

## Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26, Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

### 1. Abstract of Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26, Isaac/Rebekah and the Life of Jacob, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Robert Vannoy discusses interpreting Old Testament historical narratives, specifically focusing on the life of Abraham. He contrasts two approaches to preaching from these narratives: **an illustrative/exemplaristic approach**, which uses biblical characters as moral examples, and **a redemptive-historical approach**, which emphasizes God's overarching plan of salvation revealed throughout history. Vannoy argues that the redemptive-historical approach is superior, grounding faith in God's actions rather than solely human behavior. He uses the story of Isaac's marriage (Genesis 24) to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of each method, criticizing the allegorical approach as arbitrary and potentially misleading. Ultimately, he advocates for integrating both perspectives, ensuring that illustrative points are always understood within the larger context of God's redemptive work.

**2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Pentateuch → Genesis).**



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ssion25.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26, Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpt, including relevant quotes.

#### Briefing Document: "Preaching Historical Narratives – Gen. 24"

**Purpose:** This document summarizes the key points of Dr. Vannoy's lecture, focusing on his discussion of Abraham, the interpretation of historical narratives in the Bible, and different approaches to preaching from such texts.

#### Key Themes and Ideas:

##### 1. Abraham's Story and God's Plan:

- **Abraham's Lapses and God's Sovereignty:** The lecture begins by noting Abraham's failures (e.g., his relationship with Hagar) and emphasizes that God's plan of promise (the line leading to Isaac) is achieved despite these human shortcomings. The line of promise is explicitly stated to go through Isaac and not Ishmael (Gen. 17:21).
- **God's Active Role:** Dr. Vannoy highlights the "strict supernaturalism" in the events of Abraham's life, asserting that God is actively working to realize the promise. As Vos states, "that Abram was not permitted to do anything through his own strength or resources to realize the promise that's before him."
- **Lineage and the Nations:** The lecture traces the lines of Ishmael, Midianites (through Keturah), Ammonites, and Moabites, all related to Abraham's family in some way.

##### 2. Abraham's Significance:

- **Redemptive-Historical Significance:** Abraham is crucial in the redemptive narrative. He is chosen by God "to give his promises to and to prepare the way ultimately for the coming of Christ." The lecture emphasizes that "God is at work in and through Abraham to realize that redemptive purpose," and connects Abraham to the Genesis 3:15 promise of the seed of the woman crushing the serpent.
- **Exemplary or Illustrative Significance:** Abraham also serves as a model of faith. The lecture notes that he is used as an example in the New Testament (Romans 4,

Hebrews 11, James 2), a man "of faith, someone who in that sense we can emulate."

### 3. Preaching Historical Narratives: A Central Issue:

- **Beyond Retelling:** Dr. Vannoy stresses that preaching on a historical text should not simply be a retelling of the Bible story. He says, "Bible history should be treated in a different manner than...a Sunday school class where you're basically interested in content, retelling the stories." The key is to find God's message for the people today.
- **The Challenge:** Understanding the meaning of these stories for today is a challenge. The lecture asks, "What is the message of God in that story for God's people today?" It is noted that it's more difficult to answer than ask the question.
- **Translation Needed:** The lecture asserts that "What must be done is to translate what is in those stories, the message that's contained, into our situation."

### 4. Approaches to Interpreting Historical Narratives:

- **The Allegorical Method:**
- **Definition:** This method "spiritualize[s] the stories of the Bible, so that the historical facts in themselves really are not very important. But they become bearers of deeper spiritual truths."
- **Example (Genesis 24):** Isaac = Christ, Rebekah = the church, Abraham's servant = the preacher, Rebekah drawing water = daily dependence on God's Word, etc.
- **Critique:** This method is viewed as "eisogesis, or reading things into these stories," and it obscures the real message of the text. "The facts of the story cease to be important." The lecture emphasizes that this method can lead to making the Scripture mean almost anything by drawing differing analogies, and is not based in exegesis or listening to the Scripture.
- **The Exemplaristic Method:**
- **Definition:** This method uses the stories as examples of how we should or shouldn't act today ("do as this one did or don't do as that one did").
- **Example (Genesis 24):** Parents should ensure their children marry believers; seek God's leading through prayer when looking for a spouse, etc.

- **Critique:** This method is critiqued as being "arbitrary" (how do we choose which parts to emulate?) and "anthropocentric" (focusing on human behavior rather than God's works). The lecture notes that this method runs the risk of moralizing the text, focusing on do's and don'ts.
- **The Danger:** By primarily treating passages in this way, the congregation may miss God's mighty works, which is the true message of Biblical history.
- **The Redemptive-Historical Method:**
- **Definition:** This approach emphasizes the place of events in the history of redemption, seeing "the progress of revelation that ultimately comes to Christ." The focus is on God's work in the events rather than just the human examples.
- **Example (Genesis 24):** The focus shifts from Abraham and his servant to how the event demonstrates God's faithfulness in fulfilling his promises (that Abraham and Isaac would have many descendants).
- **Strength:** It highlights God's acts in history, not simply human examples, and shows that God is still at work. "We are to see God at work and the marriage as one small part of God's mighty work in this world."
- **Focus:** This method teaches the congregation "who God is, what he has promised, what he has done, and how he deals with people."
- **Reconciling the Approaches:** The lecture argues that these methods shouldn't be in opposition. There's a place for exemplaristic preaching, but it needs to be grounded in the redemptive historical context.

## 5. Importance of History in Doctrine:

- **History as Foundational:** The lecture posits that "history is foundational to doctrine." The lecture contends that history is not simply illustrative, it "provides a basis for doctrine."
- **Consequences of Ignoring History:** If history is treated as mere illustration, then the actual events are unimportant. This position, the lecture notes, opens the door to the types of interpretations that ignore the historicity of the Bible, the focus becoming the moral or religious lessons rather than the events themselves.
- **New Testament Precedent:** The lecture points to the preaching of Peter and Paul as examples of those who "recounted the acts in the course of redemptive

history," tying their understanding of the historical record in the Old Testament to their present day experience and understanding of God's plan.

## 6. Challenges and Practical Advice:

- **Balancing Methods:** It is important to tie exemplary points to the redemptive historical function. Otherwise, there is a strong potential for arbitrary interpretations, choosing to emulate some parts of the narrative while ignoring others.
- **Lack of Resources:** There is a lack of resources from a redemptive historical perspective, with most materials focusing on the exemplaristic approach.
- **Struggle Required:** Understanding how some narratives fit into the overall redemptive plan is challenging and will require study.

## Key Quotes:

- "Abram was not permitted to do anything through his own strength or resources to realize the promise that's before him."
- "God is at work in and through Abraham to realize that redemptive purpose."
- "Bible history should be treated in a different manner than...a Sunday school class where you're basically interested in content, retelling the stories."
- "What is the message of God in that story for God's people today?"
- "The facts of the story cease to be important." (regarding the allegorical approach)
- "We are to see God at work and the marriage as one small part of God's mighty work in this world."
- "History is foundational to doctrine."
- "History does not just illustrate doctrine, it provides a basis for doctrine."

**Conclusion:**

This lecture provides a valuable overview of how to approach Old Testament historical narratives, urging a move beyond simple retelling or moralizing to understand these stories within the larger framework of God's redemptive plan. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's active role in history and calls for a nuanced approach that combines both exemplary and redemptive-historical perspectives in preaching and interpretation.

## 4. Study Guide: Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26, Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob

### Abraham: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why was Ishmael not considered the son of promise, despite being Abraham's son?
2. According to Vos, what was significant about Abram's role in realizing God's promise?
3. What two categories did the lecture suggest as a way of understanding the meaning of Abraham's life?
4. How did the allegorical method interpret the story of Isaac's marriage in Genesis 24?
5. What is the core principle of exemplaristic preaching?
6. What specific example from Genesis 24 was used to illustrate exemplaristic preaching regarding marriage?
7. What criticism was raised about the arbitrary nature of the exemplaristic method?
8. What is the main concern that makes exemplaristic preaching potentially anthropocentric?
9. How does redemptive historical preaching approach the story of Isaac's marriage in Genesis 24?
10. What point was made about the relationship between history and doctrine?

#### Answer Key

1. Ishmael was not the son of promise because God explicitly stated that the covenant would be established through Isaac, born to Sarah. While Ishmael was blessed and promised a great nation, he was not in the line of promise.

2. Vos stated that Abram was not permitted to use his own strength or resources to fulfill the promise, emphasizing God's supernatural work in Abraham's life. This highlights God's initiative and power in the fulfillment of His promises.
3. The two categories are: Redemptive-historical significance, which emphasizes Abraham's role in God's plan of salvation; and Exemplary or Illustrative significance, where Abraham is seen as a model of faith. These two provide different perspectives on understanding Abraham's significance.
4. The allegorical method spiritualized the story, interpreting Isaac as Christ, Rebekah as the Church, and the servant as the preacher, among other symbolic interpretations. The historical details were not considered as important as their deeper symbolic meanings.
5. Exemplaristic preaching uses the stories of the Bible as examples of how believers should and should not act, encouraging certain behaviors and warning against others based on the actions of Old Testament characters. It focuses on moral lessons and principles from historical events.
6. The lecture suggested that Abraham's desire for Isaac to marry a woman from his family in Haran served as an example for parents today, implying that believers should seek spouses for their children who also believe. This approach translates the historical action into a modern application for parents.
7. The arbitrary nature of the exemplaristic method was criticized because it is unclear how one decides which actions in the Bible should serve as positive examples and which should not, potentially leading to inconsistent and subjective interpretations. It creates difficulties in deciding which practices are to be emulated.
8. The main concern is that it tends to emphasize human actions (the "do's and don'ts") and therefore distracts from focusing on God's actions in the story, potentially leading to legalism or moralism. The focus may shift from God's redemptive work to human morality.
9. Redemptive-historical preaching emphasizes how the story of Isaac's marriage fulfills God's promises to Abraham and points forward to the coming of Christ. It focuses on God's actions in fulfilling His redemptive plan rather than focusing on human behavior as primary.



10. The point was made that history is foundational to doctrine. Doctrines are based on what God has done in history, and therefore history should not be treated merely as an illustration but as the basis for doctrinal claims.

## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Please answer the following questions in essay form.

1. Compare and contrast the allegorical and exemplaristic methods of interpreting biblical narrative. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
2. Explain the distinction between redemptive-historical significance and exemplary significance, using the life of Abraham as an example. How do these two perspectives complement or contradict each other?
3. Discuss the challenges and potential pitfalls of preaching from Old Testament historical texts. How can a pastor effectively connect these ancient narratives to a modern audience while maintaining fidelity to the original text?
4. Evaluate the critique of the exemplaristic method that it is "arbitrary" and "anthropocentric." What are the limitations of focusing solely on the actions of human characters in biblical narratives?
5. How does understanding the relationship between history and doctrine affect one's approach to interpreting the Bible? How might a view of history as foundational to doctrine affect the interpretation of Old Testament narratives?

## Glossary

**Allegorical Method:** An interpretive approach that seeks deeper, spiritual meanings in biblical stories, often seeing historical facts as symbols or allegories. It prioritizes symbolic interpretations over the historical context.

**Anthropocentric:** A perspective that prioritizes human concerns and actions, often at the expense of considering God's role or actions in the biblical text. It is in contrast to a God-centered perspective.

**Eisogesis:** The act of reading one's own ideas, biases, or pre-conceived notions into a text rather than extracting meaning from the text itself. This is often contrasted with exegesis.

**Exegesis:** The critical interpretation of a text, focusing on drawing the meaning out of the text through careful analysis and considering the context. It aims to understand the author's original intent.

**Exemplaristic Preaching:** A preaching method that uses biblical narratives as examples of how believers should and should not act. It focuses on practical and moral applications of biblical stories.

**Homiletics:** The art of preaching or writing sermons, including the preparation and delivery of sermons.

**Redemptive-Historical Significance:** The importance and meaning of events in the Bible in light of God's plan of salvation and the ultimate coming of Christ. It emphasizes the narrative of God's plan for humanity.

**Supernaturalism:** The belief that God actively intervenes in the world and in the lives of individuals. It often implies miracles and divine power beyond natural laws.

## 5. FAQs on Vannoy, Genesis, Session 26, Isaac/Rebekah and the Early Life of Jacob, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on Preaching Historical Narratives (Based on Dr. Vannoy's Lecture)

1. **What are some of Abraham's shortcomings or failures as detailed in Genesis?**  
Abraham's failures include the situation with Hagar in Genesis 16. Sarah, barren for ten years, gives her servant Hagar to Abraham, who conceives Ishmael. This act, despite appearing successful initially, introduces conflict between Sarah and Hagar and also strains the relationship between Sarah and Abraham. Ishmael is not the son of promise. Additionally, the lecture implies a general principle that Abraham was not to rely on his own resources to fulfill God's promise.
2. **What is the distinction between redemptive-historical significance and exemplary significance when interpreting Old Testament narratives like those of Abraham?** Redemptive-historical significance focuses on the role of the narrative in the overarching plan of God's redemption. Abraham is part of the lineage that leads to Christ. These narratives reveal God's sovereign work. Exemplary significance considers figures like Abraham as models of faith that we can imitate. The New Testament refers to Abraham as a model of faith.
3. **Why is it problematic to preach historical narratives merely as a retelling of the story?** Simply retelling the story without exploring its deeper significance fails to capture God's intended message for his people. Preaching should not only focus on the historical events but also seek to understand the meaning of these events within God's plan of revelation. A historical sermon should provide something more than a Sunday school lesson that retells stories.
4. **What is the allegorical method of interpreting biblical narratives, and why is it generally not considered a valid approach today?** The allegorical method spiritualizes biblical stories, seeing historical facts as symbols representing deeper spiritual truths. For example, Isaac becomes a symbol of Christ. This method often disregards the historical context and can lead to interpretations that impose external meanings onto the text rather than drawing meaning from it. As such, it is considered "eisegesis" (reading into a text) rather than "exegesis" (drawing meaning out of a text).

5. **What is exemplaristic preaching, and what are some of its potential weaknesses?** Exemplaristic preaching uses biblical stories as examples of how people should or should not behave. While this approach can be helpful, it can be arbitrary, focusing on selecting specific actions without considering the larger context. It can also be anthropocentric by focusing too heavily on the actions of biblical characters rather than on God's work and plan.
6. **How does redemptive-historical preaching differ from exemplaristic preaching, and why is it considered a better approach?** Redemptive-historical preaching emphasizes the place of the historical event within the larger scope of God's plan of redemption, focusing on God's actions and purpose. Unlike the exemplaristic approach, it doesn't primarily emphasize what humans have done but what God has done in history. It views biblical history as part of a single, unified narrative leading to Christ. This approach helps believers to see God's overarching plan at work rather than a collection of individual stories.
7. **Why is it important to understand the relationship between the historical and doctrinal sections of Scripture?** The historical sections of Scripture are foundational to the doctrinal sections. Doctrine is rooted in the history of God's actions within time and space. If history is seen merely as illustrative, it doesn't matter whether events happened or not. This devalues the importance of historical context and can lead to a distorted understanding of the scriptures.
8. **How can we appropriately apply the lessons from historical narratives without resorting to allegorical or solely exemplaristic methods?** To appropriately apply lessons, it's important to analyze a narrative in its historical and redemptive-historical context, recognizing its function in God's plan. The illustrative or exemplary aspects can be explored as long as it is tied to God's unfolding plan of redemption. We must first understand what God is doing in the text before we can explore how it relates to our own lives today. We must avoid imposing interpretations based on present-day ideas, thus maintaining that history is foundational to doctrine and that these are actual historical events.