



Lesson 9

“God Will Provide Himself a Lamb”

Abraham 1

Genesis 15-17; 21-22

Purpose: To understand Heavenly Father’s sacrifice in offering His Son as we learn Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Issac.

Elder Melvin J. Ballard, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, before his death in 1939 told this story to a group of young people.

“You remember the story of how Abraham’s son came after long years of waiting and was looked upon by his father as more precious than all his other possessions. Yet in the midst of his rejoicing, Abraham was told to take this only son and offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord. He obeyed. But can you imagine what was in the heart of Abraham on that occasion? What do you think he felt when he started away from Mother Sarah? What do you think was in his heart when he saw Isaac bidding good-bye to his mother to take that three-day journey to the appointed place where the sacrifice was to be made?”

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 that were to consume the sacrifice. The travelers rested, finally, at the mountainside, and the men who had accompanied them were told to remain while Abraham and his son started up the hill.

The boy then said to his father: “Father, we have the fagots, we have the fire to burn the sacrifice, but where is 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.”

They ascended the mountain, gathered the stones together, and placed the fagots upon them. Then Isaac was bound, hand and foot, kneeling upon the altar. I presume Abraham, like a true father, must have given his son a farewell kiss, his blessing, and his love. His soul must have been drawn out in that hour of agony toward his son who was to die by the hand of his own father. All preparations were made until the cold steel blade was drawn, and the hand raised that was to strike the blow to let out the life’s blood when the angel of the Lord said: “It is enough.”

Then the angel said, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son.”

Abraham looked up and saw a ram that was caught by its horns in a thicket. He took the ram and offered it up for an offering to the Lord instead of his son.

And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham again and said, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed."

The Book of Abraham

See Supplement Lesson 2.

The Book of Genesis

See Supplement Lesson 6.

Commentary:

Abraham 1

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;

The land of the Chaldeans was in modern day Iraq. The Bible tells us the name of the city where Terah dwelt was "Ur of the Chaldees" (Gen. 11:28).

You notice the book of Abraham catches [this situation]. It begins with Abraham "in the soup." He is going to be sacrificed. It begins, "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." He couldn't hang on there any longer. He protested with his own family, and his own father wanted him put to death to the mother goddess. It was that bad. They "utterly refused to hearken to my voice," he said. (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon--Semester 1: Transcripts of Lectures Presented to an Honors Book of Mormon Class at Brigham Young University, 1988--1990 [FARMS], 83)

Abraham let [righteous] desires work in him until the day came when faith moved him away to start a different life. He certainly "gave place" by giving up his status quo in order to establish the better life he desired in "another place of residence." (See Abraham 1:1-2.) His sights were really set on the City of God, for he desired a heavenly country (see Hebrews 11:10, 16). (Neal A. Maxwell, Lord, Increase Our Faith [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994], 106)

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.

"An interesting phenomenon about gospel study is that the more you know, the more you want to know. You recall that Abraham said he wanted to be a greater follower of righteousness and to possess a greater knowledge. (Abr. 1:2)... When a person is once awakened to the knowledge and inklings of the doctrine and laws of God, the soul thirsts for gospel knowledge even more vigorously than the body craves food." (Robert J. Matthews, A Bible! A Bible! [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990], 27 - 28)

"To attain greatness, it must be our heart's desire. I am convinced that no one ever attained to be or to do anything great that he hadn't consciously desired with all his heart." (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, edited by Clyde J. Williams [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], 75)

I am always impressed... with the thought of how much greater power we would exert if we but fully followed the example set by Abraham, if we would think so much of our calling in the Priesthood that we would know that in it there is great happiness, peace, rest and blessings of the fathers, if we would only righteously seek for these blessings. (Edward G. Wood, Conference Report, April 1923, Third Day-Morning Session 94)

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.

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. (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 322-323)

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

This Priesthood, including that of the Aaronic, holds the keys of revelation of the oracles of God to man upon the earth; the power and right to give laws and commandments to individuals, churches, rulers, nations and the world; to appoint, ordain, and establish constitutions and kingdoms; to appoint kings, presidents, governors or judges, and to ordain or anoint them to their several holy callings, also to instruct, warn, or reprove them by the word of the Lord.

It also holds the keys of administration of ordinances for the remission of sins, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit; to heal the sick, cast out demons or work miracles in the name of the Lord; in fine, to bind or loose on earth and in heaven...

Although the chosen instruments chosen to hold the keys of this Priesthood must be the literal lineage of Israel, yet that lineage are not all thus commissioned, nor indeed are any of them Priests merely because they are of the chosen seed. Such an instrument must be revealed, and his ordination, which he had before the world began, be renewed and confirmed upon his fleshly tabernacle, or he cannot be a Priest on earth. (Parley P. Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology/ A Voice of Warning [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965], 73)

7 Therefore they turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb idols, and hearkened not unto my voice, but endeavored to take away my life by the hand of the priest of Elkenah. The priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh.

t is with this background-a horrifying hatred of human sacrifice-that God would ask Abraham to offer his son Isaac. God would ask of Abraham that which was most difficult of all-to sacrifice his son, Isaac, just like he had seen done in his youth in heathen idol worship. If God would ask that which was most difficult for Abraham, we should not be too surprised if he asks that which is most difficult for us as well. Joseph Smith taught that the trials of the saints would be equal to that of Abraham so that "the ancients will not have whereof to boast over us in the day of judgment, as being called to pass through heavier afflictions." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 136)

8 Now, at this time it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea, for the offering unto these strange gods, men, women, and children.

"In recent years the site of Ur has been explored by the eminent British archaeologist Dr. C. Leonard Woolley. He reports that he found unmistakable evidence of trade connections between Ur and Egypt as early as about the first dynasty." (George Reynolds and Janne M.

Sjodahl, Commentary on the Book of Mormon, edited and arranged by Philip C. Reynolds, 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1955-1961], 1: 401.)

10 Even the thank-offering of a child did the priest of Pharaoh offer upon the altar which stood by the hill called Potiphar's Hill, at the head of the plain of Olishem.

President Joseph Fielding Smith, commenting on the human sacrifices that took place during the time of Abraham, wrote: "Abraham was of the [tenth] generation from Noah. Several hundred years had passed since the flood, and people had multiplied and spread over the face of the earth. The civilizations of Egypt, Chaldea, Assyria and the petty nations of Canaan, had been established. In the midst of this scattering the true worship of the Father was nearly lost. Sacrifice instituted in the days of Adam and continued in the practice and teaching of Noah, in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of Man, had become perverted. Instead of offering clean animals, such as the lamb and bullock, the apostate nations had dwindled in unbelief to the extent that human sacrifice was offered to their idol gods" (The Way to Perfection, 85).

11 Now, this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time, who were the daughters of Onitah, one of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham. These virgins were offered up because of their virtue; they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, therefore they were killed upon this altar, and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians.

Along with three exceptionally faithful young men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (see Daniel 3:12–30)—Elder Neal A. Maxwell discussed these three virtuous young women as "marvelous models on enduring uncertainty and on trusting God": "Matching those three young men are three young women whose names we do not have. They are mentioned in the book of Abraham, remarkable young women about whom I am anxious to know more. They were actually sacrificed upon the altar because 'they would not bow down to worship [an idol] of wood or stone' (Abraham 1:11). Some day the faithful will get to meet them" ("Not My Will, But Thine" [1988], 119–20).

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;

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;

The Prophet 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 excellency 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. ...

"... A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.

"... It is in vain for persons to fancy to themselves that they are heirs with those, or can be heirs with them, who have offered their all in sacrifice, and by this means obtained faith in God and favor with him so as to obtain eternal life, unless they, in like manner, offer unto him the same sacrifice, and through that offering obtain the knowledge that they are accepted of him. ...

“... From the days of righteous Abel to the present time, the knowledge that men have that they are accepted in the sight of God is obtained by offering sacrifice. ...

“... Those, then, who make the sacrifice, will have the testimony that their course is pleasing in the sight of God; and those who have this testimony will have faith to lay hold on eternal life, and will be enabled, through faith, to endure unto the end, and receive the crown that is laid up for them that love the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. But those who do not make the sacrifice cannot enjoy this faith, because men are dependent upon this sacrifice in order to obtain this faith: therefore, they cannot lay hold upon eternal life, because the revelations of God do not guarantee unto them the authority so to do, and without this guarantee faith could not exist” (Lectures on Faith, 68–70).

20 Behold, Potiphar’s Hill was in the land of Ur, of Chaldea. And the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh; which Pharaoh signifies king by royal blood.

Chaldea was a great distance from Egypt, yet there was mourning in Egypt when the Lord broke down the altar and smote the priest. Regarding this event, Elder Mark E. Petersen wrote:



“When the scripture says that the Lord broke down the altars of the gods of the land, it must have had broad repercussions because it brought great mourning in Chaldea ‘and also in the court of Pharaoh.’ Pharaoh and his court were in Egypt. Only a most unusual event could have caused such extensive and distant reactions.

“Abraham’s brief account obviously does not tell the whole story” (Abraham, Friend of God, 48–49).

25 Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote: “After the immersion of the earth in the waters of Noah came a day of new beginning. As in Adam’s day, the faithful lived under a theocratic system, and as in the days before the flood, those who chose to live after the manner of the world set up their own governments and their own ways of worship. The seed of Shem, Ham, and Japheth began to populate the earth, and it so continued for more than four hundred years, when Abraham, who received theocratic power from Melchizedek, went down into Egypt. There he found a descendant of Ham, reigning as Pharaoh, whose government was patterned after the patriarchal governments of old, but which was devoid of priesthood and revelation, and hence, as far as worship is concerned—a worship prescribed, mandated, and commanded by pharaoh—had turned to idolatry.” (Abraham 1:20–27.)” (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, 660).



Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote:

“Egypt was not the only nation, in these early times, which attempted to imitate the patriarchal order of government. We have seen in Abraham’s record that this was the order of government in the reign of Adam, and down to the time of Noah.

“Naturally that form of government would be perpetuated in large degree by all tribes as they began to spread over the face of the earth. As men multiplied they organized first in the family group, then into tribes and eventually into nations. The greater powers would naturally occupy the most favored spots. Stronger tribes would overcome the weaker and force them to join the national government, or else they would be subdued and treated as slaves, or placed under tribute. As the patriarchal order was handed down from father to son so also would the political authority be perpetuated with the same claims to authority. We know that in ancient times in Egypt, Assyria, Chaldea, Babylon, Persia, and among all the petty nations of the Mesopotamia and Palestine, the monarch was succeeded by his posterity in hereditary right” (The Progress of Man, 3rd ed. [1944], 100–101.)

26 Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood.

27 Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry;

At times in the past, the power and authority to act in the name of the Lord was bestowed upon only a few worthy males and withheld from all others. In the days of Moses’ leadership of the children of Israel, for example, only the tribe of Levi had the privilege to hold the priesthood (see Numbers 8:5–26). Our day is the “long-promised day ... when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood.” On 8 June 1978, the First Presidency announced:

“Aware of the promises made by the prophets and presidents of the Church who have preceded us that at some time, in God’s eternal plan, all of our brethren who are worthy may receive the priesthood, and witnessing the faithfulness of those from whom the priesthood has been withheld, we have pleaded long and earnestly in behalf of these, our faithful brethren, spending many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple supplicating the Lord for divine guidance.

“He has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood, with power to exercise its divine authority, and enjoy with his loved ones every blessing that flows therefrom, including the blessings of the temple. Accordingly, all worthy male members of the Church may be ordained to the priesthood

without regard for race or color. Priesthood leaders are instructed to follow the policy of carefully interviewing all candidates for ordination to either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek Priesthood to insure that they meet the established standards for worthiness.

“We declare with soberness that the Lord has now made known his will for the blessing of all his children throughout the earth who will hearken to the voice of his authorized servants, and prepare themselves to receive every blessing of the gospel” (Official Declaration 2).

Fain means “content or willing to accept an alternative when the more desirable thing cannot be attained” (Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged, 2nd ed., 657). “The Pharaohs would fain claim [the priesthood] from Noah, through Ham” (Abraham 1:27).

Genesis 15

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.

In the Joseph Smith Translation, four significant verses are added between verses 5 and 6 of the Genesis account:

“And Abram said, Lord God, how wilt thou give me this land for an everlasting inheritance?

“And the Lord said, Though thou wast dead, yet am I not able to give it thee?

“And if thou shalt die, yet thou shalt possess it, for the day cometh, that the Son of Man shall live; but how can he live if he be not dead? he must first be quickened.

“And it came to pass, that Abram looked forth and saw the days of the Son of Man, and was glad, and his soul found rest, and he believed in the Lord; and the Lord counted it unto him for righteousness.” (JST, Genesis 15:9–12.)

Once again it is clear that the early patriarchs knew far more about Christ and His mission than the present Old Testament record indicates (see Mosiah 13:33).

12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

For an interesting parallel to the experience Abraham had at the beginning of his vision, read Joseph Smith—History 1:14–16.

13 And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

15 And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

16 But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.

In this prophecy about the future captivity of Israel, the Lord gives an important clue to why He later would command the Israelites to utterly destroy any Canaanites living in the land of promise (see Deuteronomy 7:1–2; 20:16–18). Evidently by that time their iniquity had become full and they were therefore ripe for destruction.

Genesis 16

1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar.

“A Midrash claims that Hagar was Pharaoh’s daughter and royalty in her own right, ‘for he preferred to see his daughter the servant of Sarah to reigning as mistress in another harem’ (Ginzberg, Legends, 1:223). It seems more likely that Hagar was either an Egyptian child sold by her parents into slavery or a slave born to other Egyptian slaves within Abram and Sarai’s household.” (Camille Fronk Olson, Women of the Old Testament, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 37)

“The temptation is to paint her as the nemesis, the intruder, the foreigner to faith. The biblical text, however, does not allow such an interpretation. Hagar directly communed with God, received inspired directions, and was promised eternal blessings. Unquestionably, God loved Hagar and acknowledged her goodness... A Midrash describes Sarai as Hagar’s spiritual teacher... ‘Taught and bred by Sarah, [Hagar] walked in the same path of righteousness as her mistress.’” (Camille Fronk Olson, Women of the Old Testament, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 29, 37)

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.

“In scriptural text, Hagar is referred to as a ‘concubine’ (Genesis 25:6; D&C 132:37). With none of the immoral overtones inherent in the label today, a concubine in the ancient Near East was a legal wife who was elevated from servant status by her marriage. Her increased status did not, however, equal that of the chief wife, who was always a free woman. Although a legitimate wife to her husband, a concubine remained a servant to her mistress, who could discipline or sell her at will. Receiving free status and giving birth often added confusion to her status in the family and threatened to reverse her importance with that of the chief wife. The ancient Babylonian law, the Code of Hammurabi, rescinded freedom and status should a concubine assume equality with her mistress. The regulation reads, ‘If a man take a wife and she give this man a maid-servant as wife and she bear him children, and then this maid assume equality with the wife: because she has borne him children her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maid-servants’ (no. 146). The ancient Babylonian custom parallels the dynamics between Sarai and Hagar when Hagar knew she had conceived a child (Genesis 16:4-6). Sarai’s remorse after Hagar became pregnant may have been out of fear that Hagar would supplant her as chief wife. Likewise, Hagar’s ‘despising’ of Sarai suggests that Sarai’s importance and status had diminished in Hagar’s eyes. The distinction between authority and possession was beginning to blur.” (Camille Fronk Olson, Women of the Old Testament, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 37-38)

9 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

10 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

The angelic message to Hagar shows that the promises to Abraham go even beyond those which have come through Isaac.

12 And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

The Hebrew word Ishmael literally means, “God bears” (v. 11a). In verse 12 he is called a “wild man,” or in Hebrew, a “wild ass,” which metaphor implies one who loves freedom. This metaphor could be a prophetic description of the nomadic life of the descendants of Ishmael (see v. 12a).

Genesis 17

1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

The commandment to Abraham was “thou shalt walk uprightly before me, and be perfect” (JST, Genesis 17:1a). This commandment has been given to the Saints in all ages (see Deuteronomy 18:13; Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48; 27:27; D&C 67:13).

“Salvation does not come all at once; we are commanded to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. It will take us ages to accomplish this end, for there will be greater progress beyond the grave, and it will be there that the faithful will overcome all things, and receive all things, even the fulness of the Father’s glory.

“I believe the Lord meant just what he said: that we should be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect. That will not come all at once, but line upon line, and precept upon precept, example upon example, and even then not as long as we live in this mortal life, for we will have to go even beyond the grave before we reach that perfection and shall be like God.

“But here we lay the foundation. Here is where we are taught these simple truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in this probationary state, to prepare us for that perfection. It is our duty to be better today than we were yesterday, and better tomorrow than we are today. Why? Because we are on that road, if we are keeping the commandments of the Lord, we are on that road to perfection, and that can only come through obedience and the desire in our hearts to overcome the world.” (Smith, Doctrines of Salvation, 2:18–19.)

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.

12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

The word circumcision comes from the Latin words meaning “to cut around.” It was instituted by revelation as a sign or token that one was of the covenant seed of Abraham. To better understand why the Lord chose this particular sign or token, read the account in the Joseph Smith Translation:

“And it came to pass, that Abram fell on his face, and called upon the name of the Lord.

“And God talked with him, saying, My people have gone astray from my precepts, and have not kept mine ordinances, which I gave unto their fathers;

“And they have not observed mine anointing, and the burial, or baptism wherewith I commanded them;

“But have turned from the commandment, and taken unto themselves the washing of children, and the blood of sprinkling;

“And have said that the blood of the righteous Abel was shed for sins; and have not known wherein they are accountable before me. ...

“And I will establish a covenant of circumcision with thee, and it shall be my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations; that thou mayest know for ever that children are not accountable before me until they are eight years old.” (JST, Genesis 17:3–7, 11.)

Much additional information is given in this account.

1. Before instituting the law of circumcision, the Lord explained why He was establishing this token of the covenant.

a. The people had left correct principles and forsaken the true ordinances.

b. Baptism was one ordinance being incorrectly observed.

c. The people were washing their children and sprinkling blood in remembrance of Abel’s blood, which they taught was shed for sins.

d. They misunderstood the relationship between accountability of children and the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

2. Because of this apostasy, circumcision was instituted.

a. It was a covenant token.

b. It was for the seed of Abraham.

c. It signified that children were not accountable until they were eight years old.

Other scriptures make it clear that it was not the act itself but rather what it stood for that gave circumcision its greatest significance.

In many places the Lord speaks of true circumcision as being the circumcision of the heart. The heart that is “circumcised” is one that loves God and is obedient to the Spirit. The “uncircumcised in heart” are wicked, proud, and rebellious (Ezekiel 44:7; see also Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 44:7; Acts 7:51; Romans 2:25–29; Colossians 2:11).

Though a person may have had the token of circumcision in the flesh, unless he was righteous the covenant was invalidated and the circumcision became profitless. Thus, circumcision was only a sign or token of what needed to happen to the inward man. If the inward change had not taken place, then circumcision was virtually meaningless. (See Jeremiah 9:25–26; Romans 2:25–29; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:1–6; 6:12–15; Philippians 3:3–4.)

With the fulfillment of the Mosaic law under Jesus, the token of circumcision was no longer required of God’s covenant people (see Acts 15:22–29; Galatians 5:1–6; 6:12–15).

The Abrahamic covenant makes frequent reference to one’s seed (see Genesis 17:6–12). The organ of the body that produces seed and brings about physical birth is the organ on which the token of the covenant was made. The organ of spiritual rebirth, however, is the heart (see 3 Nephi 9:20). Thus, when a person was circumcised it signified that while he had been born into the covenant, he need not be baptized until he became accountable before the Lord. But spiritual circumcision, or the circumcision of the heart, must take place once one becomes accountable or one is not considered as true Israel. As Paul said so aptly, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

“But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28–29).

15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.

16 And I will bless her, 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, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

Joseph Smith corrected this verse to say that Abraham rejoiced (see JST, Genesis 17:23a). This change is also substantiated by the Hebrew text.

21 But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

The birthright was given to Isaac, the first son of the first wife, rather than to Ishmael, who was the first son of Abraham and Hagar and was about fourteen years older than Isaac. The Lord made it clear that in accordance with the original promise Abraham’s son by Sarah would bear the covenant responsibility. Yet, Ishmael, through his twelve sons, was also to be the father of a great nation.

24 And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

I don’t even want to think about it.

27 And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

Three for the price of one? Maybe they had coupons.

Genesis 21

2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

*“Abraham, old and white-haired as he was, found his hair turning black, and he recovered the vigor of his youth. Sarah, likewise, old and white-haired as she was, found her hair turning black. Abraham became a young man again and Sarah became a young woman again. Thereupon, just about everyone in the world gathered around them and asked, ‘What was so unusual about you both as to have such extraordinary things befall you?’ So Abraham sat down, and beginning with his deliverance from the fire of the Chaldees, told everything that had happened to him in the world up to that very hour. Of the things that befell Abraham, it is said, ‘Who hath raised up one from the East? At whose steps does victory attend? He giveth nations before him and maketh him rule over kings.’” (Tvedtnes, Hauglid, & Gee, *Traditions About the Early Life of Abraham* [Provo: FARMS, 2001], 76-77)*

3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

*“Those who are not descendants of Abraham are adopted in the House of Israel when they join the Church and become heirs of the covenant of Abraham, through the ordinances of the gospel.” (Ardeth G. Kapp, *LDS Church News*, 1991)*

Genesis 22

1 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 word translated as “tempt” in the King James Version comes from the Hebrew word nissab, which means “to test, try, or prove.” The test given to Abraham had two aspects. First, he was asked to give up something very precious to him. To kill one’s child would be horrible enough but to kill the child that had come after decades of fruitless waiting, the child promised by holy men sent from God, the child in whom the covenant was to be fulfilled, must have been a test beyond comprehension. The willingness of Abraham to give up something as dear as Isaac sharply contrasts with the reluctance of the rich young ruler who asked the Savior what he must do to be saved. When told he should sell all of his possessions and follow the Master, “he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:22).

But an equally difficult, if not greater, test was what could be described as the question of the integrity of God. Abraham himself had nearly lost his life on an idolatrous altar and had been saved by the direct intervention of the Lord (see Abraham 1:12–20). Abraham knew that the law of God forbids human sacrifice or murder of any sort. Surely one would wonder at such a command, asking himself, “Can this be from God? Does God contradict himself?” And then to know that, additionally, it would mean the end of the very covenant line that God had Himself promised to establish would surely be almost overwhelming.

*Elder Spencer W. Kimball commented on this aspect of the test: “Exceeding faith was shown by Abraham when the superhuman test was applied to him. His young ‘child of promise,’ destined to be the father of empires, must now be offered upon the sacrificial altar. It was God’s command, but it seemed so contradictory! How could his son, Isaac, be the father of an uncountable posterity if in his youth his mortal life was to be terminated? Why should he, Abraham, be called upon to do this revolting deed? It was irreconcilable, impossible! And yet he believed God. His undaunted faith carried him with breaking heart toward the land of Moriah with this young son who little suspected the agonies through which his father must have been passing.” (In *Conference Report*, Oct. 1952, p. 48.)*

Little wonder that throughout the scriptures Abraham is spoken of again and again as a great example of one with faith, of one who was obedient.

2 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.

In the Book of Mormon, Jacob clearly teaches that Abraham's willingness to offer up Isaac is "a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son" (Jacob 4:5). A similitude is an object, act, or event in physical reality which corresponds to (is similar to or is a simulation of) some greater spiritual reality. (For a discussion of why the Lord uses similitudes, see Enrichment Section C, "Symbolism and Typology in the Old Testament.")

Most readers of the Old Testament can immediately see the similarities between the test of Abraham and the sacrifice of the Father, but many miss the precise detail of this similitude that God used to teach about the future sacrifice of His only Son. The following are some of these significant details.

Abraham obviously was a type or similitude of the Father. Interestingly enough, his name, Abram, means "exalted father," and Abraham means "father of a great multitude" (see Genesis 17:5). Both are names appropriate of Heavenly Father.

Isaac was a type of the Son of God. One of the meanings of his name is "he shall rejoice." Like Jesus, he was the product of a miraculous birth. Isaac's birth certainly was not as miraculous as the birth of Jesus through Mary, but at age ninety, Sarah too was a woman for whom birth was not possible by all usual standards. Yet, through the intervention of God, she conceived and bore a son. Paul called Isaac the "only begotten son" (Hebrews 11:17) when he referred to this event.

The Lord not only asked Abraham to perform the act of similitude of His own future actions but indicated that it had to be in a place specified by Him. This place was Moriah, "upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2). (Today Mount Moriah is a major hill of Jerusalem.) The site known traditionally as the place where Abraham offered Isaac is now the site of the Dome of the Rock, a beautiful Moslem mosque. A few hundred yards to the north on a higher point of that same hill system is another world-famous site known as Gordon's Calvary. Its Hebrew name was Golgotha. Not only did Abraham perform the similitude, but he performed it in the same area in which the Father would make the sacrifice of His Son.

When they arrived at Moriah, the Genesis account says, "Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son" (Genesis 22:6). The Joseph Smith Translation, however, reads, "laid it upon his back" (JST, Genesis 22:7). Some have seen in this action a similarity to Christ's carrying of the cross upon His shoulders on the way to His Crucifixion (see Clarke, Bible Commentary, 1:139; John 19:17).

"And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son" (Genesis 22:6).

Isaac voluntarily submitted to Abraham. This important parallel is often overlooked. The Old Testament does not give enough detail to indicate exactly how old Isaac was at the time of this event, but it is possible that he was an adult. Immediately following the account of the sacrifice on Mount Moriah is recorded the statement that Sarah died at the age of 127 (see Genesis 23:1). Thus, Isaac would have been 37 at the time of her death. Even if the journey to Moriah had happened several years before Sarah's death, Isaac could have been in his thirties, as was the Savior at the time of His Crucifixion. Nevertheless, Isaac's exact age is not really important. What is significant is that Abraham was well over a hundred years old and Isaac was most likely a strong young man who could have put up a fierce resistance had he chosen to do so. In fact, Isaac submitted willingly to what his father intended, just as the Savior would do.

Once the event was over and all ended happily, Abraham named the place Jehovah-jireh, which the King James Version translates as "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Genesis 22:14). Adam Clarke, citing other scholars, said that the proper translation should be "on this mount the Lord shall be seen." Clarke then concluded: "From this it appears that the sacrifice offered by Abraham was understood to be a representative one, and a tradition was kept up that Jehovah should be seen in a sacrificial way on this mount. And

this renders ... more than probable ... that Abraham offered Isaac on that very mountain on which, in the fulness of time, Jesus suffered.” (Bible Commentary, 1:141.) Jesus was sentenced to death within the walls of the Antonia fortress, which was only about a hundred yards from the traditional site of Abraham’s sacrifice. He was put to death at Golgotha, part of the same ridge system as Moriah.

Scholars not only have noted the significance of the site for the sacrifice of Jesus Himself but also have pointed out that it related to the site of Solomon’s temple where the sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation took place. “The place of sacrifice points with peculiar clearness [to] Mount Moriah, upon which under the legal economy all the typical sacrifices were offered to Jehovah; ... that by this one true sacrifice the shadows of the typical sacrifices might be rendered both real and true” (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 1:1:253; emphasis added).

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