

Old Testament 9
God Will Provide Himself a Lamb
(Abraham 1; Genesis 15-17; 21-22)
By Lenet Hadley Read

(Here is inspirational background)

I. When we look at Facsimile No. 1 in the Pearl of Great Price, we should understand the abhorrence Abraham must have felt for human sacrifice.

A. And he strongly condemned such sacrifices --- to dumb gods, for he had been taken by violence for sacrifice himself (Abraham 1:5-12).

B. His previous abhorrence must have caused shock when he heard his own God ask him to **sacrifice his son**.

II. Other factors made this commandment extremely difficult to keep.

A. Abraham had to wait a very long time for this son whom he was now asked to sacrifice. Surely this very **long wait had endeared him even more to that son!**

B. Furthermore, the Lord had promised him a great multiplicity of seed, yet **he was to slay the very means to that promise** (Genesis 13:16). What bitterness!

C. On the other hand, he would not have had a son *except* as a gift from the Lord. It would be hard to deny the Lord, since *He* gave the gift.

III. The Lord later shows Abraham **his willingness to offer his only son was the very key to opening up that great blessing of enormous posterity!**

A. “...because thou ... hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: ... I will bless thee; and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:16-18.)

B. A modern prophet has shown the parallels for us.

1. “What a wondrous thing it is to behold mortal men --- [like] Abraham,--- receiving the divine word that in them and in their seed all generations shall be blessed and that their posterity, through the continuation of the eternal family unit, shall be as the dust of the earth in number, as the sands upon the seashore in multitude....” Bruce R. McConkie, *Millennial Messiah*, p. 264.

IV. There were several things which must have helped prepare Abraham to accept God’s will, in spite of his abhorrence.

A. His God, Jehovah, *had delivered him* from his being offered as sacrifice (Abraham 1:15.) So deep down, he might have held hope that his own son would be delivered too.

B. Furthermore, **evidence shows Abraham knew that God’s required sacrifices were basically in similitude of a future self-sacrifice in love by Christ.**

1. He said he had the records from the beginning and Adam had been told the sacrifices were a similitude of a future Savior (Moses 5:5-8; Helaman 8:17-18). That understanding was likely passed down to later prophets

C. Furthermore he also had faith that God would raise up his son from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19 and Helaman 8:17).

V. And Abraham's offering of Isaac did indeed bear witness of the offering Jesus Christ would make.

A. There are many deliberate parallels between the sacrifice offered by Abraham of his son and that made by God our Eternal Father of His Son.

B. One was the significance of the *place* of the sacrifice.

1. The place of the offering was the same. Mount Moriah was named by Abraham "Jehovah-jireh," which means "The Lord will provide [the sacrifice]." (BD, p. 711.)

2. Jewish tradition places Isaac's sacrifice upon this mountain and equates it with the mountain upon which Solomon's temple was built. (BD, p.734). But also on that mountain, though outside Jerusalem's walls, is Golgotha, the very place of Christ's great sacrifice.

C. We are meant to understand the nature of God, the Eternal Father, from these events.

1. While Abraham did not complete his offering, God the Eternal Father did. But we can feel through what Abraham suffered, how God the Father must also have suffered, to even a greater degree. **Though terribly wrenching**, He would make the greatest sacrifice for our sakes. Elder Melvin J. Ballard helps us understand.

"Our Father in heaven went through [terrible suffering], for in his case the hand was not stayed. He loved his Son, Jesus Christ, better than Abraham ever loved Isaac... and yet he allowed this well-beloved Son to descend from the place of glory and honor... down to the earth, a condescension that is not within the power of man to conceive. He came to receive the insult, the abuse, and the crown of thorns. God heard the cry of his Son in that moment of great grief and agony, in the garden when ...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...'

"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; and, like the mother who bids farewell to her dying child, has to be taken out of the room, so as not to look upon the last struggles, so he bowed his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that he had for his Son. Oh, in that moment when he might have saved 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 also had love for us. 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." (Melvin J. Ballard, "The Sacramental Covenant.")

VI. There are other poignant parallels.

A. Both Jesus and Isaac bore the wood, the means of sacrifice, upon their backs.

B. **Importantly, Isaac and Jesus were the same age. Both were old enough to resist, yet both lovingly yielded to their fathers and offered their sacrifices willingly.**

C. The ram caught in the thicket also taught of Christ. Rams were one of the sacrifices made in similitude of Him. This offering with its horns, (which are signs of power)

demonstrated that Jesus was actually a being of great power [a God Himself], --- yet would offer Himself meekly, like a lamb.

D. Note it was after offering the ram Abraham names Moriah “Jehovah-jireh” [The Lord will provide].

E. I like to consider that “Jehovah-jireh” meant “God will provide *Himself* --- a **Lamb**” (Genesis 22:7-8).

VII. The Lord often tests *us* also --- to know whether we are willing to make significant sacrifices for His sake (See D&C 101:1, 3-5).

A. As with Abraham, the Lord often tests us through things that are the *most difficult* for us.

1. While many of us are more willing to make sacrifices ourselves, it is much more difficult to make sacrifices of our children. Yet Latter-day Saints are making such an offering in sending children on missions.

2. When my oldest son, John, was serving a mission in Argentina, I had not worried about his safety until the Falkland Islands War broke out between Argentina and Great Britain in the early 80's. I called the mission department in concern. They said they were monitoring the situation continually, and they would remove the missionaries if they felt advisable. In the meantime the missionaries had been given some precautions to help protect themselves and orders of what to do if things became more serious.

However, a non-member acquaintance began to condemn me on one occasion. He pointed out that every other American group of people had come out: diplomats, businessmen, etc. And he said, with some contempt for our seeming insensitivity, that the only Americans still there were the Mormon missionaries. When I said the Church was continually monitoring the matter, he responded, again with strong judgment, that things could change instantly, far too soon to react.

My faith was indeed tested. But I had to trust in the Lord and in His servants.

Fortunately, the war was a quick one, and ended without any injury to the missionaries. I have felt this was one of my Abrahamic tests.

3. When serving as a Temple Missionary in the Palmyra, New York Temple, in 2013-14, some of us saw “The Saratov Approach,” about two Mormon missionaries held hostage by terrorists in Russia. Later, some comments were made of it in testimony meeting. Afterwards, in Relief Society, an unknown woman stood to bear her testimony. She said she was from the Ukraine. Likely reacting to the things said in testimony meeting, and of the dangerous thing that had happened in Russia, and to comfort us, she said, “Thank you, mothers, for sending your children on missions. I was an atheist and a Communist. And my life has greatly changed.”

This did comfort us, helping us know the sending of our children and grandchildren **into unknown lands and into unknown dangers is important to the salvation of others, as was Christ's sacrifice.**

4. As with Abraham, it is also true with us, that what we are willing to sacrifice for God's sake will open to us His greatest blessing in the long run.

5. The Lord has promised us all: “For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25).

VIII. The Lord's dealing differently with Isaac and Ishmael had a significant meaning, which the Apostle Paul later understood and clarified. (See Gen. 16; 17:19-21, and Galatians 4:22-31).

A. Paul actually explains in Galatians that the situation was a similitude: that Isaac was a witness of Jesus Christ in more ways than being offered as a sacrifice. For he also bore witness, as "the long-awaited, to be specially blessed Son." He witnessed of Jesus, whose coming was long awaited, and who actually fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, and set people free from the bondage of sin and death. Thus Isaac, as ancestor to Jesus, was the sole recipient of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Remember, as explained in my OT Lesson 7, that the Lord is not trying to show a preference for one people over another as many assume. In fact He repeatedly manifests His love for both of Abraham's sons and their descendants (See Gen. 16:11 and 17:20).

But through Isaac He is prophesying of the *coming of Jesus Christ* through a particular lineage, and that it is through this eventual heir and *only this heir, Jesus Christ*, that will come the immense freedoms and also the great blessings of Eternal Seed.

We must remember the *spiritual* nature of God's promises. And that *those great blessings will eventually be made available to individuals of all nations if they will receive them!*

B. And those who are willing to make sacrifices for the Father and His Son, will be heirs of their greatest blessings, as was Abraham.