

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 13: Isaac Born and the Binding of Isaac -- Genesis 20:1–22:24

At last the laughter changes. For chapters now, laughter in this story has been the bitter kind, Abraham falling on his face and chuckling at the absurdity, Sarah laughing behind the tent at a promise too late to keep. But chapter twenty-one opens with the words faith has been waiting twenty-five years to hear: “The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.” A baby cries in a tent where a hundred-year-old man and a ninety-year-old woman live, and Sarah says, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” They name him Isaac, which means “he laughs.” God always keeps His word, even when His word seems impossible, even when we have stopped expecting it.

But the road to Isaac was not a straight line of strong faith. Just before his birth, Abraham repeats the very same fearful lie about his wife that got him into trouble in Egypt, and once again God has to step in and protect them from the consequences of Abraham’s own failure. It is strangely comforting. The father of the faithful was not a spiritual superhero; he was a man who stumbled over the same sin twice, and God remained faithful anyway. Our God works His purposes through flawed people who are still learning to trust Him.

And then comes chapter twenty-two, one of the most staggering chapters in the entire Bible. God says to Abraham, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and... offer him there as a burnt offering.” Read those words and feel their weight. The son he waited a lifetime for. The son the promise depends on. The son he loves. And Abraham rises early the next morning and obeys, walking three days toward a mountain with his boy and a knife and a breaking heart, telling his servants, “We will worship and come again to you,” and telling Isaac, “God will provide for himself the lamb.”

At the last possible second, the knife raised, the voice from heaven calls his name, and Abraham looks up and sees a ram caught in a thicket, a substitute, a life in place of his son’s. He names the place “The Lord will provide.” This was never about God wanting a child’s blood; the God of the Bible utterly hates child sacrifice and forbids it. It was a unique test of a unique man, and it was something more: a window into the heart of God, who would one day climb another hill outside Jerusalem and not spare His own Son, but give Him up for us all. Read this passage and let it lead you, through Abraham’s trembling obedience, to the cross, where the Lamb God provided was His own beloved Son.

Group Discussion: When God told Abraham to offer Isaac, Abraham obeyed early the next morning, trusting that somehow God would keep His promise (22:1–8; Hebrews 11:17–19). What do you think made it possible for Abraham to obey such an agonizing command, and what does his trust reveal about how well he had come to know God?

Personal Reflection: After waiting twenty-five years, Abraham was asked to give back to God the very son he had longed for. Is there something precious to you, a person, a dream, a possession, that you are holding so tightly it has become more important than God Himself? What would it mean to hold it with an open hand?

Read Genesis 20:1–22:24

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 11:17–19, Abraham offering Isaac, believing God could raise the dead; Romans 8:32, God not sparing His own Son but giving Him up for us all; John 3:16, God so loving the world that He gave His only Son; James 2:21–23, Abraham’s faith completed by his obedience at the altar; Jeremiah 19:5, God declaring that child sacrifice never entered His mind, showing how He abhors it.