

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 22, Podcast Audio

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right, so welcome back, everyone. Today we're going deep, like really deep, into the Abrahamic Covenant. Oh, that's a big one.

It is, right? This agreement between God and Abraham has, well, it's kind of shaped everything. Faiths, empires, the whole shebang. For millennia.

Millennia, exactly. And to help us unpack all of this, well, we've got an expert with us, which is great. Happy to be here.

And our main source, some really cool lecture notes from an Old Testament scholar, Dr. Robert Vennoy. He's quite a big name in the field. So we're in good hands.

Get ready for some history, some theology, and oh, maybe even a little bit of linguistics, you know... Puzzles. Puzzles, yeah, exactly. As we figure out, I guess, what did this covenant actually mean back then? When did it actually happen? And how are we still seeing the effects of it even now, today? Well, and that's what I find so intriguing about Dr. Vannoy's approach.

He really wants us to push past the usual stories and think about the historical context. He brings up this whole debate about Abraham and the Philistines. Oh, yeah, yeah.

That's where it gets tricky, right? Like, got to put on your detective hat. Exactly. Because the Philistines, they weren't even in the region until centuries after Abraham supposedly lived.

So that's a bit of a problem. It is. It's like finding a mention of TikTok in a Shakespeare play or something.

Ah, right, right. Something's off. Yeah.

It's what scholars call, what is it, an anachronism. And that's the thing with ancient history. It's like pinning down dates and people.

It's a puzzle, for sure. A huge puzzle. And we might never have all the pieces.

So then how can we even be sure that Abraham was a real person? That's the million-dollar question, isn't it? I mean, we got to look at archaeology, linguistics, and compare it to other ancient texts. It's a process. But we got to accept that maybe we won't have all the answers, huh? Yeah, some mystery is going to remain.

So let's just say for now that Abraham did walk the earth, right? What makes this covenant he made so different? It all comes down to this. It's not like a contract. It's a promise.

See, most ancient covenants were agreements where both sides had to do things, right? This one's what Dr. Benoit calls a promissory covenant. It's God straight up making promises to Abraham just like that. Wow.

So no strings attached. Not from Abraham's side, no. It's like imagine a lifetime warranty that actually means lifetime and covers everything, but on a cosmic scale.

OK, that definitely sets it apart. So what exactly was being promised in this cosmic warranty? Well, there are three big ones: land, descendants, and a blessing for, well, everyone, every nation. The land promise? That seems pretty straightforward, right? Like, here's some land for your descendants.

Yeah, God designating a specific territory. But Dr. Benoit brings up some interesting points about whether that promise really, truly came to be. Ah, so there's debate about that.

Oh, absolutely. He points out that when King David was ruling, when the Israelite kingdom was at its largest, it might have been a temporary fulfillment of the land promise. Temporary.

So you're saying there might be more to come. Maybe. That's the question Dr. Benoit leaves us with.

What about the ultimate, the complete fulfillment? Something to think about for sure. But for now, let's talk about that blessing for all nations promise. Dr. Benoit gets deep into the original Hebrew here, talking about the word for bless and how it could be passive or reflexive.

Yeah, and that little detail, that grammar stuff, it changes things like big time. Really? Oh, yeah. See, the passive way, it means all the nations, they just kind of benefit from Abraham's family line, you know? But the reflexive, that implies they actually do something themselves, that they bless themselves because of something to do with Abraham.

So like they're actively involved somehow. Right. And get this, both ways are grammatically possible in the Hebrew.

Oh, wow. So we're not totally sure which one it is. Makes it all the more interesting to debate, doesn't it? It does.

It does. You know, it really shows how much weight just one word can carry, especially when we're talking about these ancient texts. Okay.

But how does any of this connect to, you know, to us today living thousands of years later? Well, to get at that, let's jump into Genesis 15:6, a verse Dr. Vannoy calls like a turning point. It says, Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness. That verse right there, it's a foundation.

How so? Well, Dr. Vannoy points out that this is the very first time in the whole Bible that we see faith and righteousness connected like that. And that idea, man, it just, it echoes through Western religion, philosophy, everything. So it's like a building block for, well, a lot of beliefs even now.

You got it. This idea that faith is a way to be righteous. It's huge in so many belief systems even today.

I see. It's like this verse; it sets the stage for everything that comes after. In a lot of ways, yeah.

But Genesis 15, it's not all, you know, deep theological stuff. There's that wild scene with the vision, the deep sleep, and then bam, a smoking furnace and a flaming torch just going right between these chopped-up animal pieces. Oh yeah.

That's a, that's pretty intense imagery. Talk about drama, right? Dr. Vannoy, and he's drawing on a scholar named Meredith Kline here, explains this is like an ancient way of making a covenant official. It's like literally cutting a covenant.

That's actually where that saying comes from. Wait, seriously. I always thought cut a covenant was just, you know, an expression.

Nope. It goes all the way back to this. Wow.

But I still don't get it. How does cutting up animals, you know, how does that symbolize making a deal? Well, back in ancient Near Eastern cultures, what they do is the two sides would cut an animal right down the middle, and then they would walk between the pieces. Okay.

And that was like a super serious oath, you know, like saying, if I break my promise, let this happen to me. Pretty high stakes, huh? Yeah. No kidding.

I'm glad we don't do business that way anymore. But all the scary stuff, the darkness around the whole event, that seems a little, I don't know, ominous for a covenant ceremony. It is a striking image.

Yeah. Some scholars, they think it might be like God taking on the curse part of the deal, you know, saying, hey, if this covenant goes wrong, it's on me, not you. Oh, wow.

That adds a whole other layer to it, doesn't it? But this covenant, it's not just stuck in Genesis, is it? Dr. Vannoy says we can find like echoes of it later on in the Bible, especially in the stuff Paul wrote. Oh, absolutely. Paul brings it up all the time in Acts and Galatians.

He's really drawing on this. And get this, he even calls it the gospel. That's Paul for you.

Bold statements all the way. The gospel, though, that's a pretty big claim, even for Paul. It is, but it makes sense if you think about it.

Remember that idea of a Redeemer coming that we first see way back in Genesis 3:15, the promise about Abraham's descendant who'd defeat evil, you know? Paul saw that as the starting point for the whole story of salvation. Ah, okay. Yeah, I can see that connection.

It's all tied together. Wow. We've covered a lot, haven't we? Ancient rituals to some of the most important ideas in Christianity, and it all goes back to this one covenant.

It just shows you how powerful this promise is, how it keeps showing up throughout history. And it's a story that's still unfolding, right? Yeah, absolutely. We still need to explore how this covenant played out, you know, over time and what it means for us now, today.

So much more to uncover. Yeah, but I think we'll save all that for part two of our deep dive. Sounds good.

All right, see you then. It really is amazing to think about how this one covenant, you know, made thousands of years ago has really shaped everything. I mean, civilizations, cultures.

Yeah, it's not just some abstract idea, right? No, not at all. Think about the Jewish people. This covenant, I mean, it's central to who they are, right? Their identity, where they belong, their, like, hopes for the future.

Absolutely. And it's not just Judaism either, right? You've got Christianity, Islam, both of them. They trace their roots right back to Abraham.

So this covenant, it's like it's connecting these huge world religions. A common thread woven through history, you know? It's incredible how powerful this idea is, how it goes beyond, like, culture and time. It really is mind-blowing.

But it does bring up some more interesting questions, right? We talked about that land promise and how maybe, you know, David's reign was like a partial fulfillment of it. Right. But if this covenant is everlasting, which is what we often hear, could there be, like, another fulfillment in the future? That's a question that gets right to the heart of why this covenant still matters.

Yeah. You know, Dr. Vannoy, he, well, based on how he understands Old Testament prophecy, he seems to think that Israel will return to the land eventually. Really? And a lot of people believe that, huh? Oh, yeah.

It's a belief held by many and definitely worth thinking about. So are we talking, like, an actual physical return to a specific place? Well, that's where the different interpretations come in. Some people take it super literally, geographically.

Others see it more symbolically. You know, Dr. Vannoy, in his lectures, he focuses more on what the covenant means theologically and historically, so he doesn't really get into those specifics. Yeah, I get that.

But it does leave us with a lot to ponder. For sure. It's wild how this deep dive has taken us from, you know, these old historical debates to these deep theological ideas from, like, bloody rituals to things that affect us today.

We've only just scratched the surface. The Abrahamic Covenant, I mean, it's a wellspring of ideas. It's still fueling theological debates, philosophical discussions, even today.

It's a story that's still being written, huh? You could say that. What really strikes me is how a promise made so long ago can still speak to, well, billions of people across the world, across, like, all the time. It makes you think about the power of these basic stories, you know? What's fascinating is how this covenant speaks to some really basic human needs.

The need to belong, to find meaning and purpose, to connect to something bigger than ourselves. It's like universal stuff, right? Exactly. Those are themes that go beyond culture, beyond history, beyond any specific time period.

Absolutely. It's like this covenant; it tapped into something essential about being human, something that goes beyond time and place. Exactly.

And that's why it's still relevant, you know? Even in our modern world, which can be pretty secular, it makes us look at what we believe, grapple with these big questions, like, what does it mean to have faith? How does understanding history change how we see the world? And what role do these ancient promises play in our lives right now? Those are some pretty big questions. They are. But that's what makes this deep dive so, so interesting, right? It gives us the tools to think about these ideas, to understand them.

Exactly. Knowledge, it's most valuable when we understand it and use it, you know? Apply it to our lives, to the world around us. Yeah.

To make these ancient stories come alive in the present. Exactly. Well said.

So as we start wrapping up this deep dive into the Abrahamic covenant, I have one last question for, well, for you, our listener. How does this covenant, this ancient promise, you know, how does it shape how you understand faith? What about your place in the world? Something to think about, something to explore, you know, on your own. Yeah.

It's a question worth wrestling with because it really does touch on some of the biggest questions we face as human beings, you know? It really does. We are talking big stuff here. Identity, purpose, how we relate to, well, to God.

I mean, these are questions people have been asking forever. Since the beginning, right? And what's so powerful about this covenant, at least to me, is how it shows us just how much, well, how much belief matters. You know, we keep going back to that line, Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

It's like, it's telling us that taking that leap of faith, even when it doesn't make sense, even when it seems impossible, well, it can change everything. It's kind of like that saying, leap and the net will appear. But this is, this is bigger than that, right? It's like leap and you'll be seen as righteous.

It's a, that's a powerful thought. It is. And I think that's, well, that's why this Abrahamic covenant is still so important.

You know, it's a story about believing, about the importance of promises and about how, how one man's faith in something bigger than himself can, can create this lasting legacy. And that legacy, I mean, whether we realize it or not, it still shapes the world we live in today. It's part of our history, our cultures, even, even our own personal beliefs.

It's all connected. Yeah, it really is. So as we, as we kind of finish up this deep dive into the Abrahamic covenant, I want to leave you, our listener, with this.

How does this covenant, this promise made thousands of years ago, how does it affect how you understand faith? And what about your place in the world? It's something to think about, to explore, you know, as you go on your own journey. It's a question worth, worth struggling with. Because it really does, it touches on some of the biggest questions we have as humans.

It does. And that's what makes these deep dives so fascinating, right? It gives us a chance to, to wrestle with these big ideas. So thanks for joining us on this deep dive into the Abrahamic covenant.

It's been a really incredible journey looking at history, theology, and just the, the power of believing. A journey through millennia. That's it.

So until next time, keep exploring, keep asking those tough questions, and keep diving deep.