

Genesis Session 13 Outline: The Covenant Ceremony and Covenant Sign, Part 2

Author: Dr. Kenneth Mathews

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Kenneth Mathews focuses on the biblical narratives in Genesis 16 and 17, highlighting the birth of Ishmael and the establishment of the covenant sign of circumcision. It explores the human failures of Abraham and Sarah in utilizing Hagar as a surrogate, which contrasted with God's subsequent mercy and protective promises to Hagar and Ishmael. The session then details the confirmation of God's covenant in Genesis 17, where God reveals Himself as El Shaddai, changes the patriarchs' names to signify their new identities, and mandates circumcision as an everlasting sign of their relationship. Ultimately, it emphasizes the developing closeness between God and His people and the joyful yet hesitant anticipation of Isaac's birth.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genesis Session 13, Part 2 (Genesis 15:1-17:27)

- A. Speaker: Dr. Kenneth Mathews
- B. Focus: Genesis 16 (Hagar and Ishmael) and Genesis 17 (The Covenant Sign)
- C. Chronological setting: Ten years since Abraham and Sarah entered Canaan (Abraham aged 85, Sarah aged 75)

II. Genesis 16: The Birth of Ishmael and God's Rescuing Mercy

- A. The human plan for an heir
 - 1. Sarah's persistent barrenness prompts a desperate proposal to use a surrogate
 - 2. Abraham's compliance to Sarah's voice
 - 3. Direct textual echoes of Genesis 3 (Sarah taking Hagar and giving her to her husband, mirroring Eve's actions)
 - 4. Spiritual truth: God does not abandon but rescues the plan when humans stumble
- B. Domestic conflict and Hagar's flight
 - 1. Procreative success leads Hagar to despise her barren mistress, Sarah
 - 2. Cultural background of women's prestige and identity tied to children in antiquity

3. Sarah shifts blame to Abraham and mistreats Hagar, leading Hagar to flee into the wilderness

C. Divine intervention and promises to Hagar

1. The Angel of the Lord finds Hagar near a desert spring
2. Command to return and submit to Sarah
3. Expansion of the procreative promise to Hagar's numerous offspring
4. Forecast of Ishmael's character as a wild, hostile donkey of a man living on the margins of society

D. Theological revelations and designations

1. Meaning of Ishmael: 'God hears' (representing God's mercy to the Egyptian slave woman)
2. Hagar names God 'El Roi' (The God who sees me) and names the spring 'Beer-lahai-roi' (The well of the living one who sees me)
3. Demonstration of God's grace extending to traditional outsiders
4. Timeline confirmation: Ishmael is born and is 13 years older than Isaac

III. Genesis 17: The Covenant of Circumcision

A. Relationship between the covenants of Genesis 15 and 17

1. Continuation of the same covenant rather than a separate covenant
2. Marked by a parallel progression and 'I am' declarations (El Shaddai)
3. Signaling an evolving, closer relationship of training and revelation

B. Divine self-revelation and call to obedience

1. Revelation as El Shaddai (translated as God Almighty)
2. Exhortation to 'walk before me and be blameless' (completeness, wholeness, and integrity, not flawless perfection)
3. Covenant sustained by enabling grace and a life devoted to faith and moral behavior

C. Bestowal of new names and identities

1. Abram ('exalted father') renamed to Abraham ('father of many [nations]')
2. Name changes signal a God-ordained new identity and guaranteed fulfillment of fruitfulness
3. Sarai renamed to Sarah ('princess'), designated as a mother of nations and kings
4. Contrast with the prideful name-making at the Tower of Babel; God makes Abraham's name great

D. The covenant sign of circumcision

1. Physical marker on the male organ associated with progeny and generational commitment
2. Contrast with common ancient Near Eastern puberty or hygienic rites

E. Abraham's reaction and the promise of Isaac

1. Laughter of doubt and hesitancy at his own age (99 years) and Sarah's
2. Plea for Ishmael to inherit the blessing
3. God's response: Ishmael will be cared for and father 12 rulers, but the covenant will continue through Isaac
4. Meaning of Isaac: 'He laughs' (reflecting initial parental doubt and ultimate immense joy)

IV. Conclusion

- A. Complete obedience of Abraham in circumcising Ishmael and his entire household
- B. Setting the stage for the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 and 19