

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: The Supreme Test: Offering Isaac on Moriah

Genesis 22:1–19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Genesis 22 is the climax of the Abraham narrative and one of the most demanding passages in all of Scripture, and it requires both pastoral care and doctrinal clarity. The historical and literary setting heightens everything: Isaac is the long-awaited child of promise, on whom every covenant word now rests, and God commands Abraham to offer him on a mountain in the region of Moriah, later identified with the temple mount in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 3:1). The teacher must name plainly, and early, what the passage is not. God does not desire human sacrifice; He explicitly condemns the sacrifice of children as detestable, a thing that never entered His mind (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5). This was a unique, never-to-be-repeated test, and God never intended Isaac to die; He stopped Abraham's hand and provided a substitute. Establishing this frees the class to engage the chapter without being frightened by it for the wrong reasons.

Doctrinally, several truths come into focus. The chapter teaches the nature of testing: God tests to prove and refine genuine faith, which is wholly different from tempting to evil (James 1:13). It displays a faith that obeys beyond understanding, grounded in confidence in God's power even to raise the dead (Hebrews 11:17–19). It reveals God as the provider of a substitute, Jehovah Jireh, the LORD who provides. And it raises honestly the moral question that troubles many sincere readers, which the teacher should address directly rather than skip. Be especially sensitive here to parents who have lost children and to any who find the command disturbing; handle the text with reverence and tenderness.

The doctrinal summit (Question 9) is the foreshadowing of the cross, and it should be handled with worshipful care. A father and his beloved only son climb a mountain near Jerusalem; the son carries the wood of his own sacrifice; a substitute dies in his place. Two thousand years later God the Father led His own beloved Son up a hill outside that same city and, unlike Abraham, did not withhold Him (Romans 8:32; John 3:16). The provided ram points to Christ the Lamb of God. The block should also note, without preempting Lesson 11, that Abraham's obedience here is what James points to when he says faith was completed by works (James 2:21–22). Aim, finally, at the heart: to call students to a surrendering, trusting faith that holds even God's gifts with an open hand, anchored in the God who provided His own Son.

Question 1

Student Question:

The chapter opens, “After these things God tested Abraham” (v. 1), and the command is framed in the most costly terms: “your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love” (v. 2). What does it mean that God tests His people, how does this differ from tempting someone to evil (James 1:13), and why is this rightly called the supreme test of Abraham’s faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the word the narrator gives us before Abraham knows it: this is a test. The reader is told at the outset what Abraham was not told, that God was proving him, never intending Isaac’s death. Keeping this in view is essential; the chapter is the account of a test, with its outcome secured by God from the start.

Distinguish testing from temptation, using James 1:13: “God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” Temptation aims to draw us into sin and toward ruin; testing aims to prove, refine, and strengthen genuine faith. Satan tempts to destroy; God tests to purify (compare 1 Peter 1:6–7, faith refined like gold). God was not luring Abraham into evil; He was drawing out and proving a faith that was real.

Feel the weight of the command’s wording. God piles up the costly terms: your son, your only son, whom you love. He names exactly what makes the test so severe. This is not indifference to Abraham’s love for Isaac; it is full acknowledgment of it. The supreme test touches the supreme treasure.

Explain why this is the supreme test. Everything converges on Isaac: the promise of descendants, the covenant, the blessing to all nations, twenty-five years of waiting, and a father’s love. To surrender Isaac was to surrender, humanly speaking, the promise itself. God was asking whether Abraham trusted the Giver even more than the gift, even more than the promise that gift carried.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God tests to prove and refine faith; the reader knows from the start it is a test
- Testing versus temptation (James 1:13; 1 Peter 1:6–7)
- The costly terms (“your only son, whom you love”) acknowledging the depth of the test
- The supreme test as a question of trusting the Giver above the gift and the promise

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between God testing us and Satan tempting us?
- Why does God frame the command in such painfully specific terms?
- Why does everything in Abraham’s life converge on this one test?

Question 2

Student Question:

God's tests are meant to prove and refine genuine faith, not to destroy us. When hard trials come, do you tend to see them as God refining and strengthening your faith, or only as obstacles and misfortunes to escape? How might viewing a current trial as a test from a loving God change the way you walk through it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help the class reframe trials. Our instinct is to view hardship purely as something to escape, an interruption to the good life. Scripture invites a different lens: trials as the refining fire in which faith is proven and matured (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7). The same fire that we want to flee is often the fire God is using to purify us.

Be careful and pastoral. This does not mean every hardship is a direct test sent by God, nor that we should pretend pain is not painful. Abraham's test was agonizing, and he obeyed with a heavy heart. The point is not to deny the difficulty but to trust that a loving God is at work in it for our good.

Make it concrete. Ask each person to consider a current trial through this lens: what might God be refining, what trust might He be deepening, what idol might He be loosening? Seeing a loving purpose behind the hardship changes how we walk through it, from mere endurance to faith that expects God to be at work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reframing trials as the refining of faith (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7)
- Not every hardship is a direct test, and pain is still real
- Trusting a loving God's purpose without denying the difficulty
- Walking through trial with expectant faith rather than mere escape

Discussion Prompts

- Do you usually see trials as refining or merely as obstacles?
- What might God be refining in a current trial of yours?
- How would trusting His purpose change the way you walk through it?

Question 3

Student Question:

Abraham rose early to obey, told the servants "we will come again to you" (v. 5), and assured Isaac that "God will provide for himself the lamb" (v. 8). Hebrews 11:17–19 explains that Abraham reasoned God was able even to raise the dead. What does this reveal about the nature of a faith that obeys God beyond what it can understand or see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the clues to Abraham's faith scattered through the narrative. He rose early, not dragging his feet. He told the servants, "we will come again to you," we, both of us. He told Isaac, "God will provide the lamb." These are not the words of a man who expected to return alone. Somehow he trusted that Isaac would come back down the mountain.

Let Hebrews 11:17–19 supply the key. Abraham "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead." He could not reconcile the command (offer Isaac) with the promise (your offspring will come through Isaac), so he trusted that God, who had given life to his and Sarah's dead bodies, could give it again even from the ashes of an altar. His faith reasoned from God's proven power and character to a conclusion he could not yet see.

Define this kind of faith. It is not blind; it is grounded. Abraham obeyed beyond his understanding precisely because he had below his understanding a bedrock of confidence in who God is. When the command and the promise seemed to collide, he trusted that the God who could not lie would somehow keep both, and he left the how to God.

Apply it. Mature faith obeys God even when obedience seems to contradict the very thing God has promised, trusting that God is able and faithful to resolve what we cannot. This is the faith of the father of the faithful: it acts on God's word and leaves the impossible mathematics to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Clues of Abraham's confident faith woven through the narrative ("we will come again")
- Resurrection faith: God able even to raise the dead (Hebrews 11:17–19)
- Faith grounded in God's proven power and character, not blind
- Obeying beyond understanding while leaving the "how" to God

Discussion Prompts

- What clues show that Abraham expected Isaac to come back down the mountain?
- How did Abraham's faith reason from God's power to obedience?
- What does it mean to obey beyond understanding without obeying blindly?

Question 4

Student Question:

Abraham obeyed even though the command seemed to contradict everything, because he trusted God's character and power more than his own understanding. Is there a costly obedience you have been withholding because you cannot see how it could possibly work out? What would it look like to trust God beyond your understanding there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Connect the principle to real obedience. We often delay obeying God in some area because we cannot see how it could turn out well: the costly act of honesty, the hard reconciliation, the generous gift, the surrender of a plan, the step of faith that seems financially or relationally impossible. Like Abraham, we are asked to obey before we can see the outcome.

Locate the real obstacle, which is usually trust, not understanding. We say we do not understand, but often we simply do not yet trust that God can be relied on with the consequences. Abraham did not understand either; he trusted. The question is whether our confidence in God's character outweighs our need to see the outcome first.

Invite a concrete step. Ask each person to name one costly obedience they have been withholding and to consider what trusting God beyond their understanding would look like this week. The aim is not recklessness but a step of genuine obedience grounded in who God is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Delaying obedience because we cannot see the outcome
- Trust, not understanding, as the real obstacle
- Confidence in God's character outweighing the need to see first
- A concrete step of obedience beyond understanding

Discussion Prompts

- What costly obedience have you been withholding because you can't see how it works out?
- Is your real obstacle understanding, or trust?
- What would trusting God beyond your understanding look like there?

Question 5

Student Question:

Twice the passage points to God's provision: "God will provide for himself the lamb" (v. 8), and then the ram caught in the thicket dies in Isaac's place, so that Abraham names the place "The LORD will provide" (v. 14). What does the provision of a substitute teach about how God meets us in our extremity, and about the principle of substitutionary sacrifice that runs through Scripture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Trace the theme of provision. Abraham's words in verse 8 are both faith and prophecy: "God will provide for himself the lamb." At the last moment, God does exactly that, a ram caught in the thicket, dying in Isaac's place. Abraham memorializes it in the name of the mountain: Jehovah Jireh, the LORD will provide.

Draw out the principle of substitution. The ram dies so that Isaac lives. One takes the place of another. This principle runs through the whole sacrificial system that God would later give: an innocent victim in the place of the guilty, the lamb for the sinner. The altar on Moriah teaches in miniature what the whole Old Testament will teach, that God provides a substitute.

Note that God provides what He requires. Abraham could not supply the sacrifice; God supplied it Himself. This is the consistent pattern of grace: God Himself meets the demand He makes. The provision comes from God's side, not ours. This prepares the way for the ultimate provision in Christ, which Question 9 will develop.

Apply it to our extremity. The God of Abraham is still the God who provides, often at the last moment and in ways we did not foresee. This does not promise we will always escape the hard thing, but it assures us that God meets His people in their extremity with the provision they need, supremely the provision of a Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jehovah Jireh, the LORD who provides
- The principle of substitution: the innocent in place of another
- God providing what He requires; provision from His side, not ours
- God meeting His people in their extremity, supremely in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How are Abraham's words in verse 8 both faith and prophecy?
- What does the substitute ram teach about substitutionary sacrifice?
- Why does it matter that God provides what He requires?

Question 6

Student Question:

God called Abraham to surrender his most precious treasure back to Him, and only then did Abraham receive him again. What is the "Isaac" in your life, the good gift you are tempted to treasure above the Giver? What would it mean, this week, to lay it on the altar and hold it with an open hand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Define the 'Isaac' carefully. Isaac was not a sin; he was a good and God-given gift. The test was not about removing something evil but about whether a good gift had taken God's place in Abraham's heart. Our 'Isaacs' are often our best blessings: a child, a marriage, a career, a dream, our health, our reputation.

Press the heart question gently. The danger is not in loving good gifts but in loving them more than the Giver, in clutching them so tightly that we would disobey God to keep them, or that we would be destroyed to lose them. Laying an Isaac on the altar means surrendering it back to God, holding it with an open hand, willing to trust Him with it.

Note the outcome, which is full of grace. Abraham did not lose Isaac; he received him back, now held rightly, as a gift rather than an idol. Surrender to God is not the loss of our treasures but their reordering; what we lay on the altar in trust we often receive back, freed from the grip that was strangling both it and us.

Invite a concrete act. Ask each person to name their Isaac and to make a deliberate act of surrender this week, entrusting that good gift to God and loosening their grip, so that God, not the gift, holds first place.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The 'Isaac' as a good gift, not a sin
- Loving the gift more than the Giver as the heart issue
- Surrender as holding gifts with an open hand, willing to trust God
- Surrender reordering our treasures rather than simply removing them

Discussion Prompts

- What is the 'Isaac' you are tempted to treasure above God?
- What is the difference between loving a gift and idolizing it?
- What would laying it on the altar look like this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

This account disturbs many readers because God commands what He elsewhere calls detestable: the sacrifice of a child (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5). How do we understand this passage rightly, recognizing that this was a unique, never-repeated test, that God never intended Isaac to die, and that He Himself stopped Abraham's hand and provided the ram? How would you help someone who finds this story troubling?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take the moral difficulty seriously and address it directly; do not skip past it. Many sincere believers, and especially parents, are genuinely disturbed by this chapter, and they should not be shamed for that. The teacher's job is to help them read it rightly, not to scold them for struggling.

State the first clarifying truth plainly: God abhors human sacrifice. He repeatedly and emphatically condemns the sacrifice of children as detestable, something that never even entered His mind (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5; Jeremiah 7:31). Whatever Genesis 22 is, it is not God endorsing child sacrifice. The rest of Scripture forbids the very thing the pagans around Israel practiced.

State the second clarifying truth: God never intended Isaac to die. From the reader's first verse, we are told this is a test. God knew the outcome; He had the ram ready; He stopped Abraham's hand at the decisive moment. The command was real as a test of Abraham's heart, but the death of Isaac was never God's purpose. This was a unique, unrepeatable moment in redemptive history, not a pattern God asks anyone to follow.

Offer the deeper purpose. God was proving and displaying the faith of the father of the faithful, and, as Question 9 will show, He was painting in advance the picture of His own self-giving love at the cross. The God who would not finally require Isaac of Abraham is the God who would give His own Son for us. The command that troubles us is, rightly seen, a window into the heart of a God who provides rather than demands.

Equip the class to help a troubled friend. Counsel them to take the difficulty seriously, to point to God's explicit condemnation of child sacrifice, to stress that God provided the substitute and never intended Isaac's death, and to lead the conversation toward the cross, where this scene finds its meaning. Honest wrestling that ends at the foot of the cross is not a threat to faith but a deepening of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Taking the moral difficulty seriously rather than skipping it
- God's explicit condemnation of child sacrifice (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5; 7:31)
- A unique, never-repeated test; God never intended Isaac to die
- God knowing the outcome, providing the ram, and stopping Abraham's hand
- The deeper purpose: proving faith and foreshadowing the cross
- How to help a troubled believer read the passage rightly

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important to say clearly that God abhors human sacrifice?
- What signs in the text show God never intended Isaac to die?
- How would you help a friend who finds this story disturbing?

Question 8

Student Question:

Faith sometimes has to trust God's good character even when a part of His Word or His providence is hard to understand. When you encounter something in Scripture or in your life that

troubles or confuses you, do you bring the question honestly to God while still trusting His goodness, or do you let it quietly erode your trust? How can you wrestle honestly and faithfully at the same time?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Validate honest wrestling. Faith is not pretending we have no questions. The Psalms, Job, and Habakkuk all wrestle honestly with God over things they cannot understand, and God does not reject them for it. The goal is not a faith without questions but a faith that brings its questions to God rather than away from Him.

Name the danger of unspoken doubt. When we nurse a troubling question in silence, away from God and away from mature believers, it tends to curdle into resentment or quiet unbelief. The same question, brought honestly into God's presence and into the fellowship of the church, can deepen rather than destroy faith.

Offer a posture for faithful wrestling. We hold two things at once: honest acknowledgment of what we do not understand, and settled trust in what we do know of God's character, supremely His love shown at the cross. We interpret the hard and unclear in the light of the clear and certain. Encourage the class to bring one troubling question to God this week rather than letting it fester.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honest wrestling as compatible with faith (Psalms, Job, Habakkuk)
- The danger of nursing doubt in silence
- Bringing questions to God and the church rather than away from them
- Interpreting the hard and unclear in light of God's clear, proven love

Discussion Prompts

- Do you bring your hard questions to God or carry them away from Him?
- How can honest wrestling actually deepen faith?
- What troubling question do you need to bring to God this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

A father climbs a mountain in the region of Moriah with his beloved only son, who carries the wood of his own sacrifice, and a substitute dies in the son's place, while God swears that through Abraham's offspring all nations will be blessed (vv. 6–18). How does this scene foreshadow God the Father, who "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32; John 3:16), how does the provided substitute point to Christ the Lamb of God, and how does Abraham's obedience here show the kind of faith that is completed by works (James 2:21–22)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the worshipful summit of the lesson, so slow down and let the parallels accumulate reverently. A father and his beloved only son climb a mountain together. The son carries the wood of the sacrifice on his own back. The place is in the region of Moriah, the very hills where Jerusalem would rise (2 Chronicles 3:1). The father is willing to give up the son he loves. Every detail leans forward toward another hill outside that same city.

Draw the central contrast that makes the gospel shine. On Moriah, God stopped Abraham's hand and provided a ram so that Isaac would live. At Calvary, there was no voice from heaven to stay the execution, no substitute provided in His place, because He was the substitute. Romans 8:32 says God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all," the very thing Abraham was spared from doing. What God in mercy did not require of Abraham, He took upon Himself for us.

Connect the substitute to Christ. The ram that died in Isaac's place points to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Isaac was spared because a substitute died; we are spared because the true Substitute, Jesus, died in our place. 'The LORD will provide' found its deepest fulfillment when God provided His own Son as the Lamb. Let this move the class to worship, not merely to note a parallel.

Show what this reveals about the Father's love. We sometimes imagine the cross as the Son rescuing us from a reluctant Father. Moriah corrects that. The same heart that asked Abraham for his beloved son is the heart that gave His own beloved Son, because He so loved the world (John 3:16). The cost that staggered us in Abraham's test is the cost God Himself paid out of love.

Finally, note Abraham's obedience as completed faith, pointing ahead to Lesson 11. James 2:21–22 points precisely to this moment: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works." Abraham's faith, credited as righteousness back in Genesis 15, here proves itself genuine by obeying. This is the great biblical refutation of a faith that merely believes and does nothing. Plant the point here, and let Lesson 11 develop the full harmony of faith and works; for now, show that the faith God commends is the faith that obeys, even at the highest cost.

Close by drawing the threads together. The oath-confirmed promise at the end of the chapter, that in Abraham's offspring all nations will be blessed, is fulfilled in Christ, the offspring through whom blessing comes to the world (Galatians 3:16). The mountain of testing becomes the mountain of provision, and both point to the mountain of redemption. The God who provided for Abraham has provided for us the Lamb He did not spare.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moriah foreshadowing the Father giving His beloved Son (Romans 8:32; John 3:16)
- The contrast: a substitute provided for Isaac, but Christ Himself the substitute for us
- The ram pointing to Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29)
- The cross revealing the Father's love, not a reluctant Father
- Abraham's obedience as faith completed by works (James 2:21–22), pointing to Lesson 11
- The oath-confirmed promise fulfilled in Christ, in whom all nations are blessed (Galatians 3:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What details on Moriah point forward to the cross?
- Why is it significant that no substitute was provided for Christ?
- How does James 2:21–22 describe the faith Abraham showed here?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole account. You have watched the supreme test of faith, a father's anguished obedience, God's provision of a substitute, and the long shadow of the cross falling across Mount Moriah. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this part of Abraham's story. What is the single truth about faith, surrender, or God's provision in Christ that you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Press for one concrete response. Some need to surrender an Isaac; some need to obey beyond their understanding; some need to bring an honest, troubling question to God; some most of all need to be freshly moved by the love of a Father who did not spare His Son. Let each name their own.

Center the response on Christ. Everything in this chapter points to Him: the beloved son, the carried wood, the provided substitute, the mountain near Jerusalem. Being formed by Genesis 22 means trusting and surrendering to the God who proved His love by giving His own Son in our place, and learning to hold even our dearest gifts with the open hand of faith.

End in worship and assurance. The God who provided the ram, and supremely provided the Lamb, can be trusted with whatever He asks us to lay down. The class can carry into the week a surrendering trust grounded in the love displayed on Moriah and fulfilled at Calvary.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the account to a concrete response of surrender or trust
- Christ at the center: the beloved Son, the carried wood, the provided Lamb
- Holding our dearest gifts with the open hand of faith

- Surrendering trust grounded in the Father's love at the cross

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth from this chapter do you most need this week?
- What is God asking you to surrender or to trust Him with?
- How does the Father giving His Son move you to trust Him?