

**GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM**  
**Genesis 21:1–22:19**

**Memory Verse:** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1 ESV).

**Background Helps:**

In this week's readings (1) God fulfills his promise to Abraham and Sarah, giving them a son, Isaac (Gen. 21:1-7); (2) God makes clear that the covenant promises to Abraham will be carried out through his son Isaac, not through his son Ishmael (Gen. 21:8-14; Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 4:28-31), but that he would bless Ishmael also as a son of Abraham (Gen. 21:13, 15-21); (3) God tests Abraham's faith and obedience, commanding him to sacrifice his son, Isaac (22:1-14), and because he obeys, God confirms his covenant with Abraham by an oath (21:15-19).

Thus we see that the initial promises given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17 and formalized in a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 are now confirmed to Abraham by God's oath in Genesis 22:15-18. Notice that God "swore by himself" (v. 16). The author of Hebrews comments on this fact in Hebrews 6:13-20. He notes that people normally swear by something greater than themselves (e.g., by placing their hand on a Bible in court and swearing an oath in God's name), but in this case, since there is nothing greater than God himself, God swore by himself! In this way "by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18)—that is, God's promise and his oath—God guaranteed his covenant to Abraham.

Notice exactly what promises God confirmed with an oath to Abraham in Genesis 22:15-18:

- I will surely bless you
- I will surely multiply your offspring (seed) as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore
- Your offspring shall possess the gate of his (notice the singular) enemies
- In your offspring (seed) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed

This last promise repeats the wonderful pledge that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (and see 18:18) that all nations would be blessed through Abraham and his seed, a promise which, according to Paul, God has fulfilled by justifying the Gentiles (as well as the Jews) through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:8).

Notice also the emphasis that the Lord places on Abraham's obedience in Genesis 22:16, 18. A genuine faith is expressed through obedience. This truth is made clear in Hebrews 11:8-12, 17-19 and James 2:21-24.

**Lesson Helps:**

A possible aim: My students will learn about God's confirmation of his covenant with Abraham by an oath, so that they will demonstrate their faith in Christ by obedience to him.

Here are a few miscellaneous ideas for this week's lesson:

- The birth of Isaac in Genesis 21 and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 provide excellent material for storytelling (see earlier forecasts).
- God's comparison of Abraham's offspring to the stars of heaven (Gen. 22:17; 15:5) and the sand on the seashore (22:17; 13:16) provides an opportunity for you to use some visual aids (or even bring some sand into class). Investigate the number of stars and the number of grains of sand on the seashores of the world. God is engaging in hyperbole (a figure of speech involving exaggeration) in order to emphasize the vast number of Abraham's offspring, including not only Jews but also Gentiles who have the faith of Abraham (Gal. 3:7-9, 29).
- You can illustrate the idea of God "swearing" or "taking an oath" by people swearing an oath in court "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."
- In your application of this lesson, emphasize the *obedience* of faith. A genuine faith is demonstrated by obedience. Observe this in Abraham's case in Genesis 22, and challenge your students to a life of obedience. The proper response to God's covenant promises is faith worked out in obedience.

**Home Assignment:**

 Read Genesis 25:19–26:5; 28; 35:9-15.

 Memorize Galatians 3:29.