

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 12, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1 (Gen 15:1-17:27)

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 17, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1 (Gen. 15:1-17:27), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture analyzes Genesis chapter 14-17, focusing on the covenant between God and Abraham. **The lecture connects the story of Melchizedek** with the priesthood of Jesus Christ, drawing analogies between their roles as both king and priest. **A key theme is Abraham's faith**, shown in his belief of God's promises, which is presented as a model for Christian faith. **The covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 is examined**, interpreted as a self-imprecation and a demonstration of God's commitment to his promises. Finally, the lecture prepares for a discussion of circumcision in Genesis 17, the covenant's sign.

2. 9 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 12 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).



**Mathews_Genesis_
Session 12.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 12, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1 (Gen 15:1-17:27)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Kenneth Mathews' "Genesis, Session 12":

Briefing Document: Dr. Kenneth Mathews on Genesis 12-17

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis chapters 12-17, focusing on the covenant God makes with Abraham. The session explores the significance of the covenant ceremony (chapter 15), the covenant sign (circumcision in chapter 17), and the crucial role of Melchizedek in understanding the nature of Christ's priesthood. The lecture also emphasizes the importance of faith in God's promises as foundational to this covenant relationship, both for Abraham and, analogously, for Christian believers.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Melchizedek as a Type of Christ:

- **Dual Role:** Melchizedek is a king and priest, a combination not found in the Israelite priesthood of Aaron. Dr. Mathews notes that this dual role was common in the ancient world but rare in Israel. "This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. So, he is both king and priest." (p. 2)
- **Superior Priesthood:** The writer to the Hebrews uses Melchizedek to demonstrate the superiority of Christ's priesthood, which is eternal and not limited by death, unlike the Levitical priesthood. He is "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever." (p. 3)
- **Prefiguration:** Melchizedek is presented as a prefiguration (type) of Christ. This prefiguration is selective, not exhaustive, highlighting that it is not necessary for *all* aspects of Melchizedek to mirror Christ. Some believe Melchizedek may be a pre-incarnate manifestation of Christ, while others believe he is a human who models specific characteristics of Christ. Regardless, "Melchizedek is a very important figure when it comes to interpreting who Jesus Christ is, what his priesthood is like, his sufficiency as a mediator between God the Father and man..." (p. 4)

- **Recognition by Abraham:** Abraham's giving of a tenth of the plunder to Melchizedek demonstrates Abraham's acknowledgment of Melchizedek's superiority. "Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder." (p. 4)
- **Names and Significance:** His name, "King of Righteousness" and "King of Salem" (peace), are further used by Hebrews to describe Jesus. "King of righteousness then describes Melchizedek as both king, but a king who practices godly upright behavior. Then also king of Salem. Salem is close to the Hebrew word for peace..." (p. 3)

1. **Covenant Ratification and Ceremony (Genesis 15):**

- **Two Sections:** Chapter 15 is structured in two parts: verses 1-6 focusing on the promise of descendants, and verses 7-21 on the promise of land, with verse 6 serving as a crucial hinge regarding faith.
- **God's Assurance:** God assures Abraham of his protection and reward following Abraham's refusal of the king of Sodom's offer, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abraham. I am your shield. I am your protection, your very great reward." (p. 6) This "shield" imagery connects with God's earlier deliverance of Abraham's enemies.
- **Abraham's Proposal and God's Response:** Abraham proposes that a servant, Eleazar of Damascus, be his heir, a common practice at the time. God rejects this proposal, promising that his heir will be a son born from his own body. "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." (p. 7)
- **Faith as Righteousness:** Verse 6, "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness," (p. 7) is critical. This demonstrates that Abraham was declared righteous not by works or law but by his faith in God's promise. This verse is also quoted in the New Testament, most notably by Paul in Romans.
- **Ceremony with Animals:** God instructs Abraham to prepare a sacrifice by cutting animals in half and arranging the pieces, a common practice when making covenants.
- **God Passes Through:** Unique to this covenant is that only God (represented by a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch) passes between the pieces, not Abraham. "a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch, it appeared and passed between the pieces." (p. 10) This signifies that God takes on the obligation to fulfill the covenant promises.

1. The Nature of Faith and Salvation

- **Faith Precedes Law and Circumcision:** The righteousness given to Abraham by God came before the Mosaic law and circumcision; this highlights that salvation is by faith and not by law or ritual. "And also notice that this came before circumcision. Circumcision will be described in Genesis chapter 17." (p. 8)
- **Old Testament and New Testament Faith:** Abraham's faith in God is analogous to Christian believers' faith in Jesus. The means (faith), object (the Lord God), and basis (the sacrifice of Jesus Christ) of salvation are consistent across testaments. "So, what do we have in common between Abraham and Christian faith? Well, we have the same means, it's by faith. We have the same object, the Lord God, and we find that the same basis, the sacrifice of Jesus..." (p. 9)
- **Jesus's Sacrifice from the Foundation of the World:** The sacrifice of Jesus is seen as eternal and effective, not limited by time. Revelation 13:8 is cited as evidence that the Lamb's sacrifice was effective "from the creation of the world," impacting the salvation of believers throughout history, including Abraham.
- **One Way of Salvation:** There is not a separate salvation for the Old Testament and the New Testament; people in both are saved through faith in God and in the promises made through Christ's sacrifice.

1. Chapter 16 and Ishmael:

- Chapter 16 serves as an interlude, introducing Ishmael, born to Hagar. This is intentional, sandwiched between chapters 15 and 17, in which God promises Abraham a true heir from his own body.
- This chapter shows the challenges and assurance that Abraham faces, as God assures him that he will yet have a son who will be the inheritor of the covenant.

1. Covenant Sign and Circumcision (Genesis 17 - noted for next session):

- The sign of the covenant is circumcision, which will be discussed in the next session.

Quotes of Particular Importance:

- “This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. So, he is both king and priest.” (p. 2)
- "without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.” (p. 3)
- “Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (p. 7)
- "The Lamb, which in context is clearly referring to Jesus Christ, a Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.” (p. 9)
- “a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch, it appeared and passed between the pieces.” (p. 10)

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathews' lecture provides a detailed analysis of the covenant God makes with Abraham, exploring the typology of Melchizedek, the significance of faith, and the one-way nature of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The session emphasizes the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, and lays groundwork for the following session focusing on circumcision as the covenant sign in Genesis 17, and the preceding chapter 16, in which we have an important side story about Ishmael. This analysis highlights the importance of faith and grace in God's plan for salvation.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 12, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1 (Gen. 15:1-17:27)

Genesis: Covenant with Abraham Study Guide

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Who are the two kings that meet Abraham after he rescues Lot, and how do they differ?
2. What is the significance of Melchizedek being both king and priest, and how does this prefigure Jesus Christ?
3. According to the text, how is Abraham's faith in God described, and what is the key verse in Genesis that captures this?
4. Explain the significance of God crediting righteousness to Abraham based on his faith, and how does the New Testament connect to this idea?
5. What does the author mean by "type" and "antitype," and how does this concept apply to Melchizedek and Jesus?
6. Describe the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, including the significance of the animals and the torch passing through the pieces.
7. Why is Abraham's act of giving a tenth to Melchizedek significant, and what does it show about Melchizedek's status?
8. What are the three main promises given to Abraham, as stated in the text, and how do they relate to the covenant?
9. What is the significance of the word "credited" in relation to Abraham's faith, and how does this relate to the idea of counting the stars?
10. How does the text explain that salvation was always by faith in both the Old and New Testaments?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The two kings are Melchizedek, the king of Salem, and the king of Sodom. Melchizedek is a righteous priest of God, while the king of Sodom is depicted as worldly, offering a compromised reward. This contrast serves to highlight the differences between God's ways and worldly ways.

2. Melchizedek being both king and priest is significant because in the Levitical priesthood, these roles were separate. This prefigures Jesus Christ, who is both the king of kings and our high priest, representing a superior order.
3. Abraham's faith is described as believing in the Lord's promises, specifically about his descendants and their future. The key verse is Genesis 15:6, where it is stated that Abraham "believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness."
4. God crediting righteousness to Abraham because of his faith indicates that right standing with God is based on trust rather than human effort or adherence to laws. The New Testament in Romans 4 connects this by stating that justification is through faith, not through the law, and that Abraham's faith came before circumcision.
5. A "type" is an Old Testament person, event, or institution that foreshadows a corresponding "antitype" in the New Testament, like Melchizedek foreshadowing Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews uses this to draw an analogy between Melchizedek and Jesus, focusing on selected similarities.
6. In the covenant ceremony, Abraham prepares animal halves and a smoking fire pot with a torch passes through them. This action symbolizes God's self-obligation to the covenant because he was the sole party to pass between the halves, demonstrating his commitment to the promises.
7. Abraham's giving of a tenth to Melchizedek signifies that Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek's superiority and authority as a priest of God Most High. This shows that Melchizedek is not only a king but also a figure that commands respect and honor, even from Abraham.
8. The three main promises given to Abraham are: 1) becoming a great nation, 2) the promise of progeny (numerous descendants), and 3) possession of the land of Canaan. These promises are central to God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants.
9. The word "credited" signifies that God considered Abraham's faith as valuable and approved, essentially counting it as righteousness. It is also semantically connected to the promise of offspring as numerous as the stars, connecting faith with God's faithfulness to his word.

10. The text argues that salvation has always been through faith, citing Abraham as an example from the Old Testament, whose faith made him righteous before the law or circumcision. In the New Testament this also demonstrates that salvation comes through faith in Christ, who is fully God.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the roles of Melchizedek and Aaron in the Old Testament, and explain how the writer of Hebrews uses these figures to illuminate the priesthood of Jesus Christ.
2. Analyze the significance of the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, discussing the symbolism of the animals, the fire pot, and the meaning of God alone passing through the pieces.
3. Discuss the role of faith in the life of Abraham, according to the text, and how it relates to the idea of righteousness. Also, consider how Abraham's faith relates to New Testament ideas of faith as expressed by the Apostle Paul.
4. Explore the theme of promise in the Abrahamic narrative, including the specific promises made to Abraham in the text, and the challenges and assurances he encounters along the way.
5. Examine how the text uses the concept of "type" and "antitype" to connect Old Testament figures and events with the life and work of Jesus Christ, particularly focusing on Melchizedek.

Glossary

- **Covenant:** A formal agreement or treaty, often with religious significance, that establishes a relationship between parties, such as God and humanity.
- **Type:** An Old Testament person, event, or institution that foreshadows or prefigures a corresponding New Testament reality.
- **Antitype:** The New Testament fulfillment of an Old Testament type, often used in theological discussions.
- **Melchizedek:** A mysterious king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem) who meets Abraham in Genesis 14; seen as a type of Christ by the writer of Hebrews.
- **El Elyon:** A Hebrew name for God, meaning "God Most High," used by Melchizedek and Abraham.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Old Testament, often translated as "LORD" in English Bibles.
- **Justification:** The act of God declaring a person to be righteous before Him, which, according to the text, is based on faith.
- **Circumcision:** A ritual act of cutting off the foreskin of the male genital; in Genesis, it is introduced as the sign of the covenant with Abraham.
- **Self-Imprecation:** A curse invoked upon oneself if a promise or covenant is violated.
- **Progeny:** Descendants or offspring; an important theme in the Abrahamic narrative.
- **Righteousness:** A state of being morally right or in right standing with God.
- **El Shaddai:** A Hebrew name for God, often translated as "God Almighty" or "Sovereign Lord."

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 12, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1 (Gen. 15:1-17:27), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Abrahamic Covenant

1. **Who is Melchizedek and why is he significant in the context of Abraham and the New Testament?** Melchizedek is a mysterious king of Salem (likely Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High who appears in Genesis 14. He blesses Abraham and receives a tithe from him. The New Testament, specifically the book of Hebrews, uses Melchizedek as a "type" or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Melchizedek is both king and priest, a combination not seen in the Levitical priesthood (where priests were from the tribe of Levi and kings from the tribe of Judah). His priesthood is described as being eternal, without beginning or end, just like the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This highlights Jesus' unique position as both king and high priest in a superior, eternal order, distinct from the temporary and repetitive sacrifices of the Levitical system.
2. **What is the significance of Abraham giving a tenth of the plunder to Melchizedek?** Abraham's offering of a tenth of the plunder to Melchizedek is an act of recognition of Melchizedek's authority as a priest of God Most High and demonstrates Abraham's acceptance of Melchizedek as a fellow worshiper of the Lord. It also highlights Melchizedek's superiority, as even the great patriarch Abraham acknowledges his higher position through this act of giving. This is especially emphasized in Hebrews, where the writer is trying to show that Jesus, who is in the order of Melchizedek, is superior to even Abraham.
3. **How does the writer of Hebrews use Melchizedek to explain the priesthood of Jesus?** The writer of Hebrews uses Melchizedek to illustrate the unique and superior nature of Jesus' priesthood. Unlike the Levitical priests who were bound by lineage, death, and the need for repeated sacrifices, Melchizedek appears without genealogy, is both king and priest, and his priesthood is without end. This mirrors the characteristics of Jesus, who is both king (descendant of David) and high priest in an eternal order, offering a once-for-all perfect sacrifice. The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus' priesthood, based on the model of Melchizedek, is a final and sufficient solution for sin, unlike the temporary measures of the Levitical system.

4. **What is the significance of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness"?** This verse is foundational for understanding salvation by faith. Abraham's belief in God's promise – specifically the promise of numerous descendants and the land – is what God "credited" to him as righteousness. This means that God declared Abraham to be in a right standing with him, not because of any merit or actions on Abraham's part, but solely based on his faith. The Apostle Paul uses this verse in Romans 4 to show that salvation comes through faith, not through adherence to the Law, as Abraham was declared righteous by God before the Law existed.
5. **What is the connection between Abraham's faith and Christian faith?** There is a direct connection between Abraham's faith and Christian faith in terms of their *means*, *object*, and *basis*. The *means* is faith; both Abraham and Christians are declared righteous through their trust. The *object* is the same; Abraham believed the Lord (Yahweh), and Christians believe in Jesus Christ, who is understood to be fully God. The *basis* for this righteousness, whether for Abraham or Christians, is the sacrifice of Jesus. God declared Abraham righteous because God had already planned for the sacrifice of Jesus. Therefore, Old Testament and New Testament believers are saved by the same divine plan and action.
6. **What is the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15, and what does it signify?** The covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 involves the cutting of animals in half and arranging the pieces in a way that forms a path. Typically, in ancient Near Eastern treaties, both parties to the covenant would walk between these pieces, thereby taking a self-imprecatory oath. However, in Genesis 15, only God, represented by a smoking fire pot and a blazing torch, passes through the pieces. This unusual act signifies that God is unilaterally binding Himself to the covenant's promises, without requiring anything from Abraham. God takes all the responsibility for fulfilling the promises, even though Abraham will fail.
7. **How does the covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 differ from typical covenant ceremonies of the ancient Near East?** In typical ancient Near Eastern covenant ceremonies, both parties would participate by walking between the cut-up animals, thus binding themselves to the covenant's terms and implicitly accepting curses if they broke the covenant. In Genesis 15, only God passes through the pieces while Abraham falls into a deep sleep. This difference emphasizes the unconditional nature of God's covenant with Abraham. It is a unilateral commitment of God guaranteeing fulfillment of the promise made, not a bilateral contract where Abraham needs to uphold the terms.

8. **What is the relationship between the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12, the covenant ceremony in chapter 15, and the covenant sign of circumcision in chapter 17?** The promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12 (land, descendants, and blessing to all nations) are foundational to the entire covenant. The covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 is a formal ratification of those promises, symbolized by God alone passing through the animal parts, thus underlining God's obligation. The covenant sign of circumcision in Genesis 17 is given as a physical marker of this covenant, applying to all males within Abraham's household (including Ishmael and servants). While circumcision is a sign and a requirement, it is important to note that Abraham's right standing with God was based on his faith (Genesis 15:6), not on his circumcision (which came later), demonstrating the priority of faith over works or rituals.