

# Lesson 6B: The Abrahamic Covenant

## Reading Preparation:

- Genesis 15-17; 21-22; 24
- PGP, Abraham 1-2

## Outline:

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## Lesson Notes:

### [1. Abram](#)

#### [1.1. Background](#)

Abram lived in the “land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers” (PGP, Abraham 1:1). This information comes to us from the Book of Abraham which is part of the Joseph Smith Translation as found in the Pearl of Great Price. Whether earlier Abram had been taught by his father or someone else had instructed him is not known, but he was aware “the blessings of the fathers” were available to him. It is these blessings he seeks through prayer from his Heavenly Father.

PGP, Abraham 1:2, 4

**2 ...I sought for the blessings of the fathers and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.**

**4 I sought for mine appointment unto the Priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concerning the seed.**

Abram was seeking from the Lord all the blessings which had been given unto the righteous fathers, including: Adam, Seth, Enoch, and Noah. As a person of righteousness, he sought to be a minister of the gospel to the inhabitants of the earth; to be given great knowledge as to things temporal and spiritual and to be a father of all nations, a prince of peace. He also desired to receive the Holy Priesthood, as had his fathers before him and to be a servant of the Lord. Unfortunately, we learn that Abram’s father, Terah, had succumbed to the evils of the day, and became one who worshipped idols.

PGP, Abraham 1:5-7

**5 My fathers, having turned from their righteousness, and from the holy commandments which the Lord their God had given unto them, unto the worshipping of the gods of the heathen, utterly refused to hearken to my voice;**

6 For their hearts were set to do evil,...  
7 Therefore they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of  
the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb  
idols,...[They] endeavored to take away my life...

Joseph Smith observed,

*"Strange as it may appear at first thought, yet it is no less strange than true, that notwithstanding all the professed determination to live godly, apostates after turning from the faith of Christ, unless they have speedily repented, have sooner or later fallen into the snares of the wicked one and have been left destitute of the Spirit of God, to manifest their wickedness in the eyes of multitudes... When once that light which was in them has been taken from them, they become as much darkened as they were previously enlightened..." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, 67).*

How tragic one's life can become should they ever turn from those truths to which they were once enlightened. Terah now consents to the shedding of the innocent blood of his own son!

John M. Lundquist notes,

*"The Book of Abraham implies a very strong Egyptian presence in northern Syria. This presence is stated in the form of a priest of Pharaoh, sacrificing individuals to idols that are named in the first two chapters of Abraham. An Egyptian presence in northern Syria is well-documented for the 12th and 18th dynasties, periods later than that with which we are dealing. " (Was Abraham At Ebla?" in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 2. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 231).*

It appears this was a practice during Abram's life. The priest would have been successful in putting Abram to death were it not for divine intervention.

PGP, Abraham 1:15

15 And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands;

In a miraculous manner, Abram's life was spared from the knife of his assailant by Jehovah, who we know to be Jesus Christ of the New Testament, who gives this obscure, but chosen young man choice blessings.

PGP, Abraham 1:16-19

16 And his voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father's house, and from all thy kinsfolk into a strange land which thou knowest not of.  
17 And this because they have turned their hearts away from me,... therefore I have come down to visit them, and to destroy him who hath lifted up his hand against thee, Abraham, my son, to take away thy life,  
18 Behold, I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee.  
19 As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.

These blessings, given either while Abram was yet upon the altar facing certain death or shortly thereafter, will become known as the Abrahamic Covenant which we will discuss in detail shortly.

Shortly after this event, the priest Elenah dies. The land is then cursed with "a famine" (PGP, Abraham 1:29). The famine had a great effect upon Abram's father,

PGP, Abraham 1:30

30 ...my father was sorely tormented because of the famine, and he repented of the evil which he had determined against me, to take away my life.

Sometimes a famine can have a positive effect upon the affected population as they are reminded of the power God has over the elements. It can lead some to repent of their sins. Such was the effect upon Terah. We also learn that due to the famine, Haren, Abram's brother, dies. Abram now takes Sarai to be his wife who is the daughter of Nehor,

his brother. Today, Sarai would be his niece. Later, in response to God's direction when in Egypt, Abram will refer to Sarai as his sister (see Genesis 20:12).

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

*"Early Hebrew does not employ words for 'niece,' 'nephew,' 'granddaughter,' etc. Sarai, being what we would call the granddaughter of Abram's father, was called in their language his 'daughter'; so also would any direct descendant be called, no matter how many generations removed. Speaking genealogically she was a daughter of the same father-line as Abram (her mother-line of course was the line of the wife of her father Haran) and in these terms she was therefore a sister to Abram." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 65-66).*

John M. Lundquist adds,

*"They travel to "Haran, [which], is located in Turkey, approximately to the northeast of Aleppo, Syria, just north of the modern-day border between Syria and Turkey." (Studies in Scripture, Vol. 2. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 226).*

While in Haran tragedy strikes and Terah, Abram's father, turns again to idolatry (PGP, Abraham 2:5). It is a sad state of affairs in the eyes of our Heavenly Father when one of his children, who has repented, turns again to their sins. In Proverbs 26:11, we read, "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."

In response to Terah's fall, Abram and Lot seek the Lord's guidance. The Lord appears to Abram and instructs him to leave Haran.

PGP, Abraham 2:6, 8-11

6 ...the Lord appeared unto me, and said unto me: Arise, and take Lot with thee; for I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, when they hearken to my voice.  
8 My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.  
9 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;  
10 And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall raise up and bless thee, as their father;  
11 ...in thee (that is, thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.

We do not know how much time had elapsed when Abram initially sought for the blessings of the fathers while in Chaldea, but we do know he was sixty-two when he and his nephew, Lot and their families departed from Haran. Prior to their departure, the Lord pronounced upon Abram all the blessings and promises he had previously sought at the Lord's hand. Abram now departed Haran being led by the Lord unto a strange land.

PGP, Abraham 2:14-15

14 So I, Abraham, departed as the Lord had said unto me, and Lot, with me; and I, Abraham, was sixty and two years old when I departed out of Haran;  
15 And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur, in Chaldea, and Lot, my brother's son, and all our substance that we had gathered, and the souls that we had won in Haran, and came forth in the way to the and of Canaan, and dwelt in tents as we came on our way;

## [2. The Abrahamic Covenant](#)

### 2.1. Promise of Land

The land of Canaan, of Palestine, was promised to Abraham and his descendants, even though he never personally possessed it during his lifetime.

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

*"...the time would eventually come, after the resurrection from the dead, when Abraham and his children who have been faithful in keeping of the commandments of the Lord, should possess that land, and they shall also spread forth as far as it is necessary for them to receive an inheritance." (Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. 1. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954, 88).*

### 2.2. Promise of Posterity

Abram desired of the Lord that He would give him posterity. To this point, he and Sari had not had any children.

Genesis 15:2-6

2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?  
3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.  
4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.  
5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.  
6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Abram had received the promise of numerous posterity, but it will many years before Sari will give birth. As time passes and still they are not blessed with children, Sarai will offer to give him her handmaiden, Hagar.

Abraham was one hundred years old before his covenant son, Isaac, was born. Abraham had eight sons in all; however, from Isaac the covenant people developed; through Ishmael came many of the Arab nations (D&C 132:34). Through Keturah's sons came the Midianites and others.

Monte S. Nyman, observes,

*"The vast population of the Arab, Moslem, and Israel world which claim to be descendants of Abraham numbers approximately one hundred million. When one adds to that figure the deceased ancestors, and the estimates of future posterities of those groups, plus other descendants of Abraham such as the past, present, and future members of the Nephite-Lamanite cultures, the lost ten tribes, and the Latter-day Saints, he sees what the Lord meant concerning the innumerable and unmeasurable blessings of posterity. " ("Abraham, The Father of the Faithful," in Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, March 6, 1975. Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975, 13).*

In a literal sense Abraham's posterity will have no end because his righteous descendants will go on through eternity bringing forth posterity (D&C 132:30).

### 2.3. Promise of Priesthood Blessings

Bruce R. McConkie stated:

*"God gave Abraham a promise, and that promise has been planted in my heart because I am a descendant of Abraham. What God said to Abraham was, 'Your descendants, 'meaning as we shall see, the ones through Isaac and Jacob, shall have a right to the priesthood, to the gospel and to eternal life. 'Three things I have a right to them. It may be different with some others. If they are not the seed of Abraham, they can obtain the gospel, or they can obtain the priesthood, and they can be adopted in, but I have a right—a right that I earned in pre-existence when the Lord decided that I should be born in the lineage that is royal. The royal lineage! It is their right to have the priesthood, the gospel and eternal life. If I do not obtain those things, it is my fault for not living up to the potential and possibility that God gave me... Eternal life consists of two things. It consists of a continuation of the family unit in eternity, and it consists of inheriting the power, dignity, honor, glory, might, and omnipotence of the Lord himself. That is called the fullness of the glory of the Father ("The Promises Made to the Fathers," in Studies of the Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 54).*

### 2.4. Promise of Salvation

The seed of Abraham would be the means whereby the descendants of Adam would receive the blessings of the Gospel and obtain salvation.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

*“...as the seed of Abraham we have the responsibility of bearing the ministry here to all nations, carrying this same priesthood and this same ministry everywhere that we as of now have an opportunity to go. That is missionary work. (“The Promises Made to the Fathers,” in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 53).*

### 3. Hagar and Ishmael

As both Abraham and Sarai increased in years there was no son to carry on the promised posterity of Abram. Abram and Sarai decide upon an accepted solution to their childless state. It is Sarai who makes the offer to her husband.

Genesis 16:1-4

**1 NOW Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.  
2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.  
3 And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.  
4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.**

Victor L. Ludlow notes,

*“Sarai follows an ancient Near Eastern practice where a barren wife (usually after at least seven years without a child) gives her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abram to be his second wife. Even in a patriarchal society the husband did not automatically have the right to acquire a second wife without the first wife’s permission. The fact that Sarai set such a noble example with this practice led to perhaps the only place in the scriptures where a law was named after a woman. We read about the laws of different kings and the law of Moses, but the law of plural marriage is called the “law of Sarah” (D&C 132:65).” (Unlocking the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981, 14-5).*

The problem became acute for Sarai, however, when Hagar begins to despise her (Gen. 16:4).

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

*“...when the handmaid saw that she was indeed to be blessed with a child she took it as evidence that she was blessed and her mistress, Sarai, contra wise was cursed. Such an attitude on Hagar’s part was intolerable to Sarai who felt that through her condescension she had been imposed upon. When she expressed her feeling to Abram, he gave her leave to adjust the matter in whatever way was “good in her eyes” (“do with her as it pleaseth thee.”). Sarai punished her, and she fled.” (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 72).*

In Gen. 16:9-11, an angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar in the desert and tells her to return to Sarai and that she was to name her child Ishmael and the Lord will multiply his seed “that it shall not be numbered for multitude” (Gen. 16:10).

When Abram was 86 years old (Gen. 16:16), Hagar’s son, Ishmael, was born. But Ishmael was not born to be the birthright heir of Abram, for God’s promise to Abram and Sarai was not fulfilled in him.

### 4. Name Change: Abram—Abraham; Sarai—Sarah

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, the Lord again appeared to Abram. The noble father Abram [“exalted father”] was at last to become Abraham [Father of a multitude]. ” (LDS Bible Dictionary, in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, 601].

Genesis 17:5-7

**5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.  
6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.  
7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.**



Through the Abrahamic covenant will come He who was to be the Savior of the World. The plan of salvation, prepared before the world was, provided for a Savior to bring man back into the presence of God after their earth life is over; it is the covenant of redemption. It is implemented only by the shedding of the precious blood of Christ.

1 Peter 1:19, 20

**19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:  
20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,**

The token of the covenant between God and Abraham and all his seed, was to be administered to the male organ of the body that produces seed and brings about physical birth.

Genesis 17:10-11

**10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.  
11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.**

Kent P. Jackson notes,

*This token, administered when the child was eight days old, "was to be incised into the flesh of the believer... it was not a token for public display, but for a permanent, irreversible, personal reminder... [not only] that the child was born into the covenant of Abraham, but also that he was born free of sin and unaccountable until eight years old, when he would receive baptism for the remission of sins-a sign of his taking part in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ." ("Inspired Additions to Genesis," in Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3. Edited by Keith P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, 41).*

Keith P. Jackson continues,

*"The ordinance of circumcision remained in force until the mortal mission of Jesus, when baptism once again was operative as the token of entrance into the covenant, and circumcision was (and is) no longer required of members of the Lord's Church." ("Inspited Additions to Genesis," in Studies in Scriptures, Vol. 3. Edited by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985, footnote, 41).*

We learn that Abraham on the "selfsame day, as God had said unto him" (Gen. 17:23) complied with the Lord's command.

We also learn that Sarai's name is also to be changed to Sarah (Genesis 17:15). God will, however, not recognize Ishmael as the covenant son and gives Abraham a very important message:

Genesis 17:16-17, 19

**16 And I will bless her [Sarah], and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.  
17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed,...  
19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him of an everlasting covenant; and with his seed after him.**

It is understandable that Abraham would laugh at the news that his wife, who is now 89 years of age and he at 99, are going to be parents! For many this has been seen as a medical miracle or less as evidence of further error in the scriptures! When later this miracle will be confirmed by three holy visitors to Abraham, Sarah overhears their announcement. We also read of Sarah's response and the Lord's confirmation.

Genesis 18: 10, 12-14

**10 ...and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.  
12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself,...  
13 And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh...  
14 Is any thing too hard for the Lord?...**

It was the outward display of astonishment by Abraham and Sarah that brought forth this important reminder, not only to Abraham and Sarah, but to each of us for are we not also invited to ponder the same question as Abraham and Sarah. Is there anything too hard for the Lord? I believe the answer is "No". Whatever God is of mind to accomplish

which he deems to be for the benefit of his children, will be done. This act will re-establish the covenant line which God has promised to Abraham, and through which the nations of the earth will be blessed.

## **5. Ishmael Mocks Isaac and Hagar and Ishmael Are Cast Out**

A period of time will pass and the two boys, Ishmael and Isaac, will grow up together in the same household. From a book from the apocrypha literature ["sacred books of the Jewish people which were not included in the Hebrew Bible," LDS Bible Dictionary, 610]. We read from the book of Jasher. [The Book of Jasher. Muskogee, Oklahoma: Artisan Publishers, 1997]

Jasher 21:13-15

**13 And when Isaac was five years old he was sitting with Ishmael at the door of the tent.**

**14 And Ishmael came to Isaac and seated himself opposite to him, and he took the bow and drew it and put the arrow in it, and intended to slay Isaac.**

**15 And Sarah saw the act which Ishmael desired to do to her son Isaac, and it grieved her exceedingly on account of her son, and she sent for Abraham, and said to him, Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for her son shall not be heir with my son, for thus did he seek to do unto him this day.**

Sarah sees Ishmael playing out the possible death of her beloved, Isaac. It is important to remember that Ishmael is thirteen years older than Isaac thereby making Ishmael 18 years of age! This action, as the Book of Jasher suggests, may have been what precipitated the request of Sarah to Abraham to cast Hagar and her son, Ishmael, out of the house!

Concurrent with this information is the statement of the Lord to Abraham,

Genesis 17:20-21

**20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.**

**21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac,...**

No doubt Abraham was grieved because of the request by Sarah to cast out Hagar and his son, Ishmael.

Ellis T. Rasmussen observes,

*"Only upon God's assurance that Ishmael would be preserved and become a "nation," though Isaac indeed would inherit the call to be transmitted to his seed, did Abraham arrange to give Hagar and Ishmael provisions and send them away." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 78).*

The provisions were not sufficient, however, God did intervene and directed Hagar to a well and thus saved them. (see Ellis T. Rasmussen. Patriarchs of the Old Testament, 78).

## **6. The Sacrifice of Isaac**

Approximately ten years passed since Abraham had sent away his son, Ishmael. If our reckoning is accurate, Isaac is now fifteen years of age. It is important to note that there is much disagreement regarding the age of Isaac at the time of God's request of Abraham ranging from 12 to 37 years of age. God will now give Abraham a very unusual commandment.

Genesis. 22:2:

**2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get them into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.**

While no one can know what was in Abraham's heart, as he heard the words of the Lord to him, I offer these thoughts. Only ten years have passed since he sent his son, Ishmael away with his mother, Hagar. This action had been a source of great sorrow for him to have to say good-bye to his son knowing that he would never see him again. Only fifteen years have passed since he and Sarah in their old age had been blessed with a son of their own, Isaac. It was he who was going to fulfill the great promise which Abraham had been given to have numerous posterity. He must have also thought back to Ur in the land of the Chaldeans when as a young man, God himself had rescued him from becoming a living sacrifice on the altar of the idolatrous priest of Elkenah. Hadn't God then destroyed the priest and the very altar upon which he had lain? And then brought a famine upon the land which temporarily had led his father to

repent from idol worship? While it is true we can't know his thoughts, we do know from the scriptures how his day began.

Genesis 22:3

**3 And Abraham rose up early in the [next] 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.**

What happened next is familiar to many. They arrived at the mount which God had designated for the sacrifice. The two young servants remained behind to tend the animals while only Abraham and Isaac, father and son, left to ascend the mountain together. The Book of Jasher indicates that not only did Isaac know he was to be the sacrifice, but he was a willing participant in fulfilling the commandment that God had given to his father, Abraham. Upon reaching the spot which God had designated, Abraham then prepared the altar. When all was ready for the sacrifice, Isaac was bound.

Jasher 22:61, 63

**61 And Isaac said to his father, Bind me securely and then place me upon the altar least I should turn and move, and break loose from the force of the knife upon my flesh and thereby profane the burnt offering; and Abraham did so.**

**63 ...and Abraham's tears gushed down upon Isaac his son, and Isaac wept bitterly, and he said to his father, Hasten thou, O my father, and do with me the will of the Lord our God as He has commanded thee.**

These verses from the apocrypha Book of Jasher lend greater insight into the role that Isaac may have played in this extraordinary event. This is especially true when we contrasted this report with the report found in Genesis.

Genesis 22:9

**9 ...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.**

It would seem logical that given the strength and understanding of a fifteen year old teenager or even older and his 114 year old father that if Isaac were not a willing participant in this dramatic event, his father would probably have enlisted the assistance of others [the two traveling companions?] to help secure him to the altar, but the record does not support this conclusion.

When I think that Isaac was as obedient to the will of his earthly father as Abraham was to his Heavenly Father, the magnitude of this event for me expands in its significance. Like Abraham, God, Our Heavenly Father will later offer His only begotten son in the flesh, Jesus Christ, to be the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind. Like Isaac, Jesus Christ will offer himself to be the atoning sacrifice to pay the debt thereby providing the opportunity of life for those who will willingly follow his commandments. He will do for us what only a God could provide! It is apparent that the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham was so much more than the pagan sacrifice Abram had experienced as a boy.

Many know and have rejoiced at Father Abraham's obedience and how having seen Abraham's total obedience, God, stayed his hand. Isaac's life was spared with these immortal words.

Genesis 22:12-13

**12 And he [God] said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest [respect] God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.**

**13 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.**

### **6.1. Parallel With Sacrifice of Jesus Christ**

The similarities between God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ are significant.

B/M, Jacob 4:5

**5 ...as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commandments to God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.**



Monte S. Nyman adds to the similarities,

*"Both were taken to Mount Moriah to be sacrificed (see Genesis 22:2; Luke 23:33). Both carried the wood for their sacrifices (see Genesis 22:6; John 19:17). A ram was provided as a vicarious sacrifice for Isaac (see Genesis 22:8, 11-13), and Christ was 'the Lamb of God' sacrificed vicariously for 'the sins of the world' (John 1:29, 36)" (These Records Are True, A Teaching Commentary on Jacob through Mosiah, Vol . 2. Orem, Utah: Granite Publishing and Distribution, 2003, 60).*

We have noted the role played by Abraham and Isaac and the counterpart of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. There is yet more for us to understand. One question we might ask is, "What did it cost our Heavenly Father to sacrifice his only son?"

Melvin J. Ballard taught,

*"I think as I read the story of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac, that our Father is trying to tell us what it cost him to give his Son as a gift to the world. [When Abraham is told to take his only son, Isaac] and offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. He responded. Can you feel what was in the heart of Abraham on that occasion? You love your son just as Abraham did; perhaps not quite so much, because of the peculiar circumstances, but what do you think was in his heart when he started away from Mother Sarah and they bade her good bye?... I imagine it was about all Father Abraham could do to keep from showing his great grief and sorrow at that parting, but he and his son trudged along three days toward the appointed place, Isaac carrying the fagots [wood?] that were to consume the sacrifice... It must have pierced the heart of Father Abraham to hear the trusting and confiding son say: 'You have forgotten the sacrifice. ' Looking at the youth, his son of promise, the poor father could only say: "The Lord will provide.*

*"Every step proceeded until the cold steel was drawn, and the hand raised to strike the blow to let out the life's blood. When the angel of the Lord said: 'It is enough."*

*"Our Father in heaven went through all that and more, for in his case the hand was not stayed. He loved his Son Jesus Christ, better than Abraham ever loved Isaac... God heard the cry of his Son in that moment of great grief and agony, in the garden when it is said, the pores of his body opened and drops of blood stood upon him and he cried out: 'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.*

*"I ask you, what father and mother could stand by and listen to the cry of their children in distress, in this world and not render aid and assistance? ...We cannot stand by and listen to those cries without it touches our hearts. The Lord has not given us power to save our own. He has given us faith and we submit to the inevitable, but he had the power to save, and he loved his Son and he could have saved him... In the case of our Father, the knife was not stayed, but it fell, and the life's blood of his beloved Son went out. His Father looked on with great grief and agony over his beloved Son, until there seems to have come a moment when even our Savior cried out in despair: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

*"In that hour I think I can see our dear Father behind the veil looking upon these dying struggles until even he could not endure it any longer;... so he hid his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that he had for his Son. I thank him and praise him that he did not fail us, for he had not only the love of his Son in mind, but he had love for us, and I rejoice that he did not interfere, and that his love for us made it possible for him to endure to look upon the sufferings of his Son and give him finally to us, our Savior and our Redeemer. For without him, without his sacrifice, we would have been buried in the earth, and there our bodies would have remained and we would never have come glorified into his presence. And so that is what it cost, in part, for our Father in heaven to give the gift of his Son unto men.*

*"How do I appreciate the gift? My brethren and sisters, I say again if I only knew what it cost our Father to give his Son, if I only knew how essential it was that I should have that Son and that I should receive the spiritual life that comes from the Son, I am sure I would always be present at the sacrament table to do honor to the gift that has come to us..." ("The Sacramental Covenant," in Melvin J. Ballard-Crusader for Righteousness. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, 135-137).*

## **6.2. Abraham Tried, Not Tempted**

Abraham was not "tempted" (Gen. 22:1) but "tried" (JST, Genesis 22:1).

Following the Saints in Jackson County being driven out of their homes into the bitter winter of 1833 in Missouri, the Lord spoke to the Saints through the Prophet Joseph Smith:

Doctrine and Covenants 101: 4-5

**4 Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son.**

**5 For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.**

At first glance, it seems like such a high standard. Why must one be tested and chastened before he can be sanctified? Why is a person not worthy to live with God unless he is willing to abide in the covenant even to death? Imagine, if you can, the disastrous consequences for an individual to become a leader who has not been tried! How

could, for example, the universe survive if it were overseen by a God who could/would not be obedient under intense pressure? Where would we be now if God had not been able to endure the suffering of his Only Begotten Son on to the cross? If Abraham had failed his test, likewise he would have lost his position. If God the Father had failed the same test there would have been no atonement... for Christ would not have died, there would have no payment provided for Adam's transgression, and thus all mankind would have remained in the grave, never to rise again! Remember, for God, the Father, there was no ram in the thicket!!!

B/M, 2 Nephi 9:8-9

**8 ...if the flesh shall rise no more [no atonement made]  
our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell  
from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became  
the devil, to rise no more.**

**9 And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we  
become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the  
presence of God, and to remain with the father of lies,  
in misery, like unto himself;...**

Joseph Smith taught,

*"For a man to lay down his all, his character and reputation, his honor, and applause, his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life also—counting all things but filth and dross for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ—requires more than mere belief or supposition that he is doing the will of God; but actual knowledge, realizing that, when these sufferings are ended, he will enter into eternal rest, and be a partaker of the glory of God" ("Lecture Six, Verse 5," in Lectures On Faith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985, 68).*

George Q. Cannon states,

*"Why did the Lord ask such things of Abraham? Because, knowing what his future would be and that he would be the father of an innumerable posterity, he was determined to test him. God did not do this for His own sake for He knew by His foreknowledge what Abraham would do; but the purpose was to impress upon Abraham a lesson and to enable him to attain this knowledge that he could not obtain in any other way. That is why God tries all of us. It is not for His own knowledge for He knows all things beforehand. He knows all our lives and everything you will do. But He tries us for our own good that we may know ourselves; for it is most important that a man should know himself.*

*"He required Abraham to submit to this trial because He intended to give him glory, exaltation, and honor. He intended to make him a king and a priest, to share with Himself the glory, power and dominion which he exercised." ("Trial Are For Our Own Benefit," in Gospel Truth, Vol. 1. Selected, Arranged and Edited by Jerreld L. Newquist. Salt Lake City: Zion's Book Store, 1957, 113).*

## **7. A Wife for Isaac**

This chapter in the Old Testament contains one of the most remarkable stories of commitment and faith in the scriptures.

Allan K. Burgess states,

*"The great prophet and patriarch Abraham understood well the importance of marriage within the covenant. Because he and his family lived among the unbelieving Canaanites, he became deeply concerned about a proper mate for his son, Isaac. Abraham had a servant whom he trusted with everything that he owned. In fact, he trust him enough to have him choose a wife for Isaac." (New Insights Into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 52).*

Abraham spoke to his servant.

Genesis 24:3-4

**3 ...sware by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of  
the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of  
the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:  
4 But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred,  
and take a wife unto my son Isaac.**

This responsibility was of such great significance that Abraham asked for his servant to take an oath which signified a covenant of honor between Abraham and his servant.

JST, Genesis 24:2

**2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house,  
that ruled over all that he had; Put forth I pray the thy  
hand under my hand, and I will make thee swear before the**

Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son, of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell; but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

Abraham's servant was anxious about the responsibility that rested upon his shoulders and expresses his concern to his master.

Genesis 24:5

5 And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?

Abraham does not want Isaac to go to the land of his forefathers, but he does give this promise to his servant.

Genesis 24:7

7 The LORD God of heaven... which spake unto me, that sware unto me,... he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

With the reassurance of his master, the servant now departs on his mission.

Genesis 24:10

10 And the servant took ten camels of his master and departed;...and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

The question on the servant's mind, must have been, how will I know of all the young women in the city, which one is to be Isaac's bride? He sought the Lord's direction in prayer including offering a possible solution to his dilemma. He then goes to the well where the women come to draw water.

Genesis 24:12-15

12 And he said, O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

13 Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:

14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

15 And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

There are two descriptions offered in the scriptures regarding Rebekah's appearance.

Genesis 24:16

16 And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her:...

JST, Genesis 24:16

16 And the damsel being a virgin, very fair to look upon, such as the servant of Abraham had not seen, neither had any man known the like unto her;...

While these two scriptures describe her external beauty, we will soon learn that that she also has those qualities that make her beautiful on the inside. In the eyes of the Lord, as he told Samuel, "for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Of the two, the inner qualities are of greatest importance.

As per his proposal to the Lord, the servant makes his request of the damsel for a drink of water, which she provides. Then she volunteers, "I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking" (Genesis 24:18-19). Her offer is incredible! She has come to the well to draw water for her family. She now draws water, according to tradition, for a

stranger, but there her obligation ends. She then offers, out of the generosity of her own heart, to also provide water for his “ten camels.”

Allan K. Burgess states,

*“This is quite a test that the servant was asking for. Ten thirsty camels would drink a lot of water, and the wells in those days were either deep pits that a person had to go down into or narrow shafts from which full buckets of water were pulled up with the help of a rope. Either case constituted hard work: to expect a total stranger to volunteer to carry the water for ten thirsty camels was an extraordinary test of character. A woman who would do this would certainly not be afraid of work and would possess many other positive character traits, such as unselfishness, kindness, and a willingness to serve.”* (New Insights into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 53-54).

The servant’s response to the immediate fulfillment of his prayer was “wonderment” (Genesis 24:21), however, when he asks her what is her name and she replies, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor” and confirmed his request for lodging (see Genesis 24:23-25), the servant humbly responds.

Genesis 24:26-27

**26 And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD.  
27 And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.**

It is unusual that a prayer is answered so quickly or with such exactness, however, this was a very unusual situation. It is noteworthy that once the servant confirmed that he had been led by the Lord to “the house of my master’s brethren” he immediately expresses his gratitude to the Lord for answering his prayer during his time of need.

The servant now went to Rebekah’s house where he is welcomed as a guest in their home. They have heard from Rebecca regarding their meeting at the well, and his joy at having been guided by the Lord, the servant is welcomed into their home. They invite him to sit down and to eat with them. The servant states, “I will not eat until I have told mine errand” (Genesis 24:33). They invite him to share why he had come to their home. He shares with them the purpose for his journey and the guidance and direction that he has received from the Lord. He concludes with asking them if they will allow Rebecca to return with him so that she may become the wife of his master’s son.

Genesis 24:50-51

**50 Then Laban and Behuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord..  
51 Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go and let her be thy master’s son’s wife, as the LORD hath spoken.**

The servant shares the gifts he has brought with him with the family and Rebekah and they spend the night in celebration. The next morning the servant is ready to return home, however, the family is reluctant as they state, “Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go” (Genesis 24:55). One could understand the reluctance to have their daughter leave immediately, while at the same time understanding the desire of the servant to return home as soon as possible. It is determined that the decision be left to Rebekah. In this patriarchal society, we do not know how much freedom Rebekah herself had regarding whom she would marry, but we do gain some insight into Rebekah’s feelings.

Genesis 24:58

**58 And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.**

Allan K. Burgess notes,

*“When Rebekah’s family said to her, ‘Wilt thou go with this man?’, they were asking a great deal of her. She was to undergo a difficult trip of five hundred miles with men she had known just one day and for the purpose of marrying someone she had never met. She demonstrated great faith and trust in the Lord when she uttered the simple words, ‘I will go.’”* (New Insight into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 55).

Given the opportunity to now voice her own feelings regarding the blessing and opportunity that had come into her life, Rebekah expresses herself, “I will go.” Her trusting response is yet another example of the inner beauty that she possessed.

Allan K. Burgess reminds of Isaac position,

*“Isaac was playing a difficult waiting game at home. One evening, as he was out in the field meditating, (24:53), he ‘saw the camels coming.’ There is no doubt that Isaac’s faith and trust in the Lord were as strong as Rebekah’s. He*

*must have spent not just one evening but many evenings meditating and praying that God would direct the choice of his father's righteous servant.” (New Insights into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 55).*

Genesis 24:64-67

64 And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.  
65 For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master; therefore she took a veil, and covered herself.  
66 And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.  
67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her:...

Allan K. Burgess states,

*“When Rebekah drew water for the ten camels, she showed her true nature. She had no idea then that her marriage to a future prophet hung in the balance. As far as she knew, it was just another normal day at the well. That is the way it is with most of us. The kind of person we are is demonstrated daily by how we treat those around us. And the kind of person we are determines the type of people we attract. The key to marrying a great man is to be a great woman, and the key to marrying a noble woman is to be a noble man... An important question for each of us to ask ourselves is, ‘Am I the kind of person who would have offered to draw water for ten thirsty camels?’” (New Insights into the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993, 56-57).*

## **8. Conclusion**

In this chapter we have focused on God's dealings with his chosen children. Specifically, we have examined the lives of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Abraham's servant, and Rebekah. We have tried to understand the trials they faced as well as the blessings they received in response to their obedience to God's commandments. We have learned that even those who are chosen, must also be willing to place all they have on God's holy altar in order to reach their full potential. It is a lesson that was not easy for them to learn. It will not be easy for us to learn. We can, however, benefit from their example. Each day, we too can make righteous choices that will serve to strengthen our faith and trust in the Lord, just as they did.