

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

NotebookLM's 6-min. Video Overview

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Welcome to The Explainer. So today, we're jumping into a huge story. It's all about faith, a whole lot of doubt, and a promise from God that, well, it seemed completely impossible to fulfill.

So let's get right into it. We're going to tackle this question by looking at a really foundational story from Genesis, chapters 16 and 17. And it's all about this classic clash, right? Human plans versus what feels like super slow divine timing.

Alright, so our story kicks off with a massive problem. A divine promise is basically hanging by a thread. See, God had promised that a whole nation would come from Abraham.

But what do you do when the one thing you absolutely need for that to happen, an heir, is the one thing you just don't have? And this timeline, man, it really shows you the pressure cooker they were in. We're talking 10 long years since they got to the promised land of Canaan. Think about it.

Abraham is 85. Sarah is 75. The promised kid? Nowhere in sight.

I mean, the biological clock isn't just ticking at this point. It feels like it's completely broken. So you've got this huge crisis of faith.

What do they do? Do they just wait? Nope. They decide, okay, we've got to take matters into our own hands. They come up with a plan that, you know, was totally acceptable back then.

But it definitely wasn't what God had in mind. So here's the plan. Sarah comes up with this idea, which was pretty common for the time.

She says Abraham should have a child with her Egyptian servant, Hagar. And the way the custom worked, that baby would legally be considered Sarah's heir. On paper, it seems like a logical, practical fix for an impossible situation, right? And this next part, this one short sentence, is so, so important.

It shows this wasn't just Sarah's plan. It was a joint decision. You can just feel the shared desperation and that nagging doubt that maybe, just maybe, God wasn't actually going to come through.

Okay, now get this, because this is where the story gets really interesting. The specific words used here create this kind of chilling echo. Remember way back in the Garden of Eden, how Eve took and gave the fruit to Adam? Well, the text here uses that exact same language.

It's like a big flashing sign pointing to that same old human tendency to doubt God and try to do things our own way. And surprise, surprise, the brilliant human plan, it doesn't just fail. It backfires, like immediately.

The whole household just explodes with conflict. Hagar gets pregnant and starts looking down on Sarah. Sarah, feeling completely despised, lashes out and mistreats Hagar so badly that Hagar has no choice but to run away, pregnant and all alone, out into the desert.

But right here, in the middle of all this human failure and suffering, the story takes this incredible, unexpected turn. And it shows us something amazing about God's character, his mercy, especially for people who are pushed to the edges. So the story says an angel of the Lord finds Hagar out there in the wilderness.

And what happens? Is she punished? No. Instead, she gets rescued and a promise. The angel tells her that her descendants will become a great nation, too many to even count.

I mean, does that sound familiar? It's almost the exact same promise God gave to Abraham. And this is so key. God doesn't just save her.

He sees her pain. He tells her to name her son Ishmael, which literally means God hears. So the name itself is this permanent reminder that God hears and pays attention to the suffering of everyone, even an Egyptian servant who was an outcast.

And Hagar's response to this is just wow. She does something pretty amazing. She gives God a new name, El Roi.

It means the God who sees me. And this isn't just some fancy title. It's a deeply personal statement from someone who felt invisible, who in her absolute worst moment realized she was seen.

OK, so let's fast forward. Thirteen years have gone by. Abraham is now 99 and his son Ishmael is a teenager.

And then out of the blue, God shows up again. But he doesn't just hand over the promised son. First, he comes to take his relationship with Abraham to a whole new level.

God introduces himself with a new name, El Shaddai, which we often translate as God Almighty. And this name is all about his incredible power, the kind of power it takes to do something that seems totally impossible, like, you know, giving a baby to a 99-year-old guy and his 90-year-old wife. And then God does something else.

He changes Abraham's name. His old name meant exalted father, which, let's be honest, must have felt like a cruel joke for all those years. But his new name, Abraham, means father of many nations.

It's like God is literally writing the promise into his very identity, talking about it like it's already a done deal. Then God just hammers home the covenant with this series of I will statements. You can see the pattern, right? I will do this.

I will do that. From confirming the covenant to making nations and kings come from him. It's all about one thing.

This promise is going to happen because of what God will do, not because of anything Abraham can pull off. All right. So to seal the deal on this everlasting covenant, God lays out two final things: a physical sign to mark his people and, at long last, a specific name for the son they've been waiting for.

The sign, it's circumcision. And this isn't just some random thing. Think about it.

It's a permanent physical mark right on the organ of procreation. It directly ties the covenant to the one thing that's been the source of all the drama in this story, the promise of a child. And then God just drops the bombshell.

He tells Abraham, this time next year, you, at a hundred years old, will have a son with Sarah who's 90. And Abraham's reaction, it's not some big moment of perfect faith. He literally falls on his face and laughs, but here's the beautiful part.

God takes that very human moment of doubt, that laughter, and weaves it right into the promise. He tells Abraham Name him Isaac, which means he laughs. So the name itself will always remember the doubt and skepticism of his parents, but it also points to the absolute joy that this impossible baby is going to bring.

So what does this all mean? I think this story shows us that the journey of faith isn't some perfect straight line. It's well, it's messy. It's about stumbling, cooking up desperate plans, and having serious doubts.

And then being rescued over and over again by a God who sees you, who hears you, and who stays faithful even when you're not.