

Lesson 8: Genesis 18–23, “Is Any Thing Too Hard For the Lord?”

Today we'll discuss Abraham and his two sons, Ishmael and Issac

Abraham and Isaac

The Lord tells Abraham the he a Sarah will have a son and that his son will continue the covenant

Gen 17:15-19

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?

18 And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!

19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.

First, how does the JST clarify verses 17-18?

JST Gen 17:23-24

23 Then Abraham fell on his face and rejoiced, and said in his heart, There shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old, and Sarah that is ninety years old shall bear.

24 And Abraham said unto God, Oh that Ishmael might live uprightly before thee!

Note in JST verse 24 how Abraham desires Ishmael to live uprightly before God. But Ishmael chose not to.

What promise was made about Isaac and his seed?

(I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him)

Bruce R. McConkie

Why Isaac? Because he kept the commandments and did everything he was counseled to do by his father. And so, in due course the Lord came also to Isaac and renewed upon his head all the promises given to Abraham. 'I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven,' was the divine word to Abraham's son, 'and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Genesis 26:4.)" (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, pg. 37)

Let's read how Sarah reacts when she overhears the angel tell Abraham that she will have a son

Gen 18:9-15

9 ¶ And they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

10 And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him.

11 Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

12 Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

13 And the LORD said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

14 Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

15 Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh.

How did the Lord answer Sarah's doubt about having a son?

(Is any thing too hard for the LORD)

Harold B. Lee

"We have seen miraculous things happen, and when we think that the problems ahead are insurmountable, I would like to ask you to remember what the Lord said to Abraham. You will remember the Lord came to Abraham and said, 'Your wife will bear a son.' Abraham and his wife laughed at Him. He said, 'Don't you know that she is over ninety years of age and past childbearing years?' Do you know what the Lord said to Abraham? 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?'

"Brethren and sisters, there is nothing too hard for the Lord. If you and I have a testimony of the divine mission of this church, the kingdom of God on earth, there is nothing too hard for the Lord." (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, pg. 1)

Isaac is born

Gen 21:1-6

1 And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken.

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

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.

5 And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

6 And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.

Verse 1 makes it clear that there was miraculous intervention. God healed Sarah.

In verse 6 – What is an alternative translation of “to laugh”?

(to rejoice)

Issac is from the Hebrew name that means "he will laugh, he will rejoice"

Abraham was 100 years old. We just read in Gen 17:17 that Sarah was 90

Abraham is Commanded to Sacrifice Issac

Gen 22:1-3

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.

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.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Verse 1 - What is an alternative translation of “tempt”?

(Foot note 1a – test or prove; In JST it is changed to "try")

Why is it important that the Lord try and test His people?

D&C 136:31

My people must be tried in all things, that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom

(that they may be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them)

Ether 12:6

And now, I, Moroni, would speak somewhat concerning these things; I would show unto the world that faith is things which are hoped for and not seen; wherefore, dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.

(for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith)

Gen 22:4-9

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off
5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.
6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.
7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?
8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.
9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

They traveled three days to the area that is now Jerusalem

Isaac, “the lad” was about 30 years old

What do you think Abraham meant by "God will provide himself a lamb"?

Dallin H. Oaks

“This story... shows the goodness of God in protecting Isaac and in providing a substitute so he would not have to die. Because of our sins and our mortality, we, like Isaac, are condemned to death. When all other hope is gone, our Father in Heaven provides the Lamb of God, and we are saved by his sacrifice” (CR, Oct. 1992)

How do you think 130 year old Abraham was able to bind his 30 year old son?

Dallin H. Oaks

“When they came to the prescribed place, Abraham built an altar and laid wood upon it. Then, the Bible says, ‘Abraham... bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood’ (Gen 22:9). What did Isaac think when Abraham did such a strange thing? The Bible mentions no struggle or objection. Isaac’s silence can be explained only in terms of his trust in and obedience to his father” (CR, Oct. 1992)

Gen 22:10-12

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
11 And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.
12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

Why do you think Abraham was ask to prove himself in such a severe way?

Spencer W. Kimball

“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?...

”Father Abraham and Mother Sarah knew—knew the promise would be fulfilled. How—they did not know and did not demand to know. Isaac positively would live to be the father of a numerous posterity. They knew he would, even though he might need to die. They knew he could still be raised from the dead to fulfil the promise, and faith here preceded the miracle.”
(CR, Oct. 1952)

Recall from Ether “ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith”
Abraham had received a great promise – The Abrahamic Covenant
This great blessing required great faith
And now he would receive the witness

Gen 22:13-18

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

15 And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,
16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

17 That in blessing 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; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice

After Abraham proved he was faithful, what promised did he receive?

(Verses 17 & 18 - because thou hast obeyed my voice)

We discussed the Abrahamic Covenant two weeks ago....

Joseph Smith

"Abraham obtained power, even power of an endless life... by the offering of his son Isaac which was the power of a King and Priest to God - to open

the windows of Heaven and pour out the peace and law of endless life to man.

"If a man would attain - he must sacrifice all to attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life." (Discourse, 22 Jan. 1843)

At different places in the scriptures the sacrifice of Abraham and Isaac is used to teach principles of the gospel.

Jacob 4:5

Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

What do you think Jacob meant by, "Abraham... offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son"?

Both Mary and Sarah gave birth miraculously

The name Abraham literally means "exalted father"

Abraham sacrificing his "only son" (Genesis 22:2)

Both Isaac and Jesus bore the wood on their backs for their own sacrifice

JST gen 22:7 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it upon his (Isaac's) back.

Isaac was offered up near the place where Jesus was crucified

Isaac voluntarily submitted to Abraham

D&C 101:1-5

1 Verily I say unto you, concerning your brethren who have been afflicted, and persecuted, and cast out from the land of their inheritance—

2 I, the Lord, have suffered the affliction to come upon them, wherewith they have been afflicted, in consequence of their transgressions;

3 Yet I will own them, and they shall be mine in that day when I shall come to make up my jewels.

4 Therefore, they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham, who was commanded to offer up his only son.

5 For all those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified.

“they must needs be chastened and tried, even as Abraham”
Why must we be chastened and tried?

(those who will not endure chastening, but deny me, cannot be sanctified)

Hagar and Ishmael

Sarai cannot have children so she give her servant, Hagar, to Abraham to be his wife. Hagar gets pregnant, which apparently makes her too uppity for Sarai's liking

Gen 16:6-12

6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

7 And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

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.

11 And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.

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.

What did the angel command Hagar to do?

(Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands)

What did the angel tell Hagar about Ishmael and her posterity?

(I will multiply thy seed exceedingly
he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him)

"wild man" is metaphor which implies one who does not like any ties. This could be prophetic description of the nomadic life of many of the descendants of Ishmael (Arabs and Bedouins).

Gen 21:8-13

8 And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.

9 And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

10 Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.

11 And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

12 And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

13 And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.

Why did Sarah want Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away?

(Sarah saw the son of Hagar... mocking)

At this point in Isaac's life Ishmael would have been in his mid to late teens

No doubt there's more to the story.

Maybe Hagar didn't submit to Sarah the way the angel told her to.

Josephus says this about their relationship

Josephus

As for Sarah, she at first loved Ismael, who was born of her own handmaid Hagar, with an affection not inferior to that of her own son, for he was brought up in order to succeed in the government; but when she herself had born Isaac, she was not willing that Ismael should be brought up with him, as being too old for him, and able to do him injuries when their father should be dead; she therefore persuaded Abraham to send him and his mother to some distant country." (Antiquities of the Jews, Book I, 12:3)

Of Isaac God said, "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called". Of Ishmael He said, "I make a nation, because he is thy seed".

What's the difference between the posterity of Isaac and the posterity of Ishmael?

Mark E. Petersen

"Nations, kings, princes, and multitudes were to come from Abraham through both Isaac and Ishmael—but the Lord's covenant would be with Isaac....

"There was no misunderstanding that language. Ishmael would be greatly blessed, but the covenant was to be with Isaac. The Lord was obviously selecting a particular parentage for his chosen people." (Abraham: Friend of God, pp. 12-13)

Gen 21:15-20

15 And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

16 And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept.

17 And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.

18 Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

19 And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

20 And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

James B. Mayfield

“According to the Koran, Abraham brought Ishmael and his mother to Arabia and settled them near what was to become the great city of Mecca. Eventually the descendants of Ishmael’s twelve sons began to fill the Arabian peninsula.

“The Muslim’s religion permeates his life from dawn to nightfall and from his inner chamber to his shop in the crowded marketplace, with a thoroughness that most Christians are often slow to understand. Many Westerners have secularized such large areas of their lives that they have forgotten what it is to live a life in which every activity is religiously oriented.

“As Africa and Asia become a part of our great missionary program, we need a new sensitivity to the history, cultures, and religions of these areas. We cannot be friends with a person or community if we disdain or ignore what that person or community most deeply cherishes. I strongly feel that we must appreciate the Arab’s feeling for the religious duties of the Muslim, and the remarkable civilization Islam produced.” (“Ishmael, Our Brother,” Ensign, June 1979)

Sodom and Gomorrah

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were ripe for destruction but Abraham hoped to find enough righteous people to save the cities

Gen 18:20-24,32

20 And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

21 I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.

22 And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the LORD.

23 ¶ And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the

wicked?

24 Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?

32 And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

Spencer W. Kimball

“Abraham knew that the cities of the plains—Sodom and Gomorrah and other places—were wicked cities, housing wicked, godless people, saying with Cain, ‘Who is the Lord that I should know him?’ He was aware that destruction of those cities was imminent; but in his compassion for his fellowman, he begged and pleaded with the Lord, ‘Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city,’ will you spare the others of the city? That pleading being granted, came Abraham again and prayed that the cities would be saved if 45 were found, or 40 or 30 or 20 or down to ten, but apparently there could not be found even ten, in those vicious cities, who were righteous.” (CR, April 1975)

Gen 19:15,24-28

15 ¶ And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

24 Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven;

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

26 ¶ But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

27 ¶ And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the LORD:

28 And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

Spencer W. Kimball

“The evil continued. The sin was too well entrenched. They had laughed and joked about a destruction. The transgressions for which Sodom had apparently been renowned continued on....

“Everything was done that could be done by Abraham to save the city, but it had become so depraved and wanton that to save it was impossible.” (CR, April 1975)

Lot's wife was commanded not to look back. Becoming a pillar of salt may or may not be a metaphor

Boyd K. Packer

“Strangely enough, it may be that the simplest and most powerful prevention and cure for pornography, or any unclean act, is to ignore and avoid it. Delete from the mind any unworthy thought that tries to take root. Once you have decided to remain clean, you are asserting your God-given agency. And then, as President Smith counseled, ‘Don’t look back.’” (CR, Oct. 2010)