

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 17, Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel (Gen. 27:41-28:22) 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, Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel (Gen. 27:41-28:22), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This is a lecture by Dr. Kenneth Mathews on Genesis 27:41-28:22, focusing on Jacob's flight from Esau and his subsequent dream at Bethel. **The lecture examines the themes of deception, family conflict, and God's covenant promises**, particularly emphasizing Jacob's journey and his encounter with God. **Dr. Mathews connects Jacob's experience to similar narratives in Genesis**, exploring the significance of place, divine presence, and the establishment of Bethel as a sacred site. **He also draws parallels between Jacob's story and New Testament theology**, highlighting the continuity of God's covenant faithfulness and its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The lecture uses detailed biblical interpretation and explores theological concepts like God's presence and the nature of covenants.

2. 10 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathews, Genesis, Session 17 – 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_
Session17.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Mathews, Genesis, Session 17, Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel (Gen. 27:41-28:22)

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Kenneth Mathews' Session 17 on Genesis 27:41-28:22, focusing on Jacob's flight and dream at Bethel:

Briefing Document: Genesis Session 17 - Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel

Overview: This session focuses on the pivotal events of Jacob's flight from Beersheba to Haran, triggered by Esau's murderous anger, and the significant dream he experiences at Bethel. Mathews explores themes of deception, divine promise, the importance of land, and the nature of God's presence. He also connects these Old Testament narratives to New Testament themes about the nature of God and salvation.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Consequences of Deception and the Nature of Sin:

- Jacob's name, meaning "grasper of the heel," is linked to his acts of deception. Esau states, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times. He took my birthright...and now he's taken my blessing" (referring to Genesis 27:36).
- Rebekah's manipulation and Jacob's participation highlight human attempts to control outcomes, even when divine promises are present. This is connected to the broader theme of human manipulation throughout the patriarchal narratives. As Mathews says: "Despite the promises of God...the human condition is always one that wants to take hold, wants to control, and wants to bring about the best outcome instead of entrusting the outcome to God."
- Esau's anger and desire for murder are equated to the sin of murder itself, drawing a parallel to Matthew 5:21-22 (anger as a form of murder) and 1 John 3:15 (hatred as murder)

1. The Importance of the Land and the Abrahamic Covenant:

- The tension in the Jacob stories centers around the land, unlike the tension of the Abraham story, which was focused on the son. Jacob's departure from the land for 20 years creates uncertainty about the fulfillment of God's promise. Mathews states: "The tension in the Jacob stories is land...we have to, as readers, wonder about whether or not, as God had promised in his dream in chapter 28, he will, in

turn, really come back to the land and be blessed there in accordance with the promises made to Abraham and to Jacob."

- Jacob's journey also includes the need to find a wife from within his extended family (endogamy) in Haran, contrasting with the threat of the Canaanite wives, who were a "source of grief" for Isaac and Rebekah. This endogamy is important for maintaining family solidarity, inheritance, and blessing. Mathews says: "This would be critically important for maintaining the solidarity of the family, unity of the family, the perpetuation without threat, it is proposed or thought, of the inheritance and of the blessing."
- God's blessing to Jacob explicitly links back to the Abrahamic covenant: "May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham...so that you may take possession of the land...the land God gave to Abraham." This confirms the continuity of the covenantal promises through Jacob.
- The text emphasizes God's covenant name, *El Shaddai*, is connected to the patriarchal promises to Abraham and later to Jacob, and eventually identified as Yahweh.

1. **Jacob's Dream at Bethel: Divine Revelation and Presence:**

- The dream at Bethel is another echo of the Abraham story; both received pivotal divine revelations in dream form. However, Abraham was a passive observer in his dream. Mathews states: "Abraham was viewing this through a dream. I'll make the point that he was a passive observer and that the promises then were weighing upon the shoulders of God himself and he alone."
- The recurring use of the word "place" emphasizes the significance of Bethel as a sacred site. When Jacob awakes he says, "Surely the Lord...is in this place, and I was not aware of it" and "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." The physical place where the dream happens becomes a point of divine encounter.
- The image of a stairway/ladder connecting heaven and earth symbolizes divine communication and the activity of God's messengers. "There is a connection, a linkage between the heavenly sphere, the divine sphere, and the concrete earthly dwelling...then we are told that this connection...is furthermore connected by virtue of the angels of God who were ascending and descending on it."
- God's presence is a key theme: "There above it stood the Lord." This divine presence provides protection for Jacob in a dangerous and hostile environment.

- Yahweh identifies himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac, setting the stage for Jacob's personal relationship with God, not just a reliance on his ancestors' faith.

1. **Jacob's Vow and the Nature of Faith:**

- After the dream, Jacob makes a vow, saying "if God will be with me...then the Lord will be my God." Mathews interprets Jacob's vow as a commitment of faith based on the assumption that God will carry out his word, not as a conditional bargain. "Or is it rather than an assumption that God will carry out His Word, He expresses it as a vow. He's making a commitment out of faith like Abraham did..."
- Jacob's actions—setting up a pillar and anointing it with oil—are acts of worship and faith, demonstrating a recognition of the sacredness of the place and God's presence.
- The naming of the place Bethel, meaning "House of God," further marks the significance of the location.

1. **Connecting Old Testament Themes to the New Testament:**

- Mathews links the story of Jacob's dream to Jesus' words in John 1:51, identifying Jesus with the connecting point between heaven and earth, echoing the imagery of Jacob's stairway/ladder.
- God's actions towards Jacob, superseding his flaws with grace and mercy, connect to the idea of salvation through Jesus Christ. As Mathews says: "He supersedes that by remarkable acts of grace and mercy, healing where healing is required, and sustaining where sustaining is required."
- The ultimate blessing promised to Abraham and his descendants, extended to all peoples, finds its fulfillment in Christ's redemptive work.

Key Quotes:

- "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times. He took my birthright...and now he's taken my blessing." (Esau on Jacob's deception)
- "Despite the promises of God...the human condition is always one that wants to take hold, wants to control, and wants to bring about the best outcome instead of entrusting the outcome to God." (Mathews on human manipulation)
- "The tension in the Jacob stories is land...we have to, as readers, wonder about whether or not, as God had promised in his dream in chapter 28, he will, in turn, really come back to the land and be blessed there in accordance with the promises made to Abraham and to Jacob." (Mathews on the theme of land)
- "This would be critically important for maintaining the solidarity of the family, unity of the family, the perpetuation without threat, it is proposed or thought, of the inheritance and of the blessing." (Mathews on endogamy)
- "Abraham was viewing this through a dream. I'll make the point that he was a passive observer and that the promises then were weighing upon the shoulders of God himself and he alone." (Mathews contrasting Abraham's and Jacob's dreams)
- "Surely the Lord...is in this place, and I was not aware of it" and "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." (Jacob after his dream)
- "There is a connection, a linkage between the heavenly sphere, the divine sphere, and the concrete earthly dwelling...then we are told that this connection...is furthermore connected by virtue of the angels of God who were ascending and descending on it." (Mathews on the meaning of the stairway/ladder)
- "Or is it rather than an assumption that God will carry out His Word, He expresses it as a vow. He's making a commitment out of faith like Abraham did..." (Mathews on Jacob's vow)
- "He supersedes that by remarkable acts of grace and mercy, healing where healing is required, and sustaining where sustaining is required." (Mathews on God's grace and mercy).

Conclusion:

Session 17 highlights a crucial turning point in Jacob's life, marked by both human frailty and divine intervention. Jacob, initially defined by deception and family conflict, encounters God personally at Bethel and is brought into a deeper relationship with the God of his fathers, Yahweh. The themes explored in this session—deception, divine promise, land, the nature of God's presence, and faith—are crucial for understanding Jacob's journey and the broader narrative of the Old Testament. The session also connects those themes to the nature of God and salvation in the New Testament.

4. Study Guide: Mathews, Genesis, Session 17, Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel (Gen. 27:41-28:22)

Genesis: Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each:

1. Why does Jacob flee from his home in Beersheba?
2. What deception does Rebekah use to convince Isaac to send Jacob away?
3. What are the key elements of God's promise to Jacob in his dream at Bethel?
4. What is the significance of the place being called "Bethel" and what does the name mean?
5. How does Jacob's vow at Bethel demonstrate his developing relationship with God?
6. How does the concept of "place" function in the narrative, and why is it significant?
7. What is the significance of the stairway or ladder in Jacob's dream?
8. How does the story of Jacob's flight and dream relate to the Abrahamic promises?
9. What actions does Jacob take at Bethel to mark it as a sacred space?
10. How does the story of Jacob's flight relate to the themes of family conflict and deception, and what broader significance do these themes have?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Jacob flees because his brother Esau is plotting to murder him because Jacob stole his birthright and blessing. Esau's hatred has grown so strong that he is determined to avenge himself after the death of their father Isaac.
2. Rebekah deceives Isaac by suggesting that Jacob should go to her family in Haran to find a wife among her relatives, rather than marrying a local Hittite woman. She uses this as a pretext to send Jacob away, while her true intention is to protect him from Esau.
3. God promises Jacob that his descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth, that he will give Jacob and his descendants the land of Canaan, and that all

people on earth will be blessed through him and his offspring. He also promises Jacob his protective presence, saying, "I am with you."

4. The name "Bethel" means "house of God," signifying that this is not just a location but a sacred space where God's presence is manifest. The name reveals Jacob's recognition of the divine presence and establishes a location of importance to the patriarchs.
5. Jacob's vow shows he is no longer merely relying on the stories of his ancestors, but is personally engaging with Yahweh by accepting the promises, making them his own, and committing to loyalty if God will be present and provide. He declares his faith that God will keep his promises.
6. "Place" functions as more than just a location; it is where God's presence is revealed and where covenants are made. Bethel becomes a significant "place" where Jacob experiences a divine encounter that sets the stage for the continuation of God's promises to his people.
7. The stairway (or ladder) symbolizes the connection between heaven and earth, illustrating how God and the divine realm are accessible. It also shows how the angels, or messengers, serve as intermediaries, connecting God and humans.
8. The narrative echoes the Abrahamic promises concerning land, descendants, and universal blessing, demonstrating that Jacob is part of that covenant lineage. Just as God appeared to Abraham, he appears to Jacob, reiterating his promises.
9. Jacob sets up the stone he used as a pillow as a pillar and pours oil on it, which was an act of consecration. It was a physical reminder of God's presence, a marker of the sacred, and an act of worship.
10. The story highlights the themes of family conflict and deception, showing how sin and manipulation can disrupt relationships. However, these negative traits are ultimately superseded by God's grace and faithfulness, which ultimately advances His promises and salvific purposes for all of humankind.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the theme of deception in the Jacob narrative up to his flight to Haran. How does this theme contribute to the understanding of the human condition and God's purposes?
2. Discuss the significance of Jacob's dream at Bethel within the context of the larger narrative of Genesis. How does this encounter shape Jacob's character and understanding of his relationship with God?
3. Examine the role of women, specifically Rebekah, in the events surrounding Jacob's flight and subsequent blessing. What does their agency and decision-making reveal about the patriarchal culture and divine intervention?
4. Compare and contrast the initial promises made to Abraham with the promises made to Jacob at Bethel. How does the repetition and reiteration of these promises contribute to the overarching narrative of redemption?
5. Explore the importance of the "place" in the story of Jacob's flight and dream. How does the concept of sacred space function, and what does it reveal about the relationship between the human and the divine?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Bethel:** A place name meaning "house of God"; it signifies a sacred site where Jacob experienced a divine encounter.
- **El Shaddai:** A name for God commonly used by the patriarchs, often translated as "God Almighty"; its specific meaning is debated.
- **Endogamy:** The practice of marrying within a specific group, such as one's own family or clan, which was emphasized in the patriarchal narratives to preserve family lineage.
- **Exogamy:** The practice of marrying outside of a specific group.
- **Haran:** A city in Mesopotamia and the homeland of Rebekah, where Jacob travels to seek a wife.
- **Patriarch:** The male head of a family or tribe, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- **Yahweh:** The personal name of God in the Hebrew Bible, often rendered as LORD in English translations.
- **Covenant:** A formal agreement or pact, particularly between God and his people.
- **Stairway/Ladder:** In Jacob's dream, the symbol of a connection between heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending.
- **Pillar:** In this context, a stone set up as a memorial or marker; also used as a place of worship.
- **Vow:** A solemn promise made to God, which Jacob makes at Bethel, indicating his commitment and faith.

5. FAQs on Mathews, Genesis, Session 17, Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel (Gen. 27:41-28:22), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Jacob's Flight and Dream at Bethel

1. **Why does Jacob flee from his home?** Jacob flees because his brother, Esau, is consumed by hatred and plans to kill him. This anger stems from Jacob's deception in obtaining Esau's birthright and blessing. Rebekah, Jacob's mother, overhears Esau's plan and urges Jacob to seek refuge with her brother Laban in Haran, primarily to escape Esau's wrath but also under the pretext of finding a wife from among their family, who are worshippers of God.
2. **What role does deception play in this narrative?** Deception is a recurring theme in the story. Jacob's initial deception of his father to receive Esau's blessing is the immediate cause of his flight. Rebekah also uses a fabricated reason to convince Isaac to send Jacob away, saying she is disgusted by the local women Esau married. This pattern highlights how humans often attempt to control outcomes through manipulation instead of trusting in God's promises.
3. **How does this story connect to the Abrahamic covenant and promises?** The narrative reaffirms the promises made to Abraham regarding land, descendants, and blessing to all nations. Although Jacob must leave the promised land, God appears to him in a dream and reiterates the promises, ensuring that the covenant is not broken and that Jacob will eventually return. This dream solidifies Jacob's connection to the Abrahamic legacy.
4. **Describe the significance of Jacob's dream at Bethel.** In the dream, Jacob sees a stairway (or ladder) connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending. At the top stands the Lord, who reaffirms the covenant promises, and offers him protection. The dream marks the beginning of Jacob's personal relationship with God and solidifies Bethel as a sacred place where heaven and earth meet.

5. **What is the significance of the “place” in the story, and specifically the naming of Bethel?** The word "place" is emphasized before and after the dream. Jacob does not recognize the holiness of the “place” until after his dream, and it is specifically when God makes his presence known. After the dream, Jacob names the “place” Bethel, which means "house of God." This location transitions from just a place of sleep to a sacred site, a gate to heaven. The place now becomes a site for God’s presence on earth. This underscores the theme that the divine can intersect with the ordinary.
6. **What is the meaning and purpose behind the pillar Jacob sets up at Bethel?** Jacob takes the stone he used as a pillow, sets it up as a pillar, and anoints it with oil as an act of worship. This act establishes a memorial marking the site of his divine encounter and acts as a sign of his faith, acknowledging God’s presence and his commitment to returning to the land of promise. It serves as a reminder of God's faithfulness and Jacob's vow.
7. **How is Jacob's vow at Bethel understood?** Jacob's vow is not to be seen as a conditional arrangement of if-then, but rather an expression of faith after God has already revealed himself. He acknowledges that if God will protect him, give him food and clothing, and bring him back safely, then Yahweh will be his God, and the place will be Bethel, a site for worship. Additionally, he vows to tithe as an act of devotion, reminiscent of Abraham's act of offering a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek. This vow demonstrates Jacob’s personal commitment to God as a result of this encounter.
8. **How does this story foreshadow themes in the New Testament and how is the concept of atonement discussed?** The idea of God’s presence with Jacob and the importance of a personal relationship with God foreshadow New Testament themes like the incarnation and the concept of individual faith in Christ. The themes of grace, mercy, and God's unwavering faithfulness despite human failings are evident throughout the narrative. The text also touches on the concept of atonement, emphasizing that God's love and reconciliation are always available, even in the face of sin and mistakes, and that this is especially seen in the atonement accomplished through Jesus Christ.