



## Lesson 7

## “The Abrahamic Covenant”

Abraham 1:1-4; 2:1-11  
Genesis 12:1-8; 17:1-9

**Purpose: To understand the blessings and responsibilities of the Abrahamic Covenant.**

In its simplest and perhaps most accurate terms the Abrahamic covenant is this; God speaking, “I am your God and you are My people.” The people then accepted or rejected that offering. Often a covenant is compared to a contract, but that comparison fall way short and in fact there are very few similarities. God’s covenants, including the Abrahamic covenant are pronounced by God with no input from the agreeing side. The covenant is non-specific in what man’s responsibilities are to be. They vary from circumstance to circumstance and from person to person. Though there may be some general guidelines, the scriptures are replete with examples of exceptions, all prompted through the Holy Ghost. When an individual accepts a covenant with God, they in essence say I will allow, through the acceptance of the plan of salvation, through (1) faith in Jesus Christ, (2) repentance and (3) baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, have prepared myself for (4) the laying on of hands, by those in authority, for the receiving of the gift of the Holy Ghost and will live all commandments as they are given to me so His spirit can be with me “more abundantly.”

### **The Book of Abraham**

See Supplement Lesson 2

### **The Book of Genesis**

See Supplement Lesson 6

### **Commentary:**

#### **Abraham 1:2-4**

1 In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence;

*Ur, the birthplace of Abraham, is generally identified with the modern town of Mugheir in present-day Iraq. It is about 150 miles (240 kilometers) from the Persian Gulf and 875 miles (1,400 kilometers) from Egypt. Although the peoples of Chaldea and Egypt were separated geographically, it appears that in the days of Abraham they shared religious beliefs and practices.*

*Abraham may have known the prophet Noah. The biblical chronology clearly indicates that Noah was alive during the early years of Abraham's life. In Abraham 1:19 the Lord mentioned His covenant relationship with Noah in order to teach Abraham about the covenant relationship the Lord would have with him.*

2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, 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 be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater 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.

*Elder Neal A. Maxwell, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said: "The true disciple has an inborn questioning to know, personally, all that God is willing to teach us. Nephi could have accepted gladly the vision of his father, Lehi. But Nephi 'desired to know the things that [his] father had seen.' (1 Nephi 11:1.) Abraham sought, even though he had a father who had turned from the faith, 'for greater happiness and peace' and 'for mine appointment unto the Priesthood.' (Abraham 1:2, 4.) Abraham described himself as desiring 'great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness' (Abraham 1:2), questing for the word of Christ. Divine discontent in the form of promptings can move us to feast because we know that by feasting we can increase our knowledge, effectiveness, and joy" (Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward [1977], 119).*

*The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that Adam received the priesthood "in the Creation, before the world was formed," and that he held the keys of the First Presidency (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 157).*

*President Ezra Taft Benson said: "The order of priesthood spoken of in the scriptures is sometimes referred to as the patriarchal order because it came down from father to son. ...*

*"Abraham, a righteous servant of God, desiring as he said, 'to be a greater follower of righteousness,' sought for these same blessings. Speaking of the order of the priesthood, he said: 'It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time ... even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, our first father, through the fathers unto me.' (Abr. 1:2-3.)" ("What I Hope You Will Teach Your Children about the Temple," Ensign, Aug. 1985, 9).*

*Abraham explained that he had "the records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood" (Abraham 1:31). These records confirmed Abraham's right to the priesthood. This can be traced in Genesis 5 (from Adam to Shem; see also Moses 6:8-25; 8:1-13) and Genesis (from Shem to Abram [Abraham]; see also D&C 84:14-16; 107:40-52).*

*President Joseph Fielding Smith, speaking of the patriarchal organization from Adam to Moses, wrote: "The order of this priesthood which was established in the beginning was patriarchal. The authority descended from father to son, and those who held it were high priests. This order of descent from Adam to Noah is given in the Doctrine and Covenants. Noah, who stands next to Adam in authority, brought this priesthood through the flood, and it continued from generation to generation. Abraham, the 10th from Noah, received special blessings from the Lord, and the priesthood continued through him and his seed with the promise that all who received the gospel should be counted as Abraham's seed and partake of his blessings" (Doctrines of Salvation, 3:160-61).*

3 It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me.

*Doctrine and Covenants 84:14-16 indicates that "Abraham received the priesthood from Melchizedek, who received it through the lineage of his fathers, even till Noah" and from Noah back to Enoch and eventually to Adam. Abraham's record shows that his fathers had "turned from their righteousness" (Abraham 1:5) and therefore could not confer the holy priesthood upon Abraham. Yet Abraham became a "rightful heir" to the priesthood through his righteousness and "sought for the blessings of the fathers" who held the priesthood*

(v. 2). *The Prophet Joseph Smith also referred to Abraham's relationship with the righteous patriarch Melchizedek when he wrote: "Abraham says to Melchizedek, I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, Now I have a priesthood" (History of the Church, 5:555).*

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

### **Abraham 2:1-11**

1 Now the Lord God caused the famine to wax sore in the land of Ur, insomuch that Haran, my brother, died; but Terah, my father, yet lived in the land of Ur, of the Chaldees.

*The famine in the land was most likely caused by drought, a prolonged period of dry weather during which crops wither and animals die from lack of feed. Note how the Lord used famine to influence Abraham and his family: a famine in Ur helped Terah, Abraham's father, turn from his idolatry and join his sons in the land of Haran (see Abraham 1:30); the famine in Ur also created an additional sense of urgency for Abraham to leave Ur (see Abraham 2:1-2); famine was a possible motivator for Abraham's departure from the land of Haran, and was a probable factor in the death of Terah (see Abraham 2:17; see also Genesis 11:32); a famine persuaded Abraham and his family to leave the land of Canaan and continue their journey into Egypt (see Abraham 2:21). See also Helaman 11:3-20.*

6 But I, Abraham, and Lot, my brother's son, prayed unto the Lord, and 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.

*The Bible and the book of Abraham both identify the strange land as the land of Canaan (see Genesis 17:8; Abraham 2:15). It is not the same land possessed by the people of Canaan as recorded in Moses 7:6-8. Abraham's Canaan was named for Canaan, the fourth son of Ham (see Genesis 9:22; 10:6). Canaan and his household originally inhabited the land located in the lowland toward the Mediterranean coast of Palestine. Canaan sometimes refers to all the country west of the Jordan River, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. This is the same land that Joshua parceled out to the twelve tribes of Israel (see Joshua 14-21). To learn more about the land and people of Canaan, see Genesis 15:18-21; 24:1-4; 28:1-2, 8-9; and Joshua 24:11.*

*Many of Abraham's descendants have dwelt in the land of Canaan, yet from time to time some of them were driven out of that promised land (see Abraham 2:6). President Joseph Fielding Smith explained: "The descendants of Abraham, the tribes of Israel, became the chosen people of the Lord according to the promise. The Lord honored them, nourished them, watched over them with a jealous care, until they became a great nation in the land the Lord had given to their fathers. Notwithstanding this tender care and the instructions and warnings this people received from time to time through their prophets, they failed to comprehend the goodness of the Lord and departed from him. Because of their rebellion they were driven out of their land and eventually were scattered among the nations" (Doctrines of Salvation, 1:164).*

*Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught that "Abraham's inheritance in Canaan, for himself and his seed after him, was to be an eternal inheritance, one that would endure in time and in eternity. This promise is the hope of Israel, the hope that the meek shall inherit the earth, first during the millennial era and finally in that same immortal state when the earth becomes a celestial sphere" (Doctrinal New Testament Commentary, 2:71).*

*Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:*

*“Abraham stands in the same position as Noah for all who have lived since his day, as far as eternal blessings are concerned. Even those who are not his literal seed shall receive their eternal blessings through him and the covenant God made with him. The Lord made repeated promises to Abraham that he would become a great nation and also that in him should ‘all families of the earth be blessed.’ (Genesis 12:2–3.) He was promised the land of Canaan as an everlasting inheritance for him and for his seed. ‘And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.’ (Genesis 13:16.) This has reference to eternal increase, for no man’s seed could exceed in number the dust particles of the earth. ‘Look now toward heaven,’ the Lord said, ‘and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.’ And Abraham ‘believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.’ (Genesis 15:5–6.) All these things are part of the Abrahamic covenant.*

*“And yet again the Lord said to Abraham: ‘As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. . . . And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. 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. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.’ (Genesis 17:4–8.) Abraham thus covenants for himself and for his seed that he and they will serve the Lord Jehovah, who in turn promises them eternal increase.*

*“In its purest and best form, as far as the ancient word is concerned, the Abrahamic covenant is thus set forth: [quotes Abraham 2:9–11.]*

*“What, then, is the Abrahamic covenant? It is that Abraham and his seed (including those adopted into his family) shall have all of the blessings of the gospel, of the priesthood, and of eternal life. The gate to eternal life is celestial marriage, which holy order of matrimony enables the family unit to continue in eternity, so that the participating parties may have posterity as numerous as the sands upon the seashore or the stars in heaven. The Abrahamic covenant enables men to create for themselves eternal family units that are patterned after the family of God our Heavenly Father. A lesser part of the covenant is that the seed of Abraham have the Millennial destiny of inheriting as an everlasting possession the very land of Canaan whereon the feet of the righteous have trod in days gone by” (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, 503–5;*

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 rise up and bless thee, as their father;

*Elder John A. Widtsoe stated: “All who accept the gospel become by adoption members of the family of Abraham” (Evidences and Reconciliations, 399). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: “As the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence; while the effect of the Holy Ghost upon a Gentile, is to purge out the old blood, and make him actually of the seed of Abraham. That man that has none of the blood of Abraham (naturally) must have a new creation by the Holy Ghost” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 149–50).*

11 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in 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.

*Abraham desired the blessings of the fathers—the right to administer in the Melchizedek Priesthood. He was a rightful heir, and because of his righteousness he became a high priest in the Melchizedek Priesthood (see Abraham 1:2). The Lord promised him that his posterity would also be rightful heirs of the priesthood. “Being an heir to the Abrahamic covenant does not make one a ‘chosen person’ per se, but does signify that such are chosen to responsibly carry the gospel to all the peoples of the earth. Abraham’s seed have carried out the missionary activity in all the nations since Abraham’s day. (Matt. 3:9; Abr. 2:9–11)” (Bible Dictionary, “Abraham, covenant of,” 602).*

## **Genesis 12:1-8**

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

*Abram had sought peace, righteousness, knowledge, the blessings of the righteous fathers, and the right to administer them; and he had become a high priest (Abr. 1:1-2). He had been saved by the Lord from a sacrificial death in Ur (Abr. 1:12-19; Fac. 1) and had been promised a new homeland (Abr. 2:3; Gen. 12:1). He had been called to a priesthood mission (Abr. 1:18-19) and had migrated from Ur in Chaldea to Haran (Abr. 1:1, 30; 2:4; Gen. 11:31-32; Bible Map 2).*

*In Haran certain aspects of the commands and promises of the Lord were reiterated as Abram's mission was further specified: he and his seed would bring blessings to all families of all nations (Abr. 1:19; 2:6, 9-11). These are "the blessings of the Gospel, . . . the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" (Abr. 2:11). Understanding the mission of Abraham and his seed can facilitate understanding all of God's ways and intentions in working through "chosen" people throughout history.*

4 So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

*Abram's great mission began with those souls "gotten" (Heb., lit., "made"; Abr. 2:15, "won") in Haran. With them they moved southward at the Lord's command (Abr. 2:5-6). They may have taken the trade route by way of Damascus and "won" another soul there, "Eliezer of Damascus," whom Abram later called "the steward of my house" (Gen. 15:2). They went on southward by way of Jershon (Abr. 2:16-17; possibly known later as Jerash).*

*Lot, son of Haran, was treated like a son and sometimes was called "brother" by Abram (Gen. 13:8; 14:14, 16). Sarai was also called Abram's "sister" (Gen. 12:11-13).*

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.

*Sichem (Heb., sbkhem, "one's upper back, neck, and shoulders") is spelled Shechem in all other occurrences in the Old Testament. The city is in a narrow valley between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, at about 1870 feet above sea level; those two mountains are among the highest ("shoulders") of the land. (Shechem was also the name of the son of a leader in this area at the time of Jacob; Gen. 34.) A number of important events took place here in biblical times.*

*The "plain" (Heb., 'elon "terebinth" or "oak") of Moreh was likely the terebinth or oak near Shechem mentioned in Genesis 35:4 and Joshua 24:26. Moreh means "guide" or "teacher" and is a good name for this place, for Abram built another altar unto the Lord there, and He appeared to Abram to teach him. Later, on a mount of a similar name in Jerusalem, Moriah ("Jehovah is my guide"), Abraham was taught by the Lord the greatest lessons of life (Gen. 22:2-18; Gal. 3:8; Jacob 4:5).*

*The Lord appeared and confirmed the promise of a land (Gen. 12:7). Further revelations clarify the blessing of a promised land, which would be possessed by Abraham's seed only under the condition that "they hearken to my voice" (Abr. 2:6; Gen. 17:7-9: "thou shalt keep my covenant"). They were to inherit the land "from the river of Egypt unto . . . the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18); yet Abraham was warned that his seed would be strangers in lands not their own for centuries, until the "iniquity of the Amorite" peoples dwelling in Canaan was "full"; only then could they justly be dispossessed (Gen. 15:7, 13-16, 18). These vital principles are reiterated throughout the scriptures: the Lord does not arbitrarily cause some people to suffer and be destroyed while others are blessed to prosper.*

*Thus in events recounted in Genesis, Exodus, and beyond, the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were "strangers" (Heb., lit., "sojourners") in Canaan and Egypt; indeed, they sojourned in Egypt "four generations" until the time of Moses (Gen. 15:16; Ex. 6:16-27). Only in Joshua's time, after wandering in the wilderness, did the Israelites come to "inherit" the promised land (Josh. 1:1-4).*

*Abram regularly built altars as he moved along, and he called upon the name of the Lord (Heb., lit., "called in the name of Jehovah"). From him Abram received guidance; and frequently, it is recorded, "the Lord appeared unto him" (Gen. 12:7-8; 13:3-4; Abr. 2:17).*

*Abram's first sojourn in Canaan was short because of a famine; however, before he left, the Lord gave him some great revelations about the universe of His creations and His ultimate purposes. He said, "I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words" (Abr. 3:15). These revelations were given through an instrument called "Urim and Thummim" (Heb. plurals used as abstract nouns to denote "light and perfection"), which the Lord had given him already in Ur (Abr. 3:1). Some of those revelations have been restored (Abr. 3-5).*

## **Genesis 17:1-9**

9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

*It was a high point in Abram's life when the Lord next appeared; for he gave him a great preparatory challenge, a new name, and additional covenants. Identifying himself as El Shaddai (which may imply "the God whose bosom sufficeth" but is usually translated "God Almighty"), the Lord challenged Abram to walk before him in perfection. Some patriarchs before him had "walked with God," and two had been described as "perfect" (TG, "Walking with God"; "Perfection"). Perfect is used to translate the Hebrew tammim, which connotes wholeness, completeness, and integrity. Jesus later challenged his disciples, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48; 3 Ne. 12:48).*

*On the occasion of this personal visitation to Abram, "God talked with him," renewed and expanded his covenant and gave him the new name Abraham, "Father of a Multitude" (Gen. 17:1, 3-5). The Lord promised him that he and his seed would be fruitful and multiply and become many nations and kings. Through them the everlasting covenant would be established. The promise of the land wherein they sojourned was again confirmed (Gen. 17:6-8). But to gain the blessings, Abraham and his seed after him had to keep the covenant (Gen. 17:9), perpetuating it by living according to its principles.*

*The restored version of Genesis explains that the old covenant of baptism made known in Adam's time (Gen. 17:3a; Moses 6:52-66; 7:11) had been corrupted, along with other ordinances, both in doctrine and practice. But now Abraham and his seed were commanded by the Lord, "Keep all my covenants wherein I covenanted with thy fathers," as well as those newly given them (JST Gen. 17:12; Gen. 17:7a); then circumcision was instituted as a sign of the covenant.*

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