

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

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Mathews, Genesis, Session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith (Gen. 20:1-25:18), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Genesis session 15 examines the Abraham narrative from Genesis 20:1-25:18, focusing on the **birth of Isaac** and the **testing of Abraham's faith**. The session **analyzes Abraham's repeated deception** regarding Sarah, highlighting his human flaws alongside his faith. It then **explores the birth of Isaac**, the ensuing conflict with Ishmael, and the establishment of a covenant at Beersheba. Finally, the session deeply **examines the Akedah**, the near-sacrifice of Isaac, interpreting it as a test not of God's knowledge, but of Abraham's unwavering faith and commitment.

2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 15 – 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 15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith (Gen. 20:1-25:18)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Session 15 on Genesis 20:1-25:18, "The Promised Son and the Test of Faith":

Briefing Document: Genesis 20:1-25:18 - The Promised Son and the Test of Faith

Overview:

This session focuses on the concluding chapters of the Abraham narrative (Genesis 20-25), examining two major themes: the birth of Isaac, the promised son, and the profound test of Abraham's faith through the near-sacrifice of Isaac. Dr. Mathews emphasizes that these chapters highlight God's faithfulness to His promises, even in the face of human shortcomings and challenges. The narrative reveals God's sovereignty in fulfilling His covenant and the necessary role of faith in the lives of the patriarchs.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Abraham's Recurring Failures and the Realism of Biblical Characters:

- Abraham repeats his sin of lying about Sarah being his sister in Gerar (Genesis 20), similar to the incident with Pharaoh in Egypt (Genesis 12).
- This repetition highlights the realism of biblical characters: "the Bible does not depict people of faith like a cardboard dimension where you just have either a hero or a villain...these are real people, just like you and me."
- Abraham's struggles reveal that even people of faith have moments of weakness, sin, and fear, showcasing the imperfection of human nature.
- This event is instructive as it provides insight into the other two similar episodes, one in chapter 12 and another in chapter 26 where Isaac does the same thing.

1. God's Intervention and Grace:

- God intervenes through a dream to reveal to Abimelech that Sarah is Abraham's wife, not his sister. This is how, presumably, Pharaoh also learned the truth in chapter 12.
- God's actions highlight that "God is 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..."

- Despite Abraham's failings, God uses the situation to bless both Abraham and Abimelech, ultimately leading to a covenant agreement at Beersheba.
- The healing of Abimelech's household after Abraham prays further emphasizes God's power to work even in the face of human weakness.

1. The Miraculous Birth of Isaac and God's Sovereignty:

- The long-awaited birth of Isaac to Sarah (at age 90) is presented as a direct fulfillment of God's promise (Genesis 21).
- Dr. Mathews notes how both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the initial prospect of having a child at their old age. Yet, "...even though we have their laughter, their temporary or momentary doubt about God's promises, he still keeps his promise."
- This emphasizes that God's promises are not dependent on human belief but on His own will and power, and He is the one who will ensure its unfolding.
- The name "Isaac," meaning "he laughs," reflects the joy and wonder surrounding his birth.

1. Rivalry and the Expulsion of Ishmael:

- Ishmael's "mocking" of Isaac creates tension and leads to the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21).
- This incident highlights the contrast between the son of promise (Isaac) and the son of the flesh (Ishmael).
- Dr. Mathews refers to Paul's understanding in Galatians 4, stating that Ishmael "persecuted the son born by the power of the spirit. That's Isaac," and serves as a "type of son born according to the law".
- Despite this expulsion, God promises to make Ishmael into a nation, demonstrating His expansive blessing even beyond the covenant line with Isaac.
- The significance of Ishmael marrying an Egyptian highlights a distinction between his lineage and that of Abraham's promise, indicating a lack of appreciation for the covenant blessing.

1. The Covenant at Beersheba and the Nature of God:

- The treaty established between Abraham and Abimelech at Beersheba highlights the recognition of God's blessing on Abraham.

- The name "Beersheba" is significant as it means both "well of seven" (referencing the seven lambs of the treaty) and "well of oath."
- Abraham's establishment of a place of worship at Beersheba and invocation of God as "El Olam" (Eternal God) emphasizes the eternal and unchanging nature of God's promises. "... 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...His word, His promise is eternal."

1. **The Test of Faith: The Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22):**

- This is presented as a test of Abraham's faith, not a true depiction of the character of God because He is a God of life. Dr. Mathews also says this is because "child sacrifice is not of the character of God" and is seen as an abomination.
- The command to sacrifice Isaac is a powerful challenge, as Isaac is the promised heir through whom God's covenant will be fulfilled. The command is given in terms echoing God's instruction to leave his homeland in chapter 12.
- The language is filled with pathos: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love."
- This test is not for God's discovery, but to expose what is in Abraham's heart and provide him an opportunity to act upon his faith.
- Abraham's obedience in this act is a key indication of his faith and solidifies his relationship with God.
- Dr. Mathews explains that Abraham's reasoning about God's power, as demonstrated by Hebrews 11:19, is significant, as Abraham believed "that God could even raise the dead if necessary."

1. **Abraham's Faith and Intentional Obedience:**

- Abraham's faith is displayed in his willingness to obey God and to trust in his promise, despite seemingly contradictory commands. He makes a decision to follow God's will.
- His response to the servants, "we will worship, and then we will come back to you" could indicate a belief in the idea that Isaac could not remain dead.
- The near-sacrifice of Isaac is a demonstration of Abraham's love for the giver being greater than the love of the gift.

- The intervention of the angel at the last moment highlights God's provision and that He does not want human sacrifice.

1. **The Oath of God and the Certainty of His Promises:**

- God swears by himself in confirming his covenant blessings to Abraham (Genesis 22:16), emphasizing the immutability of his promises.
- Dr. Mathews emphasizes God's integrity is on display as He fulfills His promises.
- This also indicates that the fulfillment is dependent on God's own integrity.

1. **The Purchase of the Burial Cave and Land at Machpelah:**

- The purchase of the family burial site at Machpelah symbolizes Abraham's initial step in claiming the promised land.
- The respectful interactions between Abraham and the Hittites also show how Abraham was regarded.
- The formal purchase solidifies the land ownership, demonstrating another step in God's promise and plan.

1. **Securing a Wife for Isaac from Abraham's Kin:**

- Abraham's concern for Isaac not marrying a Canaanite woman shows his commitment to the covenant and the purity of the line.
- The servant's journey to Aram Naharaim to find a wife for Isaac emphasizes the importance of endogamy (marriage within the family group) in this context.
- The test at the well and the demonstration of Rebecca's generosity indicates her character and that God is leading the servant.
- God's guidance in this event shows his continued involvement in fulfilling his promises to Abraham.
- Dr. Mathews points to the fact that the descriptions of Rebecca's lineage and virginity highlight her suitability for the purpose of God's covenant blessings.

1. **Death of Abraham and God's Continued Faithfulness:**

- Abraham's second marriage to Keturah and his death mark the end of his life, but not the end of God's covenantal promise, which now passes on to Isaac.

- Despite Abraham's death at 175, the narrative points out that the story is not just about Abraham but about God's unfolding of His plan.
- Even in death, Abraham's lineage, through both Isaac and Ishmael, reflects the fulfillment of God's promises of blessing.
- The session closes by pointing out the lessons learned regarding the importance of God's promises, the proper response by faith, and God's consistent and faithful provision through dreams, visions, and prayer.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathews' analysis underscores that the narrative of Genesis 20-25 demonstrates that God remains sovereign and faithful in fulfilling his promises, even in the presence of human failings and challenges. The life of Abraham is a powerful example of how one should place their faith in God's promises and intentions. It reveals how the character of God is trustworthy and provides a model for the life of faith. This section also emphasizes the importance of prayer as a means of participating in God's unfolding plan. The narrative moves from Abraham's life into that of Isaac's and establishes the narrative framework for the Jacob stories that will follow.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith (Gen. 20:1-25:18)

Genesis 20-25: The Promised Son and the Test of Faith

Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does Abraham's behavior in Gerar parallel an earlier event in his life, and what does this reveal about his character?
2. What role does Abimelech play in the narrative, and how does he contribute to the understanding of God's blessing on Abraham?
3. How does the birth of Isaac fulfill God's promise, and how does it emphasize God's faithfulness?
4. What is the significance of the rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael, and how does Paul interpret this in Galatians?
5. How is the importance of endogamy highlighted in the story when Abraham sends his servant in search of a wife for Isaac?
6. What is the purpose of the test that God puts before Abraham, and how does this event reveal Abraham's faith and intention?
7. What is the meaning of the name Beersheba, and what is the significance of the treaty made at this location?
8. How does Abraham's purchase of a burial site for Sarah contribute to the larger narrative of the Abrahamic covenant and the promise of the land?
9. What is the importance of the term *El Olam*, and how does it describe the nature of God in the context of the narrative?
10. How does the chapter regarding Abraham's death and burial highlight his legacy and God's faithfulness?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Abraham's deception about Sarah being his sister in Gerar mirrors his earlier lie to Pharaoh in Egypt, showing that he still struggles with fear and a lack of complete trust in God, despite his faith journey. The Bible doesn't portray heroes as flawless, and Abraham has both heroic and flawed moments.

2. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, is deceived by Abraham's lie, yet he is later blessed by God through Abraham's intercession. This demonstrates that God's blessing extends beyond Abraham's actions and even affects those who come into contact with him, highlighting the impact of God's promise.
3. The birth of Isaac, to Sarah and Abraham at an advanced age, fulfills God's seemingly impossible promise, showing that He is faithful despite the obstacles and doubts. This miraculous birth underscores that the fulfillment of God's plan depends on His power, not human ability or actions.
4. The rivalry between Isaac and Ishmael represents the conflict between the son of promise and the son born according to the flesh, a theme Paul uses in Galatians. Paul interprets Isaac as a type of the son born by faith, and Ishmael as a type of the son born according to the law, highlighting the importance of the spiritual birth.
5. Abraham's desire for Isaac to marry a relative from his homeland demonstrates the importance of maintaining the covenant line and ensuring the continuity of faith. The choice of a wife from within the family is meant to keep the covenant blessings from being corrupted by pagan influences.
6. The test of offering Isaac is not to test God's knowledge, but rather to expose Abraham's heart and give him an opportunity to exercise and strengthen his faith. It is an occasion for Abraham to act upon his belief in God's character and promises, demonstrating his true love for the giver rather than the gift.
7. Beersheba's name translates to "well of seven" or "well of oath," commemorating the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech and the sacrifice of seven lambs. It represents a place where a formal agreement was made and where Abraham experienced God's provision, emphasizing the importance of covenant in his relationship with God and others.
8. Abraham's purchase of land for Sarah's burial is significant because it's the first piece of property he owns in the promised land, foreshadowing the future inheritance of the land by his descendants. This act reinforces the idea that God's promise is being enacted in history, even amid Abraham's current status as an alien.
9. *El Olam*, meaning "Eternal God," underscores God's timeless, unchanging nature, highlighting that His promises are permanent. The use of this name emphasizes

that God's word and commitment to Abraham are steadfast and secure, enduring through all time.

10. Abraham's death at an old age and the reconciliation of Ishmael and Isaac at his burial demonstrate that God's plan is continuous and that even the earlier struggles have yielded a measure of blessing. The narrative brings a sense of completion to Abraham's life and underscores God's faithfulness, even through his passing.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the character of Abraham as presented in Genesis 20-25, focusing on how his actions, both positive and negative, contribute to the development of his faith journey.
2. Explore the significance of the birth of Isaac as a central event in the narrative, and examine the theological implications of this miraculous birth. How does this event connect to the overarching themes of the Abrahamic covenant?
3. Discuss the concept of testing and its purpose in the life of Abraham, paying close attention to the test of offering Isaac as a sacrifice. How does this event reveal God's character and the nature of true faith?
4. Examine the theme of blessing and promise in Genesis 20-25. How do the various episodes within this section illustrate God's faithfulness to his promises and the consequences of disobedience?
5. Compare and contrast the roles of Ishmael and Isaac in the narrative. How do these two figures represent the different paths of faith and inheritance that emerge from Abraham's lineage?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abimelech:** King of Gerar; he interacts with both Abraham and Isaac in different episodes, playing a role in highlighting God's blessing on Abraham.
- **Akedah:** (Hebrew) The binding; refers to the binding of Isaac on the altar by Abraham.
- **Beersheba:** A location of an oath and also where Abraham establishes a well and a treaty with Abimelech.
- **Covenant:** A sacred agreement or pact between God and humanity, exemplified in God's promises to Abraham.
- **Endogamy:** The practice of marrying within a specific social group, clan, or tribe, as Abraham wishes for Isaac.
- **El Olam:** (Hebrew) "Eternal God;" a name for God emphasizing His unchanging and timeless nature.
- **Gerar:** A Philistine city where Abraham resides and where he deceives King Abimelech about Sarah being his wife.
- **Hittites:** A local Canaanite group from whom Abraham purchases a burial site for Sarah.
- **Ishmael:** The son of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's maidservant; his story serves as a contrast to Isaac's.
- **Isaac:** The promised son of Abraham and Sarah, through whom the covenant blessings are passed.
- **Moriah:** The region where Abraham is asked to sacrifice Isaac as a test of his faith.
- **Prophet:** In the text, the first usage refers to Abraham as one who will intercede for others.
- **Rebekah:** Isaac's wife, a woman selected from Abraham's family in Aram Naharaim.
- **Sarah:** Abraham's wife, who miraculously gives birth to Isaac in her old age.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 15, The Promised Son and the Test of Faith (Gen. 20:1-25:18), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Genesis 20-25: Abraham's Faith and the Promised Son

1. **Why does Abraham lie about Sarah being his sister, and what does this reveal about his character?** Abraham lies about Sarah being his sister to protect himself from rulers who might kill him to take her as their wife. This act is a recurring pattern in his life, showing that despite his faith, he struggles with fear and isn't consistently righteous. These incidents reveal the Bible's depiction of people of faith as flawed individuals who, like everyone else, have both heroic moments and moments of failure. He had lied about Sarah before to the Pharaoh in Egypt, and this event in Gerar mirrors the earlier incident, and it will again with Isaac, all of which gives insight into each other, and the struggle of the patriarchs with faith.
2. **How does God intervene when Abimelech takes Sarah, and what is significant about Abraham being called a prophet in this context?** God intervenes by appearing to Abimelech in a dream, warning him that Sarah is a married woman, and he will die if he does not return her. This intervention is similar to God's intervention in Pharaoh's life in Genesis 12. Abraham is called a prophet as he is chosen to intercede for Abimelech, his wife, and the women of the household so they are able to conceive, which highlights his role as a blessing to the nations, echoing Genesis 12:3. This act of intercession underscores Abraham's covenant role and the reach of God's blessing to others through him.
3. **What is the significance of the birth of Isaac, and how does it relate to God's promises to Abraham?** The birth of Isaac is the miraculous fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son despite their old age. It demonstrates God's faithfulness and power to overcome seemingly impossible obstacles. It reinforces that God's plan is not dependent on human behavior or circumstances, but rather on His own will. It's a pivotal moment, as it establishes the lineage through which God's covenant will continue.

4. **What causes the conflict between Sarah and Hagar, and what are the consequences?** The conflict arises because Sarah sees Ishmael mocking Isaac. This isn't just playful teasing but a form of ridicule that threatens Isaac's position and Sarah's status as mother of the promised heir. The consequence of this conflict is the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael. This drastic measure is a result of Abraham and Sarah's imperfect faith, and it has far-reaching implications. However, God also promises to make Ishmael a great nation, demonstrating his care and extending a measure of blessing beyond the immediate line of the covenant. Paul also uses these events typologically in his letters when he speaks of the distinction between the Law and the Spirit.
5. **What is the importance of the treaty at Beersheba, and what does the name "El Olam" signify?** The treaty at Beersheba is a formal agreement between Abraham and Abimelech, a recognition of God's blessing upon Abraham and his prospering in their territory. The name "El Olam," meaning "Eternal God," is significant because it underscores the eternal and unbreakable nature of God's promises. It emphasizes that God's word will always be fulfilled because He is timeless, all-powerful, and his integrity will not fail. The treaty also establishes Beersheba as a place of worship where Abraham calls upon the name of the Lord.
6. **What is the purpose of the test in Genesis 22, where God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac?** The purpose of the test is not to test God's knowledge of Abraham's heart or to test Abraham so that he might fail. Instead, it's designed to expose and strengthen Abraham's faith. It's an opportunity for Abraham to actualize his faith and make a decision to follow God's will. It demonstrates that Abraham loves the giver of the gift more than the gift itself. The narrative also sets up a great test of the character of God, and it reveals he keeps to his promises. This moment also highlights that God doesn't desire human sacrifice, ultimately providing a ram as a substitute, while it also foreshadows the theme of sacrifice and redemption.

7. **How does Abraham ensure Isaac's wife is chosen wisely, and what does this reveal about the importance of lineage in the covenant?** Abraham sends his servant back to his homeland to find a wife for Isaac within their family group because he is concerned about Isaac marrying a Canaanite woman and adopting their pagan practices. This practice of endogamy is important, as it highlights the importance of maintaining the family lineage and keeping the Abrahamic covenant pure. It underscores that covenant blessings are passed down through the family and require careful selection of those who will carry the lineage. The narrative also demonstrates the significance of prayer and divine intervention in God's overall plan.
8. **What is the overall importance of this section of Genesis in understanding Abraham's faith and God's covenant?** The section from Genesis 20-25 reveals that Abraham's journey of faith is not linear but marked by both successes and failures. God's promises are ultimately on God's shoulders and are carried out by God's determination, desire and love for His people. Despite Abraham's failings, God's covenant remains steadfast and continues through the lineage of Isaac. We see the importance of prayer, the significance of the miraculous birth of Isaac, and the test of Abraham's faith in the sacrifice of his son, all of which underscore God's faithfulness, his character, and the fulfillment of his promises. We also see the intervention of the Lord, especially in prayer and visions, and the importance of Abraham interceding for others and nations. These chapters emphasize that God is working out his redemptive plan within the context of real human experience. This part of Genesis also prepares for the next generation, including the Jacob stories and how they develop.