faith often obeys before it sees how God will provide.

Note the substitution. The ram dies so that Isaac lives, a life given in place of a life. This is the principle of substitution that runs through the whole Bible and reaches its climax at the cross, where Christ dies in our place. The provided ram is a signpost to the provided Lamb.

Help students grasp the order: obedience first, then provision seen. Abraham did not refuse to climb the mountain until God showed him the ram; he climbed in trust, and on the mountain of the Lord it was provided. This is the pattern of faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as Jehovah-Jireh, the One who provides (Genesis 22:14).
- Provision coming after obedience, seen on the mountain, not before the climb.
- The substitute ram dying in Isaac's place, the principle of substitution.
- The provided ram pointing to the provided Lamb, Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the name 'The Lord will provide' reveal about God?
- Why did Abraham have to obey before he saw the provision?
- How does the substitute ram point forward to Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where is God calling you to obey or to step out in trust before you can see how He will provide? What would it look like to walk up the mountain, as Abraham did, trusting that God will provide what is needed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question applies the principle of obeying before seeing to the student's life. God often calls us to step out, to give, to forgive, to go, to obey, before we can see how He will provide what the obedience requires. Faith walks up the mountain trusting that provision will be there.

Help students identify where they are hesitating to obey because they cannot yet see how it will work out: a generosity that seems beyond their means, a calling that requires risk, a reconciliation that feels costly, a step of obedience whose outcome is unclear.

Encourage the Abraham pattern. We do not demand to see the ram before we climb; we climb in trust, knowing that 'on the mountain of the Lord it shall be provided' (22:14). God's provision is often released in the act of obedience, not before it.

Invite a concrete step: a specific obedience the student has been delaying until they could see how it would work, and a renewed willingness to obey now, trusting God to provide.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obeying before we see how God will provide.
- Identifying where uncertainty makes us delay obedience.
- God's provision often released in the act of obedience.
- Trusting that on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to obey before you can see how it will work out?
- What makes it hard to step out before you see the provision?
- What obedience could you take up this week, trusting God to provide?

Question 9**Student Question:**

In the binding of Isaac, God tested Abraham's faith, stopped him from harming the boy, and provided a substitute, and the scene foreshadows the Father offering His own Son (Romans 8:32; John 3:16). Since Scripture is clear that God hates and forbids child sacrifice (Jeremiah 19:5), how should we understand this unique test, and how does it point us to the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest and most important part of the lesson, and it must be taught with care, because the command to offer Isaac troubles many sincere readers. Begin by establishing what the text itself says: 'God tested Abraham' (22:1). From the very first verse, the reader knows this is a test. God never intended for Isaac to die; He intervened to stop Abraham and provided a substitute. The point was to prove and refine Abraham's faith, not to receive a child's blood.

Address the moral question directly, because students may wonder how a good God could command such a thing. Make clear that God utterly opposes child sacrifice. He later condemns it in the strongest terms as a detestable abomination that He never commanded and that 'never came into my mind' (Jeremiah 19:5; see Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). The God of the Bible abhors the very practice the pagan nations engaged in. This episode is not God endorsing child sacrifice; it is the opposite, for God stops it and provides a ram instead, teaching forever that He does not want our children's blood.

Set the test in its unique, redemptive-historical place. This was a singular test of a singular man at a pivotal moment, not a pattern for anyone to imitate. God was testing whether Abraham loved the Giver more than the gift, whether he would trust God even with the son on whom the whole promise depended. Hebrews tells us how Abraham reasoned: he 'considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead' (Hebrews 11:19). Abraham obeyed believing that God would somehow keep His promise, even through death. His faith had grown to trust God past the edge of what he could see.

Now unfold the foreshadowing, which is the deepest purpose of the scene. Look at the parallels: a father offering his beloved, only son (22:2; compare John 3:16); the son carrying the wood for his own sacrifice up the hill (22:6; compare John 19:17); three days under the shadow of death; the place, Mount Moriah, in the region where Jerusalem and Calvary would later stand; and the provision of a substitute so the son goes free. The whole episode is a divinely arranged preview of the cross. What God spared Abraham from doing, God the Father did not spare Himself: 'He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 8:32). There was no ram in the thicket for Jesus; He was the Lamb God provided.

Land it in worship and trust. Abraham's trembling obedience on Moriah opens a window into the heart of God, who loved us so much that He gave His only Son in our place. The right response is not merely to admire Abraham but to fall in worship before the Father and the Son. And it calls us to Abraham's kind of faith: to trust God so completely that we will hold even our dearest treasures with an open hand, loving the Giver above every gift, confident that the God who provided the Lamb can be trusted with everything else.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command as a test from the outset; God never intended Isaac's death (Genesis 22:1).
- God's utter opposition to child sacrifice, which He condemns and never desired (Jeremiah 19:5; Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31).
- A unique, unrepeatable test of a unique man, not a pattern to imitate.

- Abraham's faith reasoning that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).
- The scene as a divinely intended foreshadowing of the Father offering His Son (Romans 8:32; John 3:16).
- Christ as the Lamb God provided, for whom there was no substitute.
- Loving the Giver above every gift, holding our treasures with an open hand.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the text itself signal that this was a test, not God's true desire?
- How do we know God opposes child sacrifice, and why does that matter here?
- In what ways does the binding of Isaac foreshadow the cross?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to trust His faithfulness, to hold your treasures with an open hand, and to find your hope in the Lamb that God Himself provided.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to bring the passage to a personal point. We have seen God's faithfulness to His promise, His grace toward failure, His compassion for the outcast, His provision on the mountain, and His heart revealed in the offering of Isaac. The thread that binds them is trust: trusting God enough to wait, to obey, and to hold even our dearest things with an open hand.

Press for the specific. For one student it is trusting God's faithfulness in a long wait; for another, surrendering a treasure that has begun to rival God; for another, obeying before they can see how God will provide; for another, simply resting in the Lamb God provided.

Close at Moriah and at Calvary. The God who provided a ram for Isaac provided His own Son for us. To be formed by this passage is to love God above every gift, to trust Him with what is most precious to us, and to find our deepest hope not in our own obedience but in the Lamb that God Himself provided, His beloved Son, given in our place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting God enough to wait, obey, and hold our treasures with an open hand.
- Loving the Giver above every gift.
- Obeying before we see God's provision.
- Resting our hope in the Lamb God provided, His own Son.

Discussion Prompts

- What treasure is God calling you to hold with an open hand?

- Where is He calling you to trust or obey before you can see the outcome?
- How does the Lamb God provided become your deepest hope?