Lesson: Genesis 22:1-14; Time of Action: about 2050 B.C.; Place of Action: Beersheba and Moriah

Golden Text: “And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together” (Genesis 22:8).

I. INTRODUCTION. Tests! Most people don’t like them, whether they are tests in school or tests of our faith. However, both are necessary. School tests reveal how well we have learned the classroom material. A test of our faith reveals the authenticity of our spiritual progress. Abraham waited for years for God to fulfill His promise to give him a son who would be his heir. But after God gave him the promised son, Isaac, He suddenly instructed Abraham to offer his son as a burnt offering. In this week’s lesson, Abraham found himself faced with his greatest test of faith.
II. LESSON BACKGROUND. Abram was seventy-five when he set out from Haran toward the land of Canaan (see Genesis 12:4). God promised that he would become a “great nation” (see Genesis 12:2) and that he would have a natural son (see Genesis 15:4). Abram continued to believe that God would make this happen, although he didn’t understand how, considering how old he and Sarai were. At the suggestion of Sarai (see Genesis 16:1-2), Abram took her handmaid Hagar, and fathered Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born (see Genesis 16:3-4). Of course this was not what God intended, and the decision had long-term consequences. When Abram was ninety-nine, the Lord appeared to him again, renewing His covenant (see Genesis 17:1-19). Now God promised Abram that he would be “a father of many nations” (see Genesis 17:4), and He changed Abram’s name to Abraham to reflect this (see Genesis 17:5). God also gave Sarai a new name, “Sarah” (see Genesis 17:15). Before long, the Lord appeared to Abraham and Sarah and told them that they would have a child themselves within a year (see Genesis 18:10). Hearing this, Sarah laughed (see Genesis 18:12), something that Abraham himself had done before (see Genesis 17:17). Just as God promised, Abraham and Sarah had a son in their old age (see Genesis 21:1-5) and named him “Isaac” which means “laughter” or “he laughs.” But when Ishmael and Isaac, who was the younger of the two, started to grow up, strife began to develop between them (see Genesis 21:9). As a result, God told Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, and promised to make him a nation as well (see Genesis 21:12-14). After a period of “many days” (see Genesis 21:34), during which Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines, he was called to face the greatest test of his life (see Genesis 22:1). This is
where our lesson begins.

III. ABRAHAM’S TEST OF FAITH (Genesis 22:1-2)

A. God presents the test for Abraham (Genesis 22:1). Our first verse says, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” The phrase “after these things” refers to all the other things Abraham had experienced, and all the tests, hardships and difficulties he had gone through up to this point. First, he passed the “family test,” when he had to leave his loved ones and step out by faith to go to a new land (see Genesis 11:27-12:5). This was followed by the “famine test,” which Abraham failed because he doubted God and went down to Egypt for help (see Genesis 12:10-13:4). When they returned to the land of Canaan, Abraham passed the “fellowship test” when he gave Lot the first choice of the pastureland (see Genesis 13:5-18). He also passed the “fight test” when he defeated the four kings who had taken Lot captive (see Genesis 14:1-16), and he also passed the “fortune test” when he said no to Sodom’s wealth (see Genesis 14:17-24). But he failed the “fatherhood test” when Sarah got impatient with God and suggested that Abraham have a child by Hagar (see Genesis 16:1-4). When the time came to send Ishmael away, Abraham passed the “farewell test,” even though it broke his heart (see Genesis 21:11-14). Note: It’s quite possible
that Abraham was beginning to think that the storms had all blown over, but he was about to experience another one that would be sharper than any of the others. A lesson for us here is that we may have had many former trials, but that does not mean that there won’t be more. It was after Abraham’s many experiences that “God did tempt Abraham.” This statement emphasizes that the one true God initiated this trial or test of Abraham’s faith. Here the word “tempt” means “to test.” It does not mean to entice a person to sin. Note: In the “school of faith” we must have occasional tests, or we will never know where we are spiritually. Not every difficult experience in life is necessarily a personal test from God. Of course, any experience could become a test or a temptation depending on how we deal with it.

We must learn to distinguish between trials and temptations. Temptations come from our desires within us (see James 1:12-16), while trials come from the Lord who has a special purpose to fulfill. The Bible teaches that God has reasons for sending tests—perhaps to purify our faith (see I Peter 1:6-9), or perfect our character (see James 1:1-4), or even to protect us from sin (see II Corinthians 12:7-10). Temptations are used by the devil to bring out the worst in us, but trials are used by the Holy Spirit to bring out the best in us (see James 1:1-6). All believers face similar temptations to sin (see I Corinthians 10:13), but not all believers experience the same trials or tests of faith. God’s testings are tailor-made for each child of God and each experience is unique. God never asked Lot to face the tests that Abraham faced. Why? Because Lot was being tempted by the world and the flesh and never grew to
the place of maturity that Abraham reached. In one sense, it is a compliment when God sends us a test; it shows that God wants to “promote us” in the “school of faith.” God never sends a test until He knows we are ready for it. When God called out to Abraham He “said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.” Abraham quickly answered the Lord’s call.

B. God’s instructions for Abraham (Genesis 22:2). This verse says “And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Notice the tender way God spoke of “Isaac” as “thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.” This may remind us of God’s “only begotten Son” (see John 3:16), Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly God carefully chose these specific words to highlight the affection Abraham had for his son; an affection that was about to be put to a severe test. Although Abraham was also Ishmael’s father, Isaac is called his “only son” because he was the son of promise to Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael was Abraham’s son by an illegitimate relationship with Hagar, and had been cast out. Now only Isaac was left. God told Abraham to journey to “the land of Moriah” which is later identified with the place in Jerusalem where Solomon built the temple (see II Chronicles 3:1). Once Abraham reached his destination, he was to take Isaac and do as God said, “offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”
Once Abraham arrived in “the land of Moriah,” God would tell him on which mountain to offer his son as a “burnt offering.” To literally obey this command would have been extremely hard for Abraham or anyone for that matter. He had waited many years for this son God had promised him. Now he was told to give up his beloved son. **Note:** The thought of offering human sacrifices is certainly repugnant to us today. But human sacrifice was known and practiced in the world in which Abraham lived. While the worship of pagan gods often demanded human sacrifices from their servants, it must have been shocking to hear the Lord make such a demand on one who served Him. However, Abraham didn’t resist the Lord’s request, but he must have wondered how God was going to fulfill His promise of making him a great nation if the son of promise became a sacrificial victim. Whatever questions or concerns Abraham may have had were overridden by his faith, which had been fine-tuned over several decades of seeing the Lord keep His promises to him. Critics have put forth the weak argument that God gave Abraham an immoral and evil act to do. However, their charge is not valid because the Bible states that a holy God cannot be tempted with evil, and that He does not tempt anyone (see James 1:13-14). We must remember that this was a test designed to prove Abraham’s faith, and that ultimately God prevented him from killing his son.
IV. ABRAHAM’S OBEDIENCE TO GOD (Genesis 22:3-10)

A. The main journey (Genesis 22:3-4).

1. (vs. 3). This verse says “And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.” On the day of departure, “Abraham rose up early in the morning.” He had done the same thing when he sent Hagar and Ishmael away (see Genesis 21:14). This time it was Abraham’s turn to leave on an uncertain journey. Abraham “saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering.” Since Abraham was now well over a hundred years old, it seems remarkable that he put the saddle on his own donkey. In addition, Abraham himself apparently “clave” or split the “wood” that was needed for the “burnt offering” even though he “took two of his young men (or servants) with him” and “Isaac his son.” The four of them headed for “the place of which God had told him,” or the land of Moriah. Abraham heard God’s word and immediately obeyed it by faith. He knew that God’s will never contradicts His promise, so Abraham held on to the promise that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (see Genesis 21:12). No doubt, Abraham believed that even if God allowed him to slay his son, He could raise Isaac from the dead (see Hebrew 11:17-19). Remember, faith does not demand explanations; faith rests on promises.
2. (vs. 4). This verse says “Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.” On the “third day” of the journey, Abraham looked up and “afar off,” or at a distance, he “saw the place” where he was to offer the sacrifice. **Note:** Of course, “the third day” is also significant in the account of our redemption, because it was on that day that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. In a sense, Isaac would also rise from the dead on the third day, because he was as good as dead from the time Abraham received the command to sacrifice him until God prevented him from doing so (see Hebrews 11:17-19).

B. The final stage of the journey (Genesis 22:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). This verse says “And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” Upon arriving at the place, Abraham told his two servants to “Abide ye here with the ass.” Their job was to watch the donkey. Remember that everyone has a part to play in God’s plan even though it may seem small. Still speaking to his two servants, Abraham went on to say “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” This statement emphasizes the fact that Abraham was confident that Isaac would return with him even though he was committed to following the Lord’s command completely. He had no intentions of bringing back a corpse! It’s evident that Abraham had faith in God’s promise to fulfill the
covenant through Isaac. He was certain that God would either spare Isaac or raise him from the dead if necessary (see Hebrews 11:19). However, Abraham’s faith didn’t make his test an easy one.

2. (vs. 6). This verse says “And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.” The fact that Abraham laid the “wood of the burnt offering” on Isaac’s back indicates that Isaac was not a small child at this time, but probably a teenager. Whatever his age, Isaac was strong enough to carry the wood up the hill to the place of sacrifice. This whole story has many similarities to what happened to Jesus Christ, and this appears to be similar to Jesus carrying His cross to His place of sacrifice (see Mark 15:20-22; John 19:16-18). After putting the wood on Isaac’s back, Abraham carried “the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.” The “fire” here was probably a fire pot filled with burning coals. Having everything they needed for the sacrifice, (except the animal), “they went both of them together” toward their destination. We can only imagine Abraham’s thoughts as the two of them walked up Mount Moriah. Happy times with Isaac must have flashed through his mind as he watched Isaac carrying the wood while he carried the knife and the container of coals.

C. The conversation between father and son (Genesis 22:7-8).
1. (vs. 7). This verse says “And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” As they walked up the mountain, Isaac spoke to Abraham addressing him as “My father.” This must have caused Abraham to feel a knife-like pain in his own heart. As they continued to walk, Isaac asked the obvious question: “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham must have dreaded Isaac’s question which was inevitable since his son knew they had everything they needed for a sacrifice except one thing, “the lamb for a burnt offering.” We should not think that Isaac was suspicious of his father. Their relationship was based on their faith in Jehovah and their mutual trust and love for each other. It was Isaac’s curiosity that prompted him to ask “where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

2. (vs. 8). This verse says “And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.” The good relationship between father and son made it easy for Abraham to give an answer that satisfied Isaac. He said “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” In essence, Abraham was saying that God would have an animal ready when the time comes. Note: As noted earlier, Abraham believed that if he did offer his son as a sacrifice, God would raise him up. Whether he considered the possibility that a substitute would be provided at the last moment is something we just don’t know. However, as the story unfolds, it is clear that
Abraham was willing to comply with God’s command to sacrifice his promised son, Isaac. So, after this brief conversation between father and son, for the second time (see Genesis 22:6) we are told that “they went both of them together.”

D. The ultimate demonstration of faith (Genesis 22:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). This verse says “And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.” Although the text doesn’t say so, this verse indicates that the Lord must have given Abraham specific instructions concerning the exact place where the sacrifice was to be made. We are told that they arrived at the “place which God had told him of.” First, Abraham “built an altar.” This would have been a stone “altar” prepared specifically for sacrifices. Then Abraham “laid the wood in order” on the “altar.” Finally, Abraham “bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.” It would be normal for a person to want to flee if he knew he was about to be killed. But evidently Isaac believed like his father, that they would return home together because he submitted to being tied up without resisting. His submission reminds us of the passive way the Messiah responded to His captors: “He was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is
dumb, so he openeth not his mouth” (see Isaiah 53:7).

2. (vs. 10). This verse says “And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” Although Isaac was the heir, and his father’s most priceless possession on earth, Abraham would not even let his heir get in the way of his faith in Jehovah. Therefore, “Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” I’m sure the question most people would have at this point is would Abraham have completed the deed? The text leaves no doubt that he would have, for he “took the knife” and prepared to “slay his son” as a sacrifice. Note: Most sermons on this great chapter often have Abraham as their focal point. Indeed Abraham had great faith. He was willing to sacrifice his son believing that he would be received back from the dead. But I want to turn our attention from Abraham to Isaac. Isaac had probably heard many times about the glorious promises God had made to his father; promises that would be passed on to Isaac and his descendants. It must have been a glorious thing to be part of such a heritage. But instead of looking down the years anticipating many descendants, Isaac found himself looking up at the sky and a knife. We can only wonder what went through his mind. Did he share his father’s deeply rooted faith in God? His presence on the altar gives some indication that he did. So far, this whole experience was not quite what Isaac expected for his future. Yes, Abraham’s faith was certainly tested, but so was Isaac’s!
V. GOD PROVIDES FOR ABRAHAM (Genesis 22:11-14)

A. The interruption of the sacrifice (Genesis 22:11-12).

1. (vs. 11). This verse says “And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.” At this point, Abraham still didn’t know that God was ready to stop the descent of the knife. Although Abraham had not actually physically slain his son, he had done the equivalent of killing him in his mind and his will. So, just before Abraham struck the fatal blow, “the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham.” In the Old Testament, “the angel of the Lord” is often used synonymously with God Himself (see Exodus 3:2-4). In fact, many believe, as I do that “the angel of the Lord” was the preincarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ who appeared many times on earth prior to His arrival in human flesh when He was born to the Virgin Mary. Abraham quickly responded to “the Angel of the Lord” saying “Here am I,” indicating that Abraham was available to the Lord. **Note:** What we have here is a “Theophany.” It is an appearance of God in a visible form to man. Literally, this appearance of God is a “Christophany,” meaning that this is one of many occasions in the Old Testament when Jesus appeared to individuals before He was born in
Bethlehem. There were many of these appearances of Christ in the Old Testament (see Genesis 16:6-11; chapter 18; Exodus 3:1-12; Numbers 22:22-35; Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 2:1-5; 13:3-22). Whenever this angel appears, He always speaks as God saying “I will do this or I will do that.” No mere angel can speak as God. They can only say what God directs them to say. Therefore, this was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says “And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” Once the Angel of the Lord got Abraham’s attention, He said “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him.” In other words, God told Abraham not to do anything to Isaac. God allowed Abraham to proceed right to the last moment. The knife was already in the air (see Genesis 22:10) before the Lord intervened. Imagine how Abraham must have felt when the Angel of the Lord told him not to kill his son. The Lord recognized Abraham’s faith saying “for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” As we learned at the beginning of the text, this was a test of faith, but Abraham didn’t know that. He had no assurance that he wouldn’t have to literally sacrifice his son. Abraham had not held back from God that which was most dear to him, his “only son.” Abraham had passed the test of his devotion, trust and obedience to the Lord. Notice that the Angel of the Lord said “thou hast not
withheld thy son, thine only son from me.” The fact that the Angel of the Lord said “from me” indicates that He was identifying Himself as God, and therefore He was God.

B. The sacrificial substitution (Genesis 22:13-14).

1. (vs. 13). This verse says “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.” Immediately after being prevented from sacrificing his son, “Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.” Earlier in the journey, Abraham had told Isaac that God would provide a lamb (see Genesis 22:8). Now he found his own promise to Isaac literally fulfilled by “a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.” The term “thicket” refers to a bush. Abraham captured the “ram” and used it as “a burnt offering in the stead of his son.” In other words, Abraham used the “ram” as a substitute for his son, much like God giving His Son as a substitute for sinners. However, in that case, the heavenly Father did not stop the sacrifice. If He had, no salvation would have been possible for the human race. **Note:** The fact that the ram was immediately seen by Abraham should remind us that God has already made provision for our physical, spiritual, and eternal needs. Like Abraham, it is often in times of testing that we become keenly aware of God’s protection, providence and
provision. These resources are always available to God’s people even though we may not realize our need for them until some crisis arises. It would be wonderful if we could learn to trust God daily and not just in those times when our faith is severely tested.

2. (vs. 14). Our final verse says “And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” When Abraham completed the sacrifice, he “called the name of that place Jehovahjireh” or literally, “the Lord provides.” Abraham went on to explain the meaning of “Jehovahjireh” saying “as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.” In other words, Abraham was saying that the name “Jehovahjireh” means “the Lord provides” or “the Lord sees.” Perhaps both ideas should be understood here. In Abraham’s case, God had seen the motives of his heart and knew that his love was genuine. The Lord also had provided an acceptable substitute for Isaac. Both Abraham and Isaac prove that faith is always rewarded, for God is the One who sees and provides for those who trust in Him.

VI. Conclusion. Abraham was presented with an awesome challenge to his faith. God asked him to give back the son He had given to him as a sacrifice. Abraham passed the test of his faith by doing exactly what God required. At the last
moment, the Angel of the Lord stopped the sacrifice and provided a ram as a substitute for Isaac. God does not call us to sacrifice our children, but He does require faith proved by obedience. Each day we should evaluate the quality of our faith (see James 2:20), not the quantity of our faith (see Matthew 17:20). Remember that we express our faith by obedience to God, but be ready, because sometimes obedience can cost us dearly.

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