

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 11: Abraham's Journeys

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Kenneth Mathews analyzes Abraham's physical and spiritual journeys through Genesis chapters 12, 13, and 14, highlighting how his geographical movements correspond to his spiritual highs and lows. The discussion focuses on the divine covenant promises of land, nationhood, and universal blessing, and how these promises are immediately tested by circumstances like barrenness and famine. Mathews traces Abraham's interactions with key figures, including the separation from his nephew Lot, the deception of Pharaoh in Egypt, and his encounter with the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek of Salem. Ultimately, the narrative demonstrates how these events serve as spiritual training, narrowing the lineage of promise and preparing Israel for its destiny.

Outline

I. Introduction to Abraham's Journeys (Genesis 12-14)

- A. Physical journeys as a metaphor for spiritual journeys
- B. Correspondence to spiritual highs and lows
- C. Core focus on covenant promises in Genesis 12:1-3
- D. Textual connector: Terah's genealogy catchphrase (Gen 11:27)

II. Key Contextual Factors (Gen 11:30-31)

- A. Sarah's barrenness as a threat to progeny
- B. Lot's inclusion in Terah's and Abram's clan
- C. Geographical movements of Terah's clan
 - 1. Ur of the Chaldees (South Iraq) to Haran (Southeast Turkey): 600 miles
 - 2. Haran to Canaan: 400 miles

III. The Call and Covenant Promises (Gen 12:1-3)

- A. Commissioning to leave the comfort zone (three concentric circles)
 - 1. The Land (widest circle)
 - 2. The Clan (middle circle)
 - 3. The Father's Household (closest circle)
- B. Divine Promises ('I Will' statements initiated by God)
 - 1. Provision of land to be shown by God
 - 2. Great nation (progeny) despite barrenness

3. Personal and spiritual blessing (prosperity, wealth, and divine favor)
4. Great name and international reputation to influence other peoples
5. Becoming a funnel of blessing to all people groups

C. Relationship-dependent outcomes

1. Blessing of those who bless Abraham
2. Cursing (exclusion from blessing) of those who reject or curse Abraham

D. Universal blessing as the divine antidote to the Tower of Babel

1. Babel: United huddle of pride and technological advancement
2. Dispersion through confusion of languages
3. Call of Abraham: Creating the nation of Israel to unfold salvation

IV. Abraham's Journey Begins and Famine in Egypt (Gen 12:4-20)

A. Immediate obedience: Abram departs Haran at age 75

B. The 25-year wait for the promised son, Isaac

C. Sacred sites of worship and altar-building in Canaan

1. Shechem (35 miles north of Jerusalem)
2. Bethel and Ai (10 miles north of Jerusalem)

D. Famine in the land as a test of faith

E. Stumbling in Egypt

1. Deceptive strategy: Claiming Sarah is his sister out of fear for his life
2. Sarah taken into Pharaoh's harem for political/reputational expansion
3. Threat to the divine promise of miraculous progeny

F. Divine intervention and expulsion

1. Plagues inflicted on Pharaoh's household
2. Expulsion and enrichment of Abraham (monetary wealth, livestock, silver, gold)

G. Historical connection: Foreshadowing Jacob's family and the Exodus

V. Separation of Abraham and Lot (Gen 13)

A. Abundance of wealth leads to quarreling among herdsmen

B. Hostile backdrop of Canaanites and Perizzites in the land

C. Abram's gracious offer of land selection to Lot

D. Lot's selfish and greedy choice

1. Jordan plain selected for its beauty and water (resembling Garden of Eden/Egypt)
2. Choice to live under the wicked influence of Sodom and Gomorrah
3. Greed identified as self-worship and idolatry

E. Progressive reaffirmation of the land promise through a symbolic walking tour

F. Theological motif of separations in Genesis

1. Separation of righteous lineage (Sethites vs. Cainites, Isaac vs. Ishmael, Jacob vs. Esau)

2. Intent: Narrowing the seed of promise to produce the deliverer
3. Lesson for Mosaic-era Israel: Beware of pagan idolatry and remain holy

VI. Abraham as an International Figure and Rescue of Lot (Gen 14)

- A. Eastern coalition of kings raids the West
- B. Capture of Lot and his possessions from Sodom
- C. Introduction of Abraham as 'the Hebrew' (Ivri)
 1. Etymological link: Eber (ancestor in Shemite genealogy)
 2. Etymological link: 'To cross over' (migrant/sojourner context)
 3. Social use: Outsiders, fugitives, or outlaws
- D. Military rescue operation: Chase to Dan and full recovery

VII. Encounter with Melchizedek and King of Sodom (Gen 14:17-24)

- A. Meeting with Melchizedek
 1. Identity: King of Salem (Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High (El Elyon)
 2. Ritual: Bringing out bread and wine, and blessing Abram
 3. Response: Abram's tithe of a tenth part (foreshadowing Mosaic priesthood)
 4. Significance: Non-Hebrew worshiper of the one true God
- B. Meeting with the King of Sodom
 1. Abram's oath to Yahweh, Creator of heaven and earth
 2. Absolute refusal of the King of Sodom's booty to ensure God receives sole credit
 3. Permission for coalition allies to receive their shares

VIII. Theological Legacy and Christological Connections

- A. The mysterious figure of Melchizedek
 1. Mention in Psalm 110
 2. New Testament development in Hebrews chapters 5, 6, and 7
- B. Melchizedek as a type and shadow of the priesthood of Jesus Christ