

Genesis, Session 12, The Covenant Ceremony and Sign, Part 1

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Abstract

This session explores the covenant ceremony and sign established between God and Abraham in Genesis chapters 14 and 15, focusing on Abraham's rescue of Lot and his subsequent encounter with the two kings, Melchizedek of Salem and the King of Sodom. Dr. Mathews explains the theological significance of Melchizedek as a type prefiguring Jesus Christ in his dual office as both king and priest. The session details the justification of Abraham by faith in Genesis 15:6, showing how his righteousness precedes circumcision and the Mosaic law, serving as the theological model for Christian salvation. Finally, it analyzes the ancient Near Eastern covenant ratification ritual, wherein God uniquely passes through the divided animals to obligate Himself to His promises.

Outline

I. Introduction to Session 12

- A. Focus: The covenant ceremony and sign made with Abraham.
- B. Context: Abraham's journey, the battle between eastern and western kings in Genesis 14, and the defeat of the Western kings (including Sodom) by the Eastern kings.

II. Abraham's Rescue of Lot and the Encounter with Two Kings

- A. Abraham gathers his army, rescues Lot and his family, and returns.
- B. Met by two distinct kings (The "Story of Two Kings"):
 - 1. Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem) - represents blessing and righteousness.
 - 2. The King of Sodom - represents stark contrast and material temptation.
- C. Abraham's refusal of Sodom's wealth: Abraham rejects any material reward from Sodom, choosing to rely solely on God's covenant promises.

III. The Melchizedek Analogy in Hebrews 7

- A. Typology of Melchizedek (Type-Antitype)
 - 1. Melchizedek as a type (foreshadowing) of Jesus Christ (the antitype).
 - 2. Unlike the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood, which had limitations (repeated sacrifices, temporary resolution of sin, limited by death), Christ's priesthood is eternal and complete.
- B. Dual Office: King and Priest
 - 1. Levitical priests could not be kings (royalty belongs to the tribe of Judah).
 - 2. Melchizedek, as a Canaanite king, held both offices.

3. Jesus Christ possesses both offices: King (descended from David) and Priest (order of Melchizedek).

C. Character and Name of Melchizedek

1. Name "Melchizedek" means "King of Righteousness" (Hebrew: Melek for king, Zedek for righteousness).
2. "King of Salem" means "King of Peace" (Salem is related to Shalom).
3. "Without father, mother, or genealogy" – represents how Melchizedek suddenly appears and disappears without pedigree, modeling the eternal, unbegotten nature of the Son of God.

D. Superiority of Melchizedek's Order

1. Abraham paid a tenth of his plunder to Melchizedek, demonstrating Melchizedek's superiority over the patriarch of Israel.
2. Christ as the ultimate mediator and sacrifice, fulfilling Gen 3:15 (seed), Noah, and Abrahamic promises.

E. Theological Connections

1. Galatians 3:8: The gospel announced in advance to Abraham ("all nations will be blessed through you").
2. Hebrews 11:8-10: Abraham lived in tents by faith, looking forward to a permanent city built by God.

IV. The Arrangement of Genesis 15, 16, and 17

A. Structure of the chapters:

1. Chapter 15: Ratification of the covenant by ceremony.
2. Chapter 16: Interlude introducing potential rival Ishmael (born to Abraham and Hagar).
3. Chapter 17: The sign of the covenant (circumcision).

V. Genesis 15: The Progeny Promise and Righteousness by Faith

A. Two main parts of Genesis 15:

1. Verses 1-6: Focus on descendants/progeny.
2. Verses 7-21: Focus on land promise (Canaan).
3. Verse 6 serves as a crucial hinge.

B. The Progeny Promise

1. God's reassurance: "Do not be afraid... I am your shield, your very great reward."
2. Abraham's concern over childlessness and proposal of Eleazar of Damascus (adoption practice of Hurrians).
3. God's response: A biological son will be his heir, and descendants will be numerous as the stars (and earlier, dust).

C. Righteousness by Faith (Gen 15:6)

1. Abraham believed Yahweh, and He credited it to him as righteousness.
2. "Credited" related to the semantic range of counting (connecting to counting stars).
3. This was not the start of Abraham's faith, as he had already responded by leaving Ur/Haran.

D. New Testament Application (Romans 4)

1. Apostle Paul's argument: Salvation comes by faith, not by Mosaic law or circumcision.
2. Abraham was declared righteous before receiving circumcision (Gen 17) or the law.
3. Christians share the same means of salvation (faith), object of faith (Yahweh/Jesus), and basis of salvation (the eternal sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb slain from the creation of the world, Rev 13:8).

VI. Genesis 15: The Covenant Ratification Ritual

A. Ancient Near Eastern Ritual Parallel

1. Cutting animals in half and walking between them as an oath.
2. Jeremiah 34:18-20 background: Self-imprecation oath where violating parties accept the fate of the halved animals.

B. The Unique Nature of Abraham's Covenant Ceremony

1. Abraham falls into a deep sleep (similar to Adam's sleep in Gen 2) and has a night vision of descendants in Egypt.
2. A smoking fire pot and blazing torch (representing God) pass between the pieces.
3. God is the sole party passing through, unilaterally obligating Himself and His reputation to fulfill the covenant without conditions on Abraham.

C. Conclusion: Preparing for Genesis 16 (Hagar and Ishmael) and Genesis 17 (circumcision).