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To really appreciate what we have to learn from the life of Abraham, and the lessons his life can teach us, we should look at what is available to us in the plan of salvation without the covenants the Lord made with Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is what separates those who are LDS from all other religions and sects in the world.

Basic doctrine

The Lord has told us that all covenants, contracts, and promises made in mortality end when we leave mortality. This is found in Doctrine and Covenants 132:7.

> 7 And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.

In this verse, the power being referred to are the keys to the sealing power. The prophet is the only one on earth to hold and have the right to exercise these keys. And the Lord specifies that there is only one person "on the earth at a time on whom this power and

the keys of this priesthood are conferred." That means that if our current prophet holds the keys to the sealing power, there is no one else on earth to whom we can turn to for the blessings of priesthood sealings.

The sealing power is a priesthood function. Without the priesthood there can be no sealings on earth that are recognized in heaven. This means that no marriages in the world can last beyond the grave. No love between a husband and wife, or between parents and children, or between siblings can keep them together after they die. If they are not sealed together in some way by the priesthood of God, through the ministrations of he who holds the keys of that sealing power, there is nothing that can save our precious unions and associations or make them last beyond the mortal veil.

The nature of covenants

The priesthood of God allows us to make covenants with him. But without the sealing power of the priesthood, not even a priesthood holder can help someone's marriage or family be together in the eternities. The sealing power is what makes all the difference. There were many centuries when the priesthood was on the earth, but not the sealing power. These righteous people and their families will have to have their sealing work done for them just like those who were not members of the Lord's Church, because it will take someone acting under the authority of the priesthood, holding the sealing power, to unite these families.

So even having the priesthood of God is not enough to keep families together forever. The sealing power must be present for eternal units to be created. This is a Melchizedek priesthood function. No one holding the Aaronic priesthood can seal someone.

Baptism is the covenant of salvation and is available through the Aaronic priesthood. With it we can get to the celestial kingdom, but we cannot be exalted, meaning we cannot have an eternal companion, nor can we have any posterity. If we want to be exalted, we need the priesthood covenant of exaltation, which is what the Lord offered to Abraham through the Melchizedek priesthood.

Who is Abraham?

Abraham was 11 generations down the family tree from Noah, through his son Shem. Born in what is today the country of Iraq, he was raised by an idolatrous father named

Terah. But Abraham knew of, and wanted more than what his father had to offer. He longed for and sought after the blessings available to his forefathers, the great patriarchs. Note what he says in the first two verses of the Book of Abraham.

> 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;
>
> 2 And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right where unto 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.

Abraham recognized that within the gospel of Christ was peace, blessings, knowledge, and happiness. He was a "follower of righteousness," and he desired to possess great knowledge, and he desired "to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God." He tells us in his own words that he desired these things and that he was a "follower of righteousness," meaning he already kept the commandments and had lived a life worthy of receiving blessings.

As I read this second verse over and over again, the only thought that came into my head was, "Is it really that easy? Does God reward people just because they ask?" That's a mixed question. Yes, He answers our prayers, but he also requires us to be sincere, and if we know better, he also requires that we are obedient to the commandments we know about before he will grant or answer all our prayers.

Abraham was a righteous man who kept all the commandments he had been given. At the age of 60 he was commanded by the Lord to take his family from Ur, where he was raised, and move to a place they called Haran.

We don't really know anything about the early life of Abraham. Our record of him picks up here and carries us through his old age. This really isn't fair, since we only know about the part of his life when all the spiritual desires of this worthy man get realized through one miracle after another. We don't have a record of all the worthwhile and worthy things he did growing up that got him to this point. It is sort of like reading the last half of the biography of President Thomas S. Monson, or one of the other latter-day prophets. We only see them as prophets, and not as the boy or couple next door who

were normal like the rest of us, except that they were exceptionally obedient and faithful.

At this time of Abraham's life he had received the priesthood and was a High Priest, but he did not yet have the sealing power, so his wife would only be his wife until death, and any children would be lost to him upon his or their death. His name change from Abram to Abraham is only recorded in the Bible. What we read in the Book of Abraham all happens after the name change.

The story of Abraham, according to his own record, picks up when he is on the bed of sacrifice, about to be killed by the sacrificial knife by a priest of Pharaoh. His idolatrous father had turned him over to Pharaoh's priest to be a sacrifice to his idol. They had just sacrificed three virgins, and Terah recognized his son's purity and felt he would make a good offering.

Through his faith, Abraham lifts up his voice while on the bed of sacrifice and pleads to be saved by God, and is filled with a vision of the Almighty, and an angel stops the sacrifice, and kills the priest who just lifted his knife to kill Abraham. The Lord introduces himself to Abraham and among all the things he says to him, he says this in Abraham 1:19.

> 19 As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee; but through thy ministry my name shall be known in the earth forever, for I am thy God.

It is interesting that he uses the word "ministry" for missionary work is the responsibility of those with the sealing power. It may even be the earliest time the word ministry is used in the scriptures.

In his vision Abraham was told there would be a famine in the land, and as promised, a famine prevailed in the land of the Chaldeans, which caused his father to repent of his attempt to have his son offered as a sacrifice. We also learn in the last part of this chapter that Abraham had in his possession a copy of the written record of the patriarchs from Adam down to his time, so he had scriptures to study. And from the first verse of chapter three we learn that the Lord gave Abraham a Urim and Thummim before he left Ur.

The covenant with Abraham

In Abraham 2:6 the Lord says,

> ... I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, when they hearken to my voice.

Note that the Lord doesn't say, "I have proposed ...", he says, "I have purposed." In other words, the reason he wants Abraham to leave Haran is to begin his ministry in the places the Lord will send him. Here are the explanatory verses in chapter two about the ministry Abraham has been called to. These are the blessings associated with taking the gospel to the nations in which he was to be sent.

> 9 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee above measure, and make thy name great among all nations, and thou shalt be a blessing unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;
>
> 10 And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;
>
> 11 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.

Verse eleven brought to my mind the promise given to Joseph Smith that the gospel he had restored would go to the ends of the earth and that his name would be had for both good and ill among all people. Here is Doctrine and Covenants 121:16. It is reminiscent of what the Lord told Abraham.

> 16 Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them.

The rest of the quote from Abraham chapter 2 outlines Abraham's personal blessing for being as righteous as he was. The Lord was promising that all those who accepted the gospel would become Abraham's heirs and be counted as part of his bloodline. Furthermore, he was promised that the priesthood he held would be given to his posterity. This priesthood would include the promise of eternal life, which is exaltation. We cannot be exalted without celestial marriage. This is what guarantees us posterity for eternity.

Abraham as a type

A type is a kind of example. Moses was a type for Jesus. Moses offered his people physical salvation just as Christ offered spiritual salvation. Moses gave the lesser law, while Jesus gave the higher law. These are just a couple of ways in which Moses was a type for Jesus. Abraham is a type for us.

Abraham is treated in the scriptures with kid gloves. He is special. Even the Lord told Abraham in vision that he was one of the noble and great spirits in the premortal life. But the blessings and responsibilities given to Abraham were also promised to his children. We are his children. That which the Lord expected from Abraham, he expects from us.

We don't know a lot about how Abraham carried out his ministry to bear the gospel to the nations into which he was sent, but in the latter-days we know all about how the Lord has sent his people into the nations of the earth to carry the message of his gospel to the people of the earth.

With all the blessings of Abraham come the responsibilities of Abraham. What Abraham accomplished in his life can also be accomplished in our individual lives. He sought the blessings of his fathers, the peaceable things of the kingdom, knowledge of God, and greater happiness and rest. These are all things we can seek after. Abraham loved the things of God and sought after all the blessings God could offer his children. So can we.

Because we are the family of Abraham, we have the blessings of his house. We can go to the temples and be sealed to our loved ones for time and all eternity. We can extend those blessings of the higher priesthood to our loved ones and friends as well through our own personal ministries. Have we not all been called to do missionary work, either in our homes, communities, countries, abroad, or to those who are already beyond the veil?

Final Thoughts

We need to stop thinking of Abraham as an untouchable man who was so holy that no one else can measure up to his stature. The very core of our belief system tells us that because God is our Father that we can grow to be like him one day. Surely, if we choose to, we can also grow to become like Abraham.

Abraham himself gave us the key to his spiritual success - he sought the blessings. Pretty simple. Let's focus on seeking the blessings our Father in Heaven has made available to us through the covenants made to our forefather, Abraham. Those blessings can be ours, if we are willing to keep the commandments, and bear the ministry of Christ to the rest of God's family.

We won't all be called to formal missions, but ministries can take place in quiet, humble ways as we seek to fill the needs of the homeless, needy, hungry, and destitute. We can bless the lives of others in countless ways as we follow the Spirit and soothe the suffering we encounter and help lift the burdens carried by those around us. Being examples of Christ is the ministry to which we have been called, and reading and studying the life of Abraham and all the prophets will help us better understand the source of the many blessings available to us because we are the children of our father, Abraham.

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The Abrahamic Covenant

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