

Dr. Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis, Session 13, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign Part 2 (Gen. 15:1- 17:27)

NotebookLM's 20-min. Podcast

BiblicalLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everybody, to another deep dive. Today, we're going to be looking at the covenant with Abraham. Oh, yeah.

One of the pivotal moments in the Bible. Yeah, absolutely. And we're going to be using Dr. Kenneth Mathews' lecture on Genesis as our guide for this one.

Sounds good. Yeah. And specifically, Session 13, Part 2. So if you want to follow along at home... You know where to find it.

Exactly. And we're zeroing in on Chapters 15 through 17... Okay. ...where we see all these twists and turns and a little bit of laughter.

Drama. Yeah, a little bit of drama, all playing out in this foundational biblical covenant. Right.

And I think for our listeners, they're probably coming to this deep dive wanting to know what makes this agreement so significant. Right. Like, why does this matter? Exactly.

Yeah. And I think one of the things we're going to uncover is this idea that even a simple act, like giving an apple, or in this case, a maidservant, can echo through generations. Yeah.

Yeah. That's a really interesting way to put it. And we'll get to that.

So just hang in there with us. Yeah, it's all connected. It is all connected.

Yeah. These ancient stories, you know, they still have so much relevance for us today, don't you think? Oh, absolutely. Dr. Mathews sets the scene like this.

We're 10 years after Abraham and Sarah arrive in Canaan. Okay. The land that God promised them.

Sarah is 75 years old, and she's still waiting for the promised heir. Yeah. Talk about testing your patience, right? Oh, my goodness.

And at this point, Sarah proposes a plan that involves her maidservant, Hagar. I mean, it kind of seems like a practical solution on the surface. You know, surrogacy is something that we still grapple with today.

Yeah, for sure. But what Dr. Mathews points out is the language used to describe Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham. Okay.

It mirrors the language of Eve giving Adam the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3. Now, wait a minute. Are we really saying that Sarah's actions are like the same as the fall of man? Well, no. It's not about saying they're exactly the same.

But it's about recognizing that there's a shared theme. Okay. Disobedience.

Both Eve and Sarah, in their own ways, are kind of trying to take matters into their own hands. Right. They're saying, God, I've got a better plan.

Yeah, exactly. Like, we know better. Oh, we've all been there.

Haven't we? Trying to force a solution instead of trusting God's timing. Absolutely. And just like in the garden, you know, this seemingly small act kind of sets off this chain reaction.

Okay. Hagar gets pregnant. There's tension between her and Sarah.

And eventually, Hagar flees into the wilderness. Alone and afraid. Yeah.

A tough situation. So God just abandons her. Not at all.

An angel of the Lord finds Hagar. And even though her situation is a result of, you know, human disobedience. God still offers comfort and a promise.

Okay. He tells her that her son Ishmael will have countless descendants. So even though Ishmael isn't the son directly tied to the covenant, God still shows him grace and blessing.

Exactly. It's a really crucial point because it demonstrates that God's compassion, you know, it isn't limited to a specific lineage or people who perfectly follow his plan. Right.

It's expansive. It reaches out even to those caught in the, you know, the crossfire of human choices. What do you think about that? Well, it makes me think that God's not this rigid, rule-bound figure, you know.

There's a tenderness there. There's a willingness to meet people where they are. Absolutely.

So let's talk about those names in this encounter. Okay. Yeah.

The angel instructs Hagar to name her son Ishmael. Which means God hears. Exactly.

A beautiful reminder that even in her distress, you know, God was listening to Hagar's cries. And then Hagar names the place where she encounters the angel Beer Lehairoi. Which means the well of the living one who sees me.

Wow. Think about those names for a minute. Have you ever felt invisible? Like your pain or struggles were going unnoticed? For sure.

These names, they offer a profound message of hope. Yeah. Even when we feel most alone, God is present.

He sees us. He hears us. He's actively working in our lives.

It's a reminder that even when we're in a wilderness, we're not forgotten. Exactly. Now, Hagar returns to Abraham and Sarah.

She gives birth to Ishmael, but the story doesn't end there. Okay. 13 years pass, and we find Abraham now, 99 years old, encountering God once again.

Here we go. This is where things get interesting. Right.

God reaffirms his covenant with Abraham in a dramatic fashion. He changes his name from Abram to Abraham. And Sarai's name to Sarah.

It's more than just the name change, isn't it? It's a total transformation. Right. They're stepping into brand new identities.

Yeah. Ones that reflect this huge promise that they carry. Yeah.

Abram, meaning exalted father, becomes Abraham, father of many nations. And Sarai, my princess. Becomes Sarah, simply princess.

Hinting at a broader influence. It's like God is weaving his promise directly into their very beings. Yeah.

Marking them for a destiny that's bigger than they could have ever imagined. Okay. And then God drops a bombshell.

Sarah will bear a son, a son named Isaac. And what does Abraham do? He laughs. I mean, can you blame him? Sarah is way past childbearing age.

Seems impossible. It's like utterly impossible. What's fascinating is that this laughter, this human response of disbelief in the face of the divine, becomes a defining characteristic of the promised son.

Isaac, meaning he laughs, carries within his very name the echo of his father's doubt. Powerful stuff. Yeah.

It's like that laughter is woven into God's plan somehow. It really is. And Dr. Mathews, you know, he points out that this episode with Abraham and Sarah is like part of a bigger theme throughout Genesis.

Oh, okay. What's that? God is continually trying to make himself known to humanity. You know, when you put it that way, it kind of reframes the whole story.

Yeah. It's not just about a covenant or a promise. Right.

It's about a relationship. Absolutely. Think about how God appears to Abraham throughout his life.

Okay. Each encounter, it's not just like a command. It's a revelation.

Right. God's actively showing him, you know, his character, his power, his faithfulness. It's like God is peeling back the layers.

Yeah, exactly. Like a divine unveiling. And what's interesting to me is that it seems like God is tailoring his communication to meet Abraham where he is, even in those moments of doubt and disbelief.

Like with the laughter. Yeah. God doesn't just end the conversation.

No, he doesn't. It makes me think about those times when I've, you know, questioned God's plan or felt lost. Yeah.

Maybe those weren't moments of defiance. Right. Maybe there were chances for God to meet me in a new way.

That's a good way to think about it. And just as God used all these different ways to communicate with Abraham- visions, angels, even a name change. He still speaks to us today in all sorts of ways.

Yeah. Have you ever felt that, you know, like a sudden clarity in prayer or like witnessed an act of kindness that felt like it was orchestrated by something bigger than yourself? Yeah, absolutely. It's not always about, you know, a burning bush or something.

Right. Sometimes it's those small things, those subtle ways that God's presence is felt. Okay.

So let's get back to the covenant. Yeah. Let's talk about circumcision.

Okay. Dr. Mathews makes it clear that this wasn't just some random ritual. What? This was a deliberate choice.

Yeah. You know, a physical marking that symbolized a deep spiritual reality. So it was more than just a cultural practice.

Yeah, way more. It's like an outward sign of this inward covenant. The physical manifestation of their commitment to God.

Right. Remember how we were talking about those ancient cultures where physical markings showed who you belong to? Yes. It's like circumcision in this context takes it to a whole other level.

Absolutely. It's a tangible, lasting representation of this unseen bond with God. You know, I've always found it interesting that circumcision is performed on the organ that's responsible for procreation.

Yeah. It's like that promise of countless descendants is woven into their physical existence. It's like spiritual DNA passed down through generations.

And that physical act, right, that outward act of obedience. Yes. That really speaks volumes about Abraham's faith.

It does. I wonder if, you know, maybe that physical act served as a reminder. Yeah.

Not just for Abraham. But for everyone who came after him. Yeah, exactly, of the covenant that they were a part of.

That's a good point. It makes the story of Abraham so fascinating. Yeah.

It's not just a story from the past. Right. It's about faith, obedience, and the power of a relationship with God.

It really is. But we can't forget that this story is not a fairy tale. You know, there's tension, there's drama, there's even the question of what happens to Hagar and Ishmael.

Right. We haven't got to that yet. We haven't.

And that's what we'll look at next time. Okay. We'll explore those complexities and challenges that even come up in a relationship with God.

I'm ready. Let's do it. Welcome back to our deep dive.

Yeah. You know, as we're wrapping up our look at this covenant with Abraham, it really strikes me that it's not just some static agreement. It's a journey.

Yeah, it's a dynamic journey. Dr. Mathews really highlights that. He does.

The covenant's not just a transaction, you know? Right. It's about a relationship built on trust and commitment and willingness to, you know, navigate the ups and downs together. And that's so clear in how God interacts with Abraham.

Right. It's not just a one-and-done thing. No.

It's this series of encounters. Mm-hmm. And each one builds on the last.

God reaffirms his promises, provides guidance, and reveals more of his character along the way. Yeah. He speaks to his patience and faithfulness.

Definitely. It's like God saying, I'm with you, Abraham. I'm not going anywhere.

And it makes me wonder, you know, if this covenant is all about relationship. Yeah. How do we explain the hard parts? What do you mean? Like the parts where God feels silent or even absent? That's a question that so many people have wrestled with.

Right. And, you know, I think we have to acknowledge that even within a covenant relationship. Yeah.

There are going to be times of questioning. Okay. Of doubt.

Okay. Of feeling distant from God. So we're not supposed to just, you know, have this blind faith and ignore those difficult parts.

Not at all. Oh, good. In fact, I think those seasons of questioning, they can actually make our faith stronger.

Okay. When we wrestle with our doubts and honestly bring them to God. Yeah.

Our trust can grow. Right. And it makes me think about those names again.

Ishmael. Ishmael and Beer lahairoi. And the well of the living one who sees me.

Powerful. They're such important reminders that even when we feel most alone, God is with us. He sees us.

He hears us. He's walking with us through it all. That's good.

And it's really comforting when we think about everything that Abraham went through. Oh, yeah. The waiting, the drama with Hagar and Sarah.

Right. Even his own laughter, you know, when God told him about Isaac. And the symbol of circumcision really stands out to me here.

How so? Well, it's not just a physical marking. Right. It's about embodying the covenant, you know, inside and out.

So more than just a ritual. Absolutely. It's a real tangible representation of their commitment to God.

And a visible reminder of those covenant promises. Think about it in a world where, you know, people were using markings to show their tribal identity or social status. Yeah.

For Abraham's descendants, circumcision was different. It set them apart. But not for their own gain.

Right. For a bigger purpose. To be a blessing to all nations.

And that vision, you know, it still challenges us today. It does if the covenant with Abraham is still relevant. Yeah, I think it is.

We have to ask ourselves, how are we called to live out that legacy? Right. What does it mean to be a bearer of God's blessing in the 21st century? It's a big question. It is something to really wrestle with.

You know, it's not just about understanding this story. It's about letting it shape our lives and choices. And how we interact with the world around us.

Exactly. We may not have a physical sign like circumcision. But we're still called to embody the spirit of that covenant.

To live lives marked by faithfulness, generosity, and a commitment to being a blessing to others. So as we wrap up this deep dive into the covenant with Abraham, let's remember God is faithful. His promises are true.

Even when they seem impossible. And even when we laugh or doubt. God's plan continues to unfold.

Leading us towards a future filled with hope and blessing. Thanks for joining us. Until next time.