

# Mothers in Israel

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*"I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations"*  
(Genesis 17:16).

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*Latter-day Saint women can inherit all promised eternal blessings.*

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## Motherhood Is a Divine Inheritance

President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke in a Relief Society general conference about women's "high position and destiny as 'Mothers in Israel.'" He said: "Some of you may have received patriarchal blessings in which you were told in substance: 'As a mother in Israel shalt thou stand.' In any event, this promise is the assured inheritance of all the faithful sisters of the Church, of all those who love and serve the Lord with all their power and who keep the commandments which he has given."

President Smith further declared: "To be a mother in Israel in the full gospel sense is the highest reward that can come into the life of a woman. This designation has a deep and significant meaning, one that is far more than marrying and bearing children in this life, great and important as that course is. In fact, in the full and true sense of the word, the blessing of being mothers in Israel shall come in due course to some who, through no fault of their own, are denied the opportunity to marry and to bear children in this life" ("Mothers in Israel," *Relief Society Magazine*, Dec. 1970, pp. 883-84).

All of us, whether or nor we bear children, can fulfill the role of mother. Sister Patricia T. Holland explained: "In a poignant exchange with God, Adam states that he will call the woman Eve. And why does he call her Eve? 'Because she [is] the mother of all living.' (Gen. 3:20; Moses 4:26.)

" . . . Eve was given the identity of 'the mother of all living'—years, decades, perhaps centuries before she ever bore a child. It would appear that her *motherhood preceded her maternity*, just as surely as the perfection of the Garden preceded the struggles of mortality. I believe *mother* is one of those very carefully chosen words, one of those rich words—with meaning after meaning after meaning. We

must not, at all costs, let that word divide us. I believe with all my heart that it is first and foremost a statement about our nature, not a head count of our children.

“ . . . Some women give birth and raise children but never ‘mother’ them. Others, whom I love with all my heart, ‘mother’ all their lives but have never given birth. And all of us are Eve’s daughters, whether we are married or single, maternal or barren. We are created in the image of the Gods to become gods and goddesses” (“ ‘One Thing Needful’: Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1987, pp. 32–33).

No matter what our circumstances, we can love and nurture children, strengthen and defend families, care for and uplift the needy. We can live righteously. The Prophet Joseph Smith stated that “it is natural for females to have feelings of charity and benevolence” (*History of the Church*, 4:605).

READ: Genesis 3:20. Why is the word *mother* more a “statement about our nature” than about our circumstance? Why is motherhood described as an assured inheritance? How do we qualify for it?

This promised inheritance depends on our personal righteousness, *not* on our circumstances. This inheritance is as available to righteous single and childless sisters as it is to those who marry and are mothers.

### **We Were Born as Spirit Children to Heavenly Parents**

President Joseph Fielding Smith said the following about our heavenly parents:

“For us to envision what is meant by being mothers in Israel, we must have in mind our own position as the spirit children of God the Eternal Father. We must remember that he is a personal being in whose image man is created, and that he has a body of flesh and bones which is as tangible as man’s. We must remember that we were born as his spirit offspring in the premortal life and that we dwelt with him in the family unit before the foundations of this earth were laid.

“Ordinarily we speak freely of our Father in Heaven, but have little to say about our Mother in Heaven. There is, of course, no such thing as a father without a mother, or of children without parents, and we do have some official and authoritative statements about this doctrine, one of which was made by my father, President Joseph F. Smith and his counselors, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, back in 1909. Speaking of pre-existence and the origin of man, the First Presidency in that day said plainly that ‘man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father,’ that man is the

‘off-spring of celestial parentage,’ and that ‘all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.’

“Eliza R. Snow—who kept the minutes of some of the first Relief Society meetings held in the Church, and who served as general president from 1866 to 1887—recorded in her great hymn, ‘O My Father,’ this glorious truth of celestial parentage, including a Father and a Mother in Heaven. [See *Hymns*, no. 292.]” (“Mothers in Israel,” p. 884).

President Spencer W. Kimball observed: “When we sing that doctrinal hymn and anthem of affection, ‘O My Father,’ we get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return there?” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1978, p. 7; or *Ensign*, May 1978, p. 4).

The gospel of Jesus Christ teaches us of our heavenly parents and shows us the way to “create for ourselves eternal family units which are patterned after [our Eternal Father’s] family” (Joseph Fielding Smith, “Mothers in Israel,” p. 884).

### **We Can Become Heirs to the Blessings of Abraham and Sarah**

Through her faithfulness, Abraham’s wife Sarah received the blessing of eternal motherhood. As did Eve, Sarah received the promise of motherhood before she actually bore children. We speak often of the Lord’s promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, but we sometimes overlook the fact that Sarah received the same promise: “And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. 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” (Genesis 17:15–16).

These blessings given to Abraham and Sarah are also available to us as part of the Abrahamic covenant. In this last dispensation, the Lord spoke of the blessing of eternal seed given to Abraham and then said: “This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham. . . . Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham” (D&C 132:31–32).

Doing the works of Abraham includes being sealed in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (see D&C 131:1–4). The blessings given to Abraham and Sarah “were fulfilled in and through celestial marriage, marriage for time and eternity, marriage which causes the family unit to continue and enables eternal parents to have spirit children forever in the same way that God our

Heavenly Father continues to increase and abound" (Joseph Fielding Smith, "Mothers in Israel," p. 885).

The blessing of being a mother eternally depends on our faithfulness, not on our circumstances, and so does the blessing of eternal marriage. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that "not all women in the Church will have an opportunity for marriage and motherhood in mortality. But if those of you in this situation are worthy and endure faithfully, you can be assured of all blessings from a kind and loving Heavenly Father—and I emphasize *all blessings*" ("To the Single Adult Sisters of the Church," *Ensign*, Nov. 1988, p. 97).

### **This Life Is the Time to Prepare for Promised Blessings**

President Joseph Fielding Smith spoke of the purpose of individual and family life in mortality: "Now I think we should remind ourselves that this life is the time to prepare to meet God, that we are here to be tried and tested to see if we shall qualify to gain the blessings of Abraham and Sarah. This mortal life is itself a schooling, probationary estate. But so also is our life in the family unit.

"The gospel is family centered; it must be lived in the family. It is here we receive our greatest and most important training as we seek to create for ourselves eternal family units patterned after the family of God our Father. We are in training in our mortal families to operate eternal families in a state of glorious exaltation, where 'neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.' [1 Corinthians 11:11.]" ("Mothers in Israel," p. 886).

The prophets have expressed consideration and concern for women who cannot bear and rear children through no fault of their own. But what about those who can, but who have chosen other priorities over this divine commandment. We cannot shirk the duties associated with motherhood and still expect the blessings of the Lord.

President Benson has counseled: "Do not use the reasoning of the world, such as, 'We'll wait until we can better afford having children, until we are more secure, until John has completed his education, until he has a better-paying job, until we have a larger home, until we've obtained a few of the material conveniences,' and on and on.

"This is the reasoning of the world, and is not pleasing in the sight of God. . . .

". . . Material possessions, social convenience, and so-called professional advantages are nothing compared to a righteous

posterity. In the eternal perspective, children—not possessions, not position, not prestige—are our greatest jewels. . . .

“Mothers, you are your children’s best teacher. . . . The Church cannot teach like you can. The school cannot. The day-care center cannot. But you can, and the Lord will sustain you. Your children will remember your teachings forever, and when they are old, they will not depart from them. They will call you blessed—their truly angel mother.

“Mothers, this kind of heavenly, motherly teaching takes time—lots of time. It cannot be done effectively part-time. It must be done all the time in order to save and exalt your children. This is your divine calling” (*To the Mothers in Zion* [pamphlet, 1987], pp. 4, 10–11).

President Benson acknowledges “that many of you often find yourselves in circumstances that are not always ideal. I know this because I have talked with many of you who, because of necessity, must work and leave your children with others—even though your heart is in your home. To you go my love and sympathy for your present, and I hope temporary, situation and my prayers that you will be blessed by our Heavenly Father to compensate for a situation that is less than you may desire” (“The Honored Place of Woman,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1981, p. 105).

In summary, each of us is a daughter of heavenly parents. We have the potential to become like them. We will realize that potential as we follow the pattern of righteousness, faithfulness, and covenant making established by Abraham and Sarah.

### **Additional Resources for Personal and Family Use**

Ezra Taft Benson, “President Benson Lauds Blessings of Motherhood,” *Ensign*, May 1987, pp. 97–98.

Mary Alice Campbell, “A View of the Eighties,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1987, pp. 22–27.

Joanne B. Doxey, “Strengthening the Family,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1987, pp. 90–92.

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### **Suggestions for Teachers**

Note: This lesson applies to unmarried and childless sisters as well as to those who are mothers.

1. Select appropriate music, such as “O My Father” (*Hymns*, no. 292) and “From Homes of Saints Glad Songs Arise” (*Hymns*, no. 297).
2. Discuss President Smith’s statement that motherhood is more than marrying and having children in this life. How can our motherhood precede our maternity? (Refer to the quotations by Joseph Smith and Sister Holland.)

3. How does knowing that we are children of a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father help us understand our divine nature as women? Our eternal potential?
4. Identify the blessings given to Abraham that were also given to Sarah (see Genesis 17:15–16). Point out that as members of the house of Israel, we are heirs to those blessings. When might we become a mother of nations? Which women in the scriptures received the promise of motherhood before they became mothers?

What does the blessing of eternal seed mean (see D&C 132:19, 22)? How do we attain this blessing? (Through participating in the covenant of celestial marriage and remaining true to our covenant.) Point out that Abraham and Sarah received this blessing through celestial marriage and that their promises can be ours because we are of Abraham (see D&C 132:30–32).

5. Refer to President Smith's statement about the purpose of this life. We all belong to a family. How does family life here test us and train us for eternal family life? Emphasize the importance of strengthening our marriages and families in mortality to help prepare us for our eternal possibilities.

Why is it important not to give our responsibilities to teach, train, and love our children to someone else? Discuss ways in which a single parent who must accept outside employment can use her time wisely to fulfill these responsibilities. (See Home Management lesson 3, "Achieving Balance," 1989 Relief Society personal study guide.)

6. Encourage the sisters to seek for the blessings of Abraham and Sarah so they can fulfill their eternal potential.