

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

(This material helps us feel the great conflicts of emotion Abraham, [and thus God the Father whom he represented], must have felt in offering their sons. It helps us become more willing to make our own sacrifices)

Preparation: Look at Pearl of Great Price facsimile No. 1. Use it to compare with pictures of the sacrifice of Isaac and of Jesus' offering in the Crucifixion.

- I. Abraham's experiences in Egypt caused his abhorrence to human sacrifice.
 - A. His being offered as such, and his general observations, caused Abraham to abhor the practice (Abraham 1:5-12).
 1. This previous abhorrence would make it even more difficult for Abraham to obey God's command to make a sacrifice of his own son.
 2. What had happened that might have given *hope* to Abraham? (Abraham 1:15. *God had delivered him* from his being offered as sacrifice.)
 3. Furthermore, Abraham likely knew that *God's* required sacrifices were in similitude of a future self-sacrifice in love by Christ. (Moses 5:5-8; Hebrews 11:17-19 and Helaman 8:17).
- II. Abraham's offering to God, though extremely difficult, was to the key to greater blessings.
 1. Abraham had to wait a very long time for this son whom he was now asked to sacrifice. Would not the long wait have endeared him even more to this son?
 2. Would not God's promises of numerous seed make being left with no son very bitter? (See Genesis 13:16).
 - a. Yet, 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.
 3. The Lord later shows Abraham his willingness to offer his only son was the **very key to opening up the blessings of great posterity to him!**
" ...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.)
Quote: "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.
- III. Abraham's offering of Isaac bore 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.
 - a. The place of the offering was the same. Mount Moriah was named by Abraham “Jehovah-jireh, which means “The Lord will provide.” (BD, p. 711.) 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 learn much about God, the Eternal Father, from these events.

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.”)

D. There are other parallels.

1. Both Jesus and Isaac bore the wood, the means of sacrifice, upon their backs.
2. **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.**
3. 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, [God]--- yet would offer Himself meekly, like a lamb. Note it was after offering the ram Abraham

names Moriah “Jehovah-jireh.”

4. Reread Genesis 22:7-8. Then consider the Title of the lesson as actually, “God will provide *Himself* --- a Lamb.”

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

A. 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 did call 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 friend 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. I am currently (2014) serving as a Temple Missionary in the Palmyra, New York Temple. In early February, after many of our members had recently seen “The Saratov Approach,” about two Mormon missionaries held hostage by terrorists in Russia, 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. Perhaps reacting to this 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.
 - a. See Matthew 16:25, “For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

V. The Lord's dealing differently with Isaac and Ishmael had a significant meaning, which the Apostle Paul later understood and clarified.

A. The situation and the explanation can be read in Gen. 16; 17:19-21, and Galatians 4:22-31.

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 long awaited coming would fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, and set people free from the bondage of sin and death. Thus Isaac 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!*