

Lesson 10: “Birthright Blessings; Marriage in the Covenant”

Purpose: To strengthen our desire to live worthy of our birthright blessings and of eternal marriage.

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics included in the lesson purpose and scripture block. The lessons are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in downloading editable Powerpoint or Word files, links to source material or reading posts about improving Gospel Doctrine class preparation, delivery and engagement, you can join my Facebook Group and have full access to the content posted there. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188904648521022/>



Last Week's Lesson Challenge

Last week's challenge was two fold. First, as we study the Old Testament, look for instances where the events you study are in the similitude of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and are designed to help us better understand the eternal nature of the Savior's sacrifice. Second, the story of Abraham and Issac is a story of great faith, both Abraham's and Issac's. What can we do each day to increase our faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice or us and all humankind?

Would anyone share their experiences with either the symbols of Jesus Christ's sacrifice in the Old Testament or increasing our faith in Jesus Christ?

Today's lesson is about birthright blessings and marriage in the covenant. It is important for each of us to remember that not everyone has or will have the blessings of marriage in the covenant in this life. Some, for the reasons that are irrelevant to us, may wait until the next life to enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. Modern day prophets have spoken about this.

In *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 2:37–38) wrote the following.

“In the great plan of salvation nothing has been overlooked. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the most beautiful thing in the world. It embraces every soul whose heart is right and who diligently seeks him and desires to obey his laws and covenants. Therefore, if a person is for any cause denied the privilege of complying with any of the covenants, the Lord will judge him or her by the intent of the heart. There are thousands of members of the Church [without access to temples] who have married and reared families in the Church, who were deprived of the privilege of being “sealed” for time and all eternity. Many of these have passed away, and their blessings are given them vicariously. The gospel is a vicarious work. Jesus vicariously performed a labor for us all because we could not do it for ourselves. Likewise, he has granted to the living members of the Church that they may act as proxies for the dead who died without the opportunity of acting in their own behalf.

Furthermore, there are thousands of young men as well as young women, who have passed to the world of spirits without the opportunity of these blessings. Many of them have laid down their lives in battle; many have died in their early youth; and many have died in their childhood. The Lord will not forget a single one of them. All the blessings belonging to exaltation will be given them, for this is the course of justice and mercy. So with those who live in the stakes of Zion and in the shadows of our temples; if they are deprived of blessings in this life these blessings will be given to them during the millennium.”

Answers to Gospel Questions, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 2:37–38.

In Gospel Doctrine, we teach Gospel principles and ideals. No one will disagree that it is the ideal condition for God's children to have all of the eternal blessings of the Gospel in this life. We also do this with the recognition that not all of God's children will.

As we discuss marriage in the covenant, let's all be mindful and considerate that not everyone has had or will have this opportunity in their life.

Lesson 10 Covers The Following Chapters Of Genesis

Genesis 24. Abraham emphasizes the importance of marriage in the covenant (eternal marriage) through the selection of a worthy wife for Isaac.

Genesis 25:20–34. Rebekah receives a revelation concerning her unborn twin sons (25:22–23). When these sons are grown, Esau sells his birthright to Jacob (25:29–34).

Genesis 26–29. Isaac and his descendants are promised the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (26:1–5). Esau marries out of the covenant and brings sadness to his parents (26:34–35). Isaac blesses Jacob to rule over peoples and nations (27:1–46). Isaac pronounces on Jacob the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant and sends him away to find a worthy wife (28:1–10). Jacob marries Leah and Rachel in the covenant (29:1–30).

Genesis 24:1-6

1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

3 And I will make thee swear 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.

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?

6 And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.

JST Gen. 24:2 ... *hand* ...

- Abraham, in his old age, tells his eldest (or head) servant to go to his birthplace to find a woman for Issac to marry.
- Abraham wanted Issac to marry a woman born of the covenant and not one of the women of Canaan around him.
- The servant questioned him what he was to do if the woman refused to come back with him. Shall I come back and take Issac there?
- Abraham specifically tells the servant not to take Issac back to Abraham's birthplace.

What is meant by “born of the covenant?”

What does it mean to us today?

What can we learn from Abraham’s
determination that Issac marry in the
covenant?

What Is Meant By “Born Of The Covenant?”

The blood descendants of Abraham are not the only people whom God calls His covenant people. In speaking to Abraham, God said, “As many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed [lineage], and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father” (Abraham 2:10). Thus, two groups of people are included in the covenant made with Abraham: (1) Abraham’s righteous blood descendants and (2) those adopted into his lineage by accepting and living the gospel of Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 30:2).

<https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-15-the-lords-covenant-people?lang=eng>

What Does It Mean To Us Today?

When we are baptized into the Church, we enter into the covenant the Lord made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Galatians 3:26–29). If we are obedient, we inherit the blessings of that covenant. We have the right to receive help and guidance from the Holy Ghost. Worthy males have the right to hold the priesthood. Families can receive the blessings of the priesthood. We can gain eternal life in the celestial kingdom. There are no greater blessings than these.

Along with the blessings we receive as the Lord's covenant people, we have great responsibilities. The Lord promised Abraham that through his descendants the gospel would be taken to all the earth. We are fulfilling this responsibility through the full-time missionary program of the Church and the missionary work done by the members. This opportunity to preach the gospel to all the world belongs only to the Lord's Church and His covenant people.

<https://www.lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-15-the-lords-covenant-people?lang=eng>

What Can We Learn From Abraham's Determination That Issac Marry In The Covenant?

Abraham knew that if Issac married a Canaanite woman, his children would not be worthy to pass on the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham knew that Issac needed to marry a woman that not only shared his "bloodline", but also shared his beliefs. It's no different today for ourselves and our children. There is a much greater chance of having eternal life as part of an eternal family if an individual marries someone with like beliefs and values.

"The Family: A Proclamation to the World" states, "Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and ... the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children." In other words, when we talk about why we are here on the earth and what we are meant to accomplish and become, it's all tied to the idea that we are part of a family and can marry and establish new families.

The family proclamation also states: "The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally."

Regarding marriage, President Russell M. Nelson said the following in an April 2006 General Conference address:

“Marriage is the foundry for social order, the fountain of virtue, and the foundation for eternal exaltation. Marriage has been divinely designated as an eternal and everlasting covenant. Marriage is sanctified when it is cherished and honored in holiness. That union is not merely between husband and wife; it embraces a partnership with God. “Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other.” Children born of that marital union are “an heritage of the Lord.” Marriage is but the beginning bud of family life; parenthood is its flower. And that bouquet becomes even more beautiful when graced with grandchildren. Families may become as eternal as the kingdom of God itself.

Marriage is both a commandment and an exalting principle of the gospel. Marriage should ever be a covenant to lift husbands and wives to exaltation in celestial glory.

Marriage was intended by the Lord to endure beyond physical death. His plan offers eternal perpetuation of the family in the kingdom of God. His plan provides temples and opportunities to officiate therein for the living and the dead. A marriage sealed there launches a husband and wife into that grand order of unity so necessary to the perfection of God’s work.”

<https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2006/04/nurturing-marriage?lang=eng>

Genesis 25:20 - 28

20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

21 And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the Lord.

23 And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

24 ¶ And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Rebekah inquired of the Lord about her pregnancy and was told that she carried twins and that the twins would be very different and, more importantly, would be the leaders of two nations.

While Esau and Jacob were twins, they certainly were not identical. Esau was rough, course and very outdoor. Jacob was smooth and very indoor.

Esau was Issac's favorite and Jacob was Rebekah's.

Genesis 25:29-34 - KJV

29 ¶ And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.

34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

- Back at the family home, Issac is making red stew.
- Esau returns and is faint from hunger.
- Esau asks Jacob to feed him for he is famished.
 - From this the writer gives him the nickname “Edom”.
- Jacob offers, but on the condition that Esau give Jacob his birthright.
- Esau considers and says to himself, “If I am going to die of hunger, what good is my birthright to me? If I die, it would be Jacob’s anyhow”.
- Jacob makes him swear as Esau gives up his birthright.
- Esau eats.
- The phrase “thus Esau despised his birthright” is a summary statement which reveals the underlying significance of Esau’s actions. “To despise” means to treat something as worthless or with contempt. Esau’s willingness to sell his birthright was evidence that he considered it to be unimportant.

What Is A The Birthright?

The Bible Dictionary tells us it was “the right or inheritance of the firstborn under the patriarchal order.” The spiritual part was the authority to preside and give leadership to the family. The temporal part involved the firstborn receiving “a double portion of his father’s possessions.”

Esau’s selling his birthright for a bowl of stew or a “mess of pottage” qualifies as the epitome of a bad deal. He chose poorly!

Poor choices are all around us today as well. Some have chosen pornography and lost their temple marriage and family. Others have chosen not to go on a mission or not to marry in the temple. On a daily basis we are sometimes too tired to pray, too busy to study the scriptures, or not interested in going to church this Sunday, or we rationalize that we can go to the temple anytime—it is so close!

Brothers and sisters, pottage by any other name is still pottage!

The Savior asked two sobering questions recorded in Matthew: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Our choosing wisely can have eternal consequences.

Our Heavenly Father, who knows us and loves us, gave us our agency: “the ability and privilege . . . to choose and to act for [ourselves]” (Guide to the Scriptures, s.v. “agency,” scriptures.lds.org). He declared to Enoch, “In the Garden of Eden, gave I unto man his agency” (Moses 7:32).

Some call this free agency, but there is nothing free about it! The Lord explained to Moses that “Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man” (Moses 4:3). The effort to preserve our agency cost the Father a third of His children (see D&C 29:36).

Choosing wisely is a critical part of His plan of happiness and an integral part of the test of our earth life. God’s direction to Enoch was to say to the people, “Choose ye this day, to serve the Lord God who made you” (Moses 6:33). He really does know best. Elijah put it this way: “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

Stanley G. Ellis was a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given on 13 March 2012.

Genesis 27 is summarized in the following:

- Issac is old and blind and asks Esau to bring him venison to eat and Issac will give him his Father's blessing.
- Rebekah overhears this and conspires with Jacob to fool Issac and steal Esau's blessing.
- Issac believes that he is blessing Esau when he is giving Jacob the blessing he meant to give Esau.
- Esau returns from hunting and learns that Jacob has again cheated him out of his Father's blessing as he cheated him out of his birthday and vows to kill Jacob.

Issac realizing what has happened and acknowledges that Jacob is the Lord's choice says the following:

37 And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?

38 And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

39 And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above;

40 And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.

Jacob Obtains the Birthright Blessing from Esau

The story of how Jacob obtained the birthright blessing from Isaac with the help of his mother is a troubling one in many respects. Typically, commentators who do not have access to latter-day scriptures come to one of two conclusions: either they emphasize Esau's unworthiness for the birthright and therefore justify the deception, or else they criticize Jacob's shrewd and crafty nature.

A more complete knowledge of gospel principles, however, may pose some additional problems. Can a person deceive a patriarch and get a blessing that belongs to someone else? Was Jacob a deceitful and crafty man? Was Isaac blindly favorable to certain children? Can one be dishonest and still get a valid patriarchal blessing?

The following points should be carefully considered:

Considerations in Understanding Why Rebekah and Jacob Chose to Deceive Isaac

- As the record in Genesis now reads, there is little option but to conclude that Rebekah and Jacob deliberately deceived Isaac and that Jacob explicitly lied to his father (see v. 24). Rebekah and Jacob believed the deception was necessary because Isaac obviously favored Esau.
- Joseph Smith, however, taught that certain errors had crept into the Bible through “ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests” (Teachings, p. 327).
- Rebekah knew by personal revelation that Jacob was to be the son of the covenant (see Genesis 25:22–23). Jacob reluctantly gave in to his mother’s wishes after she told him that she would take the responsibility for what they were about to do.
- Although the early patriarchs and their wives were great and righteous men and women who eventually were exalted and perfected (see D&C 132:37), this fact does not mean that they were perfect in every respect while in mortality.
- If the story is correct as found in Genesis, Isaac may have been temporarily shortsighted in favoring Esau. Or Rebekah may have had insufficient faith in the Lord to let Him work His will and therefore undertook a plan of her own to ensure that the promised blessings would come to pass. These shortcomings do not lessen their later greatness and their eventual perfection.
- Whatever the explanation for the circumstances surrounding the reception of the blessing, one thing is perfectly clear. Priesthood holders are given the keys to bind and loose on earth and have that action validated in heaven (see Matthew 16:19). Once Isaac learned of the deception, he could have revoked the blessing and given it to Esau. Instead, he told Esau, “Yea, and he shall be blessed” (Genesis 27:33).
- Later, when Jacob was preparing to leave for Padan-aram to escape Esau’s wrath, Isaac clearly gave him the blessing of Abraham (see Genesis 28:3–4), an additional proof that Jacob received the blessing meant for him and that Isaac confirmed it upon him.
- Thus, if the Genesis record is correct as it now is, Jacob, like others, received a call and a promise of eventual blessings because of his potential and in spite of his weaknesses. Like anyone, he had then to live worthily in order to obtain the promised blessings.

<https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-genesis-2-samuel/genesis-24-36-the-covenant-line-continues-with-isaac-and-jacob?lang=eng>

Genesis Chapter 28 Bible Chapter Summary

Isaac forbids Jacob to marry a Canaanite—He blesses Jacob and his seed with the blessings of Abraham—Esau marries a daughter of Ishmael—Jacob sees in vision a ladder reaching up into heaven—The Lord promises him seed as the dust of the earth in number—The Lord also promises Jacob that in him and in his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed—Jacob covenants to pay tithes.

Genesis Chapter 29 Summary

Following his mother's advice, Jacob left his home. Before he left, Isaac instructed Jacob not to marry any of the daughters of Canaan, but to go to Laban's home and seek a wife there. Laban welcomed Jacob and took him to his home. He was pleased with his sister's son. And as the years past, he married Laban's oldest daughter Leah, and then her younger sister Rachel. Jacob worked hard for Laban. The flocks and herds had been small when Jacob came, but under his care they grew and multiplied. Jacob patiently served Laban day after day and year after year.

Jacob was happy, especially with his beautiful Rachel. The Lord knew that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and to ease Leah's sorrow, he blessed her with four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Rachel had none. Rachel was unhappy because she had no children. She prayed fervently to the Lord and eventually was blessed with a son, whom they named Joseph. After fourteen years of service to Laban, Jacob wanted to leave Laban and take his wives and his children to his homeland. Laban did not want him to go. The Lord had blessed Laban in many ways since Jacob had been with him. Laban pleaded with Jacob, "Stay with me and I will give thee thy desires."

Jacob patiently served Laban six more years before he took his family and animals and returned to Canaan.

Bruce C. Hafen of the First Quorum of the Seventy said the following in an October 1996 General Conference address:

Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will. Jesus taught about contractual attitudes when he described the “hireling,” who performs his conditional promise of care only when he receives something in return. When the hireling “seeth the wolf coming,” he “leaveth the sheep, and fleeth ... because he ... careth not for the sheep.” By contrast, the Savior said, “I am the good shepherd, ... and I lay down my life for the sheep.” Many people today marry as hirelings. And when the wolf comes, they flee. This idea is wrong. It curses the earth, turning parents’ hearts away from their children and from each other.

Many people even wonder these days what marriage is. Modern prophets recently proclaimed, “marriage ... is ordained of God.” Even secular marriage was historically a three-party covenant among a man, a woman, and the state. Society has a huge interest in the outcome and the offspring of every marriage. So the public nature of marriage distinguishes it from all other relationships. Guests come to weddings because, as Wendell Berry said, sweethearts “say their vows to the community as much as to one another,” giving themselves not only to each other, but also to the common good “as no contract could ever join them.”

When we observe the covenants we make at the altar of sacrifice, we discover hidden reservoirs of strength. May we restore the concept of marriage as a covenant, even the new and everlasting covenant of marriage. And when the wolf comes, may we be as shepherds, not hirelings, willing to lay down our lives, a day at a time, for the sheep of our covenant. Then, like Adam and Eve, we will have joy.

<https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1996/10/covenant-marriage?lang=eng>

This Week's Lesson Challenge

Consider the importance of marriage in the covenant in your life and the lives of your children. Do you place an equal measure of value on the sanctity of your marriage as Abraham placed on finding Isaac the woman that would be with him to carry on the Abrahamic Covenant? Do you make the same effort that Jacob did to secure his marriage to both Leah and Rachel?