

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Sessions 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith, Genesis 20:1-25:18

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This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews and his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith. Genesis 20:1-25:18.

Genesis chapter 20, verse 1 through chapter 25, verse 18. Session 15 is entitled Promised Son and Test of Faith. In these two episodes, the birth of the Son and the test of Abraham's faith will be our focus.

We will be looking at chapters 20, verse 1 through chapter 25, verse 18. And this will conclude our time in the Abraham cycle of stories. Because of how much material is given to it, I guess we need to put on our skates and quickly run through these chapters.

We'll be surprised that in chapter 20 we have an episode that will remind us of chapter 12 where Abraham lies concerning his wife Sarah to Pharaoh in Egypt. And so when we come to chapter 20, you would think that Abraham had learned his lesson well. But this is something that we can applaud in the sense that the Bible does not depict people of faith like a cardboard dimension where you just have either a hero or a villain.

And they stay true to that characterization at all points. This is what you would find when it came to Greek depictions of either heroes or villains. When it comes to the Bible, these are real people, just like you and me.

Sometimes, they show heroic and noble activities and character. At other times, they fall, they make mistakes, they sin, and they act wickedly. And so, when it comes to a figure like Abraham, we've seen that he does struggle in his faith journey.

And on this occasion, he goes to Gerar, which is one of the five Philistine cities. The Philistines migrated from the Aegean area, and they set up a series of cities along the Mediterranean coastline and a bit inland. And they're in the south-southwest.

I guess of these five, the most notable would be Gaza. Of course, today, you've heard of the Gaza Strip. Gerar is the location where he takes up residence.

And as chapter 20 begins with, he lies again to the king of Gerar. Again, he explains that he was fearful that the kings in these various cities were wicked men who did not fear God. Who would not commit the great sin, which is to steal a man's wife.

But to remedy that, he would assassinate, murder the husband, and then take his wife. So, he feared for his own life. And evidently, Sarah was complicit in this and went along with him.

Probably in part because she was fearful that her husband would be murdered. And so, he lied regarding his wife, claiming that she is my sister. Now, I think we need to take three episodes and bring them together, and chapter 20 especially helps us interpret the other two.

I've already mentioned chapter 12 before Pharaoh. Well, this wife-sister kind of episode will occur also in chapter 26. But we learn so much about how to maybe understand chapters 12 and chapter 26, where Isaac also lies about his wife, Rebecca, before the king of Gerar, the Philistines.

Now one thing we can learn about this episode, and it's a sad one indeed, that here is Abraham with an opportunity to be a righteous vessel used by God to lead Abimelech to a place of faith. But we see here that what transpires is not a righteous Abraham acting righteously, but rather a fearful one misleading Abimelech. Nevertheless, the outcome is that Abimelech will come to appreciate how great God has blessed Abraham.

And so, a treaty will be established in chapter 21, verses 22 to 23, at a place called Beersheba. We'll come to that in a bit. Now, the reason why I point out that chapter 20 is so instructive for us is because of what we find in verse 18, where we are told in verse 13, reading 13 And when God had me wander from my father's household, I said to her, This is how you can show your love to me.

Everywhere we go, say of me, He is my brother. So, everywhere that suggests a pattern, this is what Abraham does. And so, in verse 11, his great concern is in this place, they will kill me because of my wife.

And then, he offers a further explanation and excuses to Abimelech as he explains this to Abimelech. Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father, though not of my mother, and she became my wife. So, in a way, he's excusing his behavior before King Abimelech.

Now, how is it that King Abimelech learns about this? We don't know how Pharaoh came to know of it, but we are told here, and perhaps we can understand this is also the means by which God informed Pharaoh in chapter 12, that God came to Abimelech in a dream, and that's found in verse 3. And there, he forewarned Abimelech that he had stolen a man's wife, and the consequence of that would be his death. Now, Abimelech offers an apology and a defense, and it's good for us to hear this because what's at stake, of course, is the outcome of whether Sarah going into the harem has sexual relations with the king, and therefore complicating the

evidence that God will produce of his extraordinary, miraculous work in the life of Abraham according to his promise that this elderly couple will have a promised son. So, just like the case in chapter 12, and then again with Isaac in chapter 26, there will be tension in the story.

And so, Abimelech explains that he was an innocent party engaged in this, that he was lied to. And really, God says, in effect, that this is nonetheless the penalty you must suffer unless, of course, you return the woman. So that's what we find in verse 7. Now, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet.

This is the first place that the word prophet occurs, and it says he will intercede. And this reminds us of chapter 12, and then again in chapter 26, where intercession is made on the part of the patriarch in behalf of the nation. And this reminds us, and this is the whole purpose of selecting these episodes, is to tell us, remember now that chapter 12, verse 3 says that whoever curses you will be cursed, or whoever blesses you will be blessed.

So here we have Abraham who is interceding for the nations, hence serving as a blessing by virtue of the repentance on the part of Abimelech. Now, what is ironic in the story is that verse 17 says that Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his slave girl so they could have children again, for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's Sarah, his wife.

So, perhaps this is what occurred as well: there was some kind of intervention on the part of God, bringing a cessation to pregnancy in the royal households. This would have been calamitous, for as you know, kings were very given to a multiplication of wives and children and all that goes into building a strong household of a royal dynasty. Now, the irony here, of course, is that Sarah, his wife, is the one who is not able, at this point, to have a child.

So, everybody in the royal household now can have children, but our concern as we trace the story is, what about Sarah? When will she have the promised child? And that's the background then for chapter 21. God has forecast this will occur in Genesis chapters 17 and 18. You'll recall in each case with Abraham and then with Sarah, each laughed at the possibility that they would have a child.

And so, even though we have their laughter, their temporary or momentary doubt about God's promises, he still keeps his promise. And this tells us, importantly, from the viewpoint of the story, the narrator who's telling this story, he is saying, in effect, that all of this is on God's back. He's the one who's going to carry out this promise.

It is not dependent upon the behavior or the attitude or the circumstances or the threats that come, but rather that he is going to work out his plan. It's going to be

through Abraham and his descendants. And this is going to be successful because God is determined.

He's desirous. It's coming from within himself in his own longing and heart for a people totally devoted and committed to him. And this is what's going to occur.

And we're looking at just the beginnings, just the beginnings of how this promise is unfolding. So we can take heart that God is going to be faithful in carrying out the promise. And one of the earliest and most profound evidences of this is the miraculous birth of Sarah.

Chapter 21, then, is in our study, so very important, the birth of Isaac, the promised son. We learn in this chapter, it's been 25 years since Abraham and Sarah entered Canaan. They have been waiting and no doubt praying.

They have offered options and other scenarios. There is Eleazar, the servant, chapter 15, chapter 16, Hagar, the servant to Sarah. And now we have, finally, the birth of Isaac.

So, Abraham is 100 years old, and Sarah is 90 years old. Now we learn in verse 6 that God has brought me laughter. Of course, it is a play on the name Isaac, which means he laughs.

Isaac, he laughs. God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me. Well, that's not really the case.

Not everyone will laugh with Sarah. Not everyone is pleased and happy to learn about this. This establishes, then, what will occur in verses 8 and following.

When it comes to the birth, or rather the life of Ishmael, because there is a rivalry now that's established. When you look at the language that's used in verse 9, if you look at it in the New International Version, the translation is mocking. So, there is a great feast at the weaning of the child, which would mean that he's no longer dependent upon breast milk.

He would be about three years old. And this would mean that Ishmael would be an older teenager. And so, in verse 9, let's look at it.

Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar, the Egyptian, had borne to Abraham was mocking. Now, the language here is another play on the word laugh. The word in Hebrew comes from the same word, which is the name of Isaac.

He laughs. Another way of translating this mocking is to make sport of, or we would say to make fun of. But it's not a lighthearted, joking kind of sport.

But rather, it is a ridicule. It's a ridicule of the young Isaac. Now, you have to imagine how a mother would feel about this.

In the context of this great celebration, when most, if not almost all, of the clan, the family, would be rejoicing at this blessing, there is one who is ridiculing this child. And the child is young and vulnerable. And the teenager is strong and ambitious.

But the teenager has lost his status. Ishmael's name is not used in this episode. He's always described as the son or the boy.

He's identified as her son or the son of Abraham. Something along these lines. The son of the servant Hagar.

So, this is a way in which his status as the firstborn has been diminished. Now, thinking about the setting of potential rivalry that leads to murder, we have to understand that this is not an unimportant rivalry, but really in the view of the narrative here, a life and death issue, and hence why Hagar and Ishmael are expelled. The apostle Paul understood it this way.

He mentions this in Galatians 4, verse 29, where he's using a typology of a legitimate son, Isaac, who represents the son born by faith. And then Ishmael, again, a type of a son born according to the law, according to the flesh, Galatians 4, verse 29. At that time, the son was born according to the flesh, and here's the language that's important to us here: persecuted the son.

He persecuted the son. So, Ishmael persecuted the son born by the power of the spirit. That's Isaac.

He goes on to say that it's the same case spiritually where the Galatians were involved in persecuting, in the sense of rejecting the work of God through the spirit and relying upon the law. So that typology is used by the apostle Paul, but it is important for us to see that the expulsion of Hagar and the son, Ishmael, is, yes, a drastic measure and is an unfortunate consequence of Abraham and Sarah stumbling, failing to fully commit themselves by faith to the Lord. The consequences have far-reaching results, as we find in chapters 16 and 25, because the expulsion leads to the creation of a nation where God promises Abraham, He says, I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also because he is your offspring.

See, if you're rightly related to Abraham, then there is blessing, and blessing will come through procreation, population, and a strong nation. So, he's saying to Abraham, relax, Abraham, trust me, I'm going to care for Ishmael because you can well imagine that Abraham loved Ishmael and hated to see that this boy would leave.

And so, in these chapters, I mentioned 16 and chapter 25. We will see in chapter 16, or we did see a promise of preservation for Ishmael and blessing.

And then, in chapter 25, there's actually a listing of the 12 nations that come from their father, Ishmael. So yes, there's an expulsion, but in verse 18, we are told in this revelation given to Hagar that from Ishmael will come a great nation. And that's an echo of the promise that is given to Abraham that his offspring will include a great nation.

And so we found in chapters 17, that are chapter 17, that Abraham's name change has to do with how he'll become the father of many nations, the father of kings. And so with Sarah, who will be the mother of nations. And it's taking place here with Ishmael and his offspring.

Now, there is a note that we could overlook that is unimportant for casual reading. But when you set it in the larger framework of the story, and especially theologically, we are told that in verse 21, Hagar gave him a wife from Egypt. And, of course, Hagar is Egyptian herself.

The importance of this is found in chapter 24, where there is a search for a wife of Isaac. But it must be someone within the larger clan of Tera. Someone within the family of the Tera clan.

And we'll come to that in a moment. And so it is that by taking wives, just beginning with this Egyptian and others, it's an indication that Ishmael does not have the measure of appreciation for the covenant blessing that's intended for the descendants of Abraham, as we find it in the Abraham blessing. So, that there will be a significant contrast between the Ishmaelites and then the Hebrew people, the Israelites.

Then we come briefly to the treaty at Beersheba. Notice verse 22, to Abimelech and his commander, where they approach Abraham. God is with you in everything you do.

See, they could recognize, and how important is this again, the testimony of God's blessing resting upon Abraham. And so, he is prospering, and they want to enter into a peace treaty. And what we find is the treaty is ratified and then ceremonially carried out in the sacrifice, we are told, of seven lambs from the flock.

And it also, in verse 31, speaks of an oath that is taken. Rather, verse 31. Now Beersheba can be translated either way.

It can be translated. The language that is used here is a well of water at Beersheba. There's an oasis at Beersheba. And I should pause and remind you that Beersheba is on the edge southward before you enter into the wilderness of the Negev.

Beersheba has become a very important location because it's still an arable and fertile land. And so, at Beersheba, it can mean a well of seven, referring to the seven lambs, or the well of oath, Sheba. Well of Oath.

And this is mentioned in verse 31. So, it has a dual service as a reminder of what occurred at Beersheba. And there's a name for God that's given here.

And that's found in the last verse of chapter 21, actually in verse 33, where Abraham, like he has at so many places we've been reading, he establishes a place of worship, in this case, a tree. And it's there that he called upon the name of Yahweh, upon the name of the Lord. And then there's an identification of the character of the Lord.

He's called the Eternal God. And the Hebrew word here is El Olam, God of Eternity or Eternal God. And what's the point of this name? The point of identifying the Lord as the Eternal God is the one who is all-powerful and whose word is eternal and cannot be faulted, cannot be transgressed in a permanent way.

And it cannot be canceled out in a permanent way because since He is eternal, His word, His promise is eternal. Now notice Abraham resided in the land of the Philistines. It just simply says a long time.

We don't know how much time there is between the establishment of the Beersheba Treaty and then the important test of Abraham. We want to spend some time looking at it carefully because there's so much to be learned from this in the life of Abraham. First, I want to remind you that chapters 12 and 22 in the narrative serve as the announcement and the initiation of the covenant promises and then the confirmation by virtue of testing that Abraham's faith is actualized.

So, we find this journey on the part of Abraham spiritually, and we've been tracing it and watching his successes and his temporary failures. Also important when it comes to the covenant, chapter 15, where you have the ceremony of the divided animals and then the fire pot that goes in this night vision that Abraham has between the two halved animals, representing the presence of God as he ceremonially, God does, says, I am the one who's entering into this relationship of covenant promise. You, Abraham, are here in a deep sleep, having a night vision of what's taking place.

You're not participating in this. And so, God is saying this is my responsibility. You are to trust me by faith and I will ensure that my promises of a child and also of possessing land will be carried out.

Then, in chapter 17, there is the sign of the covenant, and that is circumcision. How appropriate that the mark in the human male organ that produces children is appropriate because of the promise of dynasty, the promise of descendants, the promises of developing into a great people with a great nation with a great calling upon Abraham's descendants. And so, from that point forward, every eighth day, a Hebrew male is circumcised, showing symbolically that that child is a part of the covenant community and a recipient of the covenant blessing.

So, keeping this in mind, we want to see the language that's used in chapter 22 that reminds us of chapter 12, and that's what the author would have us do. In hearing verse 2, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. So, remember what is the language used in chapter 12 where he says to Abraham I want you to leave your land, and I want you to go to the place I will show you.

It's the same language. So go to Moriah, and there make a burnt offering unto me with your son. Now, the pathos in this episode is so striking when it says take your son, your only son.

Well actually he's not his only son. Ishmael is his son as well. But he's the only son in the sense that he's a unique son.

He is a unique son because in him is found the promises that will be realized. And this has been stated explicitly in chapter 21. And so, that is the reason for the repetition of how special Isaac is.

All the promises of God rest upon the future for Isaac, whom you love. Now, this is a test because in chapter 22, verse 1, sometime later, God tested Abraham.

Now, this is very important because Abraham does not read verse 1. He doesn't know that it's a test. We are outside the narrative. We enter into the narrative by virtue of the description, the emotion, the pathos, and all that is so wonderfully and beautifully crafted in this account.

But we are given a heads up. We know that what's taking place is not a true depiction of the character of God because he is a God of the living. He's not a God of death.

It is an abomination we're told in the law of Moses. In Leviticus for example as well as Deuteronomy. That child's sacrifice is not of the character of God.

And it is strongly prohibited. And it is seen as the most dastardly aspect of pagan religion. So this sets us up to read yes with sympathy and compassion but wonder

how this is going to be worked out in such a way as to prove Abraham's faithfulness and , at the same time, it's a test of God's character.

Will God really, we think, would he really go through with this test to the end? Now, the reason for a test is not so much that God might know. It's as though God doesn't know for sure if he can trust Abraham. He doesn't know for sure that Abraham really has faith in him.

And so, he's going to find out. No, that's not the purpose of a test even though the language is now I know where your heart is. See that's the language of discovery.

This is part of the package, part of understanding a test. This is the language of a test. Therefore, we must understand that this language is conditioned by the circumstances of the paradigm, the pattern of a test.

This is not addressing the fact that God is all-knowing. He knows the human heart. He knows the human mind.

What we think, what is our true desires and will. He knows how to read these in the human person and experience. So, what is the purpose then of a test? If it's not for God to have discovery, it's then for Abraham to have discovery.

In other words, the purpose of a test is designed to expose what's in Abraham's heart. To give him an opportunity, an occasion to act upon his faith. See, what we find in James chapter 2, verses 21 and 22 is that Abraham had faith, but the faith has to be actualized.

The faith has to be realized. And that is what this test gives, James says. Abraham the opportunity to carry out in a concrete way his faith, to strengthen his faith.

See, God does not tempt us, and we're told in James chapter 1 so that we will fail. He doesn't test us so that we will fail. Ah-ha, he's playing trickery on Abraham.

Rather, he knows the outcome and wants Abraham to have confirmed solidarity in his faith, in his mind, and in his heart. And what Abraham must decide, see this is where the test comes into play. He must decide before they go to Moriah before the knife is drawn to be plunged.

Before the knife is plunged, he's got to make a decision, an intention. A decision is when he goes forward, and it says he traveled for three days. Can you imagine what it meant for him in all of the angst and anguish for three days to Mount Moriah with his young son? And he's got to have the intention to carry out God's will, and not like his own will to be carried out.

And so, that's what's so all important then, is if one is going to follow God's will, you have to be intentional about it. You have to make a decision to follow through, and here is his decision. Here is the test. It rather reminds me of Job and the test that he underwent.

Because the adversary says to the Lord, remember Satan, the angel who comes before him. He says to him, you see, the reason why Job loves you is because you give everything to him. Take it away from him, and he'll curse you.

Well, when it comes to Abraham, here's the test. Do you love the gift more than the giver? Is your love for Isaac so great that you disobey the giver? Do you think that the God who is the giver is who he claims to be? All loving, all generous, all-wise, all faithful in his promises. And, of course, we see that that is the case with Abraham.

Now, what is also very remarkable is his response to his servants, who will be keeping watch over their camp. And he says to his servants in verse 5, we will worship and then we will come back to you. Now, this could be just part of the fabric of the test, I recognize that.

But I think that there may be in Abraham's mind that the sacrifice of the boy must not be permanent. Something else has got to be worked out because otherwise, the promise will not be fully realized. And he trusts God to carry out this promise.

So that's why we have the plural: we will worship, and then we will come back to you. This is exactly what the writer of the Hebrews understood, which was at work in verse 19 of Hebrews chapter 11. When he's going through the life of Abraham, pointing out Abraham's faith and faithfulness.

Notice it says, again, Hebrews 11 verse 19, Abraham reasoned. He thought through this. He was reflecting upon the character of God and what he knew of God.

He's maturing in his knowledge of God. He's growing in understanding the grace of God, the goodness of God. And so even though he has doubts and stumbled along the way when it comes right down to the great test, he is reflecting his reasoning that God could even raise the dead if necessary.

And so, in a manner of speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. In other words, they go out as father and son, and they come back as father and son. Isaac was as good as dead because Abraham was about to plunge the knife into his son as a sacrifice to God.

And it was by God's dramatic intervention that that was not the case. But he was willing to do so because his faith was of such a high order that he believed that God

could raise him from the dead. And, of course, Abraham had never seen or heard of such a resurrection.

So even though Abraham had not seen such a thing, he was willing to say, as we found in chapter 18, by one of the visitors, the Lord, that nothing is impossible with God. When it comes to God's promises made to his people, nothing is impossible. Verse 8 also shows his faithfulness when he says to Isaac that Isaac had probably accompanied his father on many occasions to worship, and an animal was involved in that sacrifice.

And so, they have the wood, and they have what would make for the fire. We have the knife, all is here except where is the animal? And Abraham responds, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son. And the two of them went on together.

That language that she used, and the two of them went on together, was designed to bring forward to the reader this kind of personal commitment that Abraham and Isaac made. I say that Isaac had a commitment to his father. He trusted his father because, by this time, we must understand that Isaac was a teenager, maybe a young adult, and the language that's used of him, when it speaks of how he is a son and also the language of a child, could be used of a young person.

So that's the translation in verse 5, where it says, stay here with the donkey while I am the boy. It could be used for an older child or a younger child. So, I think that given that Abraham is an old man, very old man, that it's a sign of Isaac's faith in his father and what he had witnessed regarding God.

Because he permitted, he had to climb up on the altar, and he permitted Abraham to bind him. If you look at verse 9, it reads, he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. Now, this word bound is important in Jewish tradition.

It comes from a word meaning to bind. In Hebrew, it's called the Akedah, A-K-E-D-A-H, Akedah. And it's the Hebrew word for the binding.

And so, when you perhaps have Jewish friends or read commentary on this passage, it may refer to this event as the Akedah. Now, when it comes to the intervention of God, we have in verse 15, the angel of the Lord called Abraham from heaven a second time and said, I swear by myself. And here is the promise repeated in verses 17 and 18, where there he says, I will surely bless you and give you descendants numerous as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore.

See, all of the earlier narratives are brought forward where the language had been used of the multiplication of the family of Abraham, such as the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky. And then it speaks of how he will be preserved in the face of

enemies. And he had, and in his future will have enemies that would have taken his life.

And that of his family, we saw that in chapter 14, where there was a kidnapping of Lot. And so, in 18, it does again speak of how through your offspring, see, there will be the prospects of procreation, possession of the land. They will be blessed because you have obeyed me.

He's responding rightly to the opportunity to express his faith. But what I want to point out in verse 16 is I swear by myself. This is a language that's used by God, putting, as you might say, collateral, putting forward the certainty of this blessing even more strongly than what had occurred in the earlier revelations that God gave in a meeting with Abraham.

Here, he says, by oath, by swearing, he is saying this is dependent upon my own integrity. That's what I meant earlier when I said this was a test regarding God. Would he keep to his promises and prove his own integrity? And yes, he does.

So, verse 19 is the culmination. Abraham returned to his servants, and they see this would include Isaac. This is the point.

Yes, it includes his servants in this verse, which refers to servants. But we have to understand that Isaac returned to Beersheba and Abraham lived in Beersheba. Now, I must travel quickly through chapters 23 through 25.

What you will find is the death of Sarah in chapter 23. She lived to be 127 years of age. And it was necessary for Abraham to have a burial, a family burial site.

And so, there is a local group of Canaanites, and that word I use broadly as it does in the Bible. In particular, they were the Hittites. The classic Hittite nation in Asia Minor, contemporary Turkey, was from 1800 to 1200.

These were probably immigrants who came and lived in the Canaan region, the Hittites. They must have been strong in the area of Hebron because that's where the family burial site is purchased and becomes an important place for the patriarchs where they will be buried. And so, he comes before them.

He identifies himself as a sojourner, a resident, but an alien. He's a foreigner. He's a stranger.

He doesn't own any land. So, he's going to own land. This is probably an anticipation of God's promises to Abraham.

You're going to own this land and moreover, in years to come, your descendants will control and inherit this land. And they recognize Abraham's importance. There's an identification of him in verse 5. You are a mighty prince.

And so, they were willing to do so. It was a form of, I think, unofficially a treaty. They wanted to enter into a peaceful relationship with Abraham.

And so, there is a field and a cave. And in the cave will be the burial spot. It's called Mac hpelah in verse 9. And then there's a negotiation which takes place.

The owner of the cave and field, his name is Ephron. And there's a bit of a formality that's taking place here. There's not really a vigorous debate or bartering that's taking place.

But a formal respect that each shows. And then, the conclusion is found in verse 20. So, the field and the cave in it were deeded.

It's the ownership to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site. So, it's easy to overlook that, but it's very important as an indication of more to come. So, when it comes to Isaac now, we need a wife for Isaac if the blessings are to continue through him.

Now, Abraham is very concerned that Isaac would not be influenced by the women of Canaan with their paganism. And so, unlike Ishmael, we have in the case of Abraham a desire, an overriding desire, that there would be a family member who would be retrieved from his father's household, that is Teva. This is called the practice of endogamy, which is when you marry within a family group.

And so, he's going to send his servant. We don't know who that is. Many commentators will say, well, perhaps it's Eleazar who is mentioned in chapter 15.

But he sends him back to the homeland of Aram, meaning the Arameans. Aram Naharia m is mentioned in verse 10. This is where the Tira Nahor, a brother of Abraham, lived.

It's called the town of Nahor. And it is there that you have northern Mesopotamia where you'll remember that the family established themselves in that region of Haran where they resided. So, here we have an intervention on the part of the Lord to give an answer to the prayers of the servant, verse 12.

Then he prayed, in verse 15, before he had finished praying. So, praying is a very important aspect to what's taking place. So serious is this matter that the servant even establishes what will happen if the woman that God selects doesn't want to respond.

And Abraham, in effect, says, don't worry about that. God will help you in this. So, the evidence that the woman that God has selected has to do with a setting at the well where animals were watered.

And so, the test has to do with if the girl shows the woman who comes, if the woman shows a spirit of generosity. In verse 19, it says, when Rebecca arrives, she says to the man, well, we can even say in verse 18, where the servant has asked for a drink of water from the water she's drawn. And she says, drink, my Lord.

And quickly, she was largess and cooperative in her spirit. Verse 19, after she had given him a drink, she was willing also to water his animals. And this was the test from the human perspective of the servant, someone who would do this.

Now, a description of Rebecca occurs in verse 15. It gives her genealogy, and this is repeated in this chapter, to ensure that she is a part of the family group. So that is why it's important.

In verse 16, another aspect is her virginity and that she had never had sexual relations with a man. Why would that be important? Again, this has to do with the promise that a child will come through the family lineage of Abraham and then Isaac. Well, as it turns out that Rebekah recognizes that the servant has come from the household of Abraham.

And remember, it's been 25 plus years, many decades since this kind of connection between family has occurred. And so, she runs to make it known to her brother Laban. Rebecca and Laban, Laban will play a very important role in the Jacob cycle, which we take up next.

And they are both the son and daughter, children of Bethuel, who is in turn a descendant, the son of Nahor, the brother, you remember, of Abraham. So, a tight family connection is taking place. And so, in verse 34, we find that the servant identifies himself in terms of Abraham.

I am Abraham's servant, he says. The Lord, Yahweh, has blessed my master abundantly. And of course, he's giving motivation for them to be willing to release Rebecca to his care in return to marriage, in marriage to Isaac.

So, the father is Bethuel, and the brother is Laban. And we are told in verse 40 that what Abraham said to the servant, he's reviewing all that's occurred, retelling it. And so, Abraham said, you know, if the woman will not come back, what will happen? And Abraham is saying, the Lord, Yahweh, before whom I have walked.

See, his faithfulness in view here, his commune with God is in view here, his growing faith and trust. I've walked with this, the Lord God. He is faithful, he is good, he's going to help us.

He will send his angel, his angel. Abraham had experience with an angel. Chapter 18, the three visitors, they begin here in chapter 22.

The angel of the Lord speaks to him when it comes to the sacrifice of Isaac. He will lead you, he will make your journey a success. And so that's exactly what occurs as you finish out the chapter and the return of the woman.

And the response is going to be on her part, her willingness to quickly depart. And verse 48 is a repetition. I bow down, he says.

He's talking about what occurred at the well. I bow down and worship the Lord. I praise the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son.

And so Laban and Bethuel, in verse 50, agreed. And the woman agrees, Rebecca. And so that's what is said in verse 58.

So, they called Rebekah and asked her, will you go with this man? And she says I will go. And so they offer up a blessing. Now, verse 66 at the end of this chapter is again important.

Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. See, they return. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother, Sarah.

Now, this is a symbol to the reader that now we have a new Sarah. And her name is Rebecca. So, she became his wife, and he loved her.

And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. So now all of this is set forth for Abraham's death. He marries again a second time.

And her name is Keturah. And she has all of these various people groups that are born, again, having to do with the blessing of God. So, he leaves everything he possesses to Isaac.

He did make provision, you remember, for Ishmael. And they come together to honor their father. So, at 175, 75 years after the birth of Isaac, or I should say 75 years, yes, after the birth of Isaac, what we have then is the death of Abraham.

And it says Isaac and Ishmael came together in Versailles and buried him. Then we have in chapter 25 the 12 tribal rulers that are named in this short window into the Ishmael descendants. God carrying out his promises.

What we have learned from this passage is important for us to recognize. And that is the importance of God's promises, the proper response by faith even to the point of carrying out what seems to be so unlike God, but what was like God, that Abraham rested upon, was the character that he had learned to come to value. He was growing, is what I'm saying, in grace and knowledge of the Lord God.

That is what is at work here. Of course, we have also learned that God is consistent and faithful in providing a means through his intervention. We repeatedly see intervention in dreams, visions, and prayer.

The importance of Abraham as the one who makes intervening prayer for others, for the nations, and his servant who is like his master in praying and worshiping. The two of them in each of their settings here, chapter 22 and chapter 24, where prayer is offered up, faith is offered up through worship.

God provides something for us to take into account, such as the importance of prayer and how prayer is a means by which God takes us into the flow, the fabric of how he's working out his promises in a concrete way. In the framework of real human experience, historically, and also by that I mean time and space. So, prayer is not so much a design like with the pagans to change God's mind, to manipulate him, but rather to be co-participants.

We need to walk with God and, in doing so, be a part of a privileged part of seeing God as he truly is and taking God and his life into our life patterns as we walk. Because that's our lifestyle.

Next time we'll initiate the Jacob stories and it begins with the birth of Jacob in chapter 25, verse 19.

This is Dr. Kenneth Mathews and his teaching on the book of Genesis. This is session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith. Genesis 20:1-25:18.