

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 23, Podcast Audio

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, let's jump right into our deep dive on the Abrahamic covenant. We've got Dr. Vannoy's Old Testament history lecture to dig into, plus Genesis chapters 15, 17, and 22. And, you know, that whole wild story with the Akita, the binding of Isaac.

I think we're going to find some layers here that might surprise us. Oh, absolutely. This covenant, I think it gets talked about a lot, but it's not always clear exactly what it means, you know, historically, theologically.

And for us today, that's really what we're aiming for today to try to bring some clarity to that. Yeah, totally. One thing I noticed right off the bat was all the times the covenant is mentioned in Genesis.

Like you've got it in chapters 12, 15, 17, and even 22. At first I was like, wait, isn't this just repetition? Yeah, that's a great question. And actually, it's one that's kind of puzzled scholars for a long time.

Some folks think these repetitions point to different source documents that got woven together. But the point I think for us is that this repetition just underscores how important this covenant is. It's like God saying, hey, this is a big deal.

Pay attention. Okay, I get that. But this is still an ancient covenant made with like a nomadic patriarch.

What does that have to do with me thousands of years later? Well, see, that's the amazing thing about it. This isn't just some old dusty document. It's laying the groundwork for how we understand God's interactions with us humans, his promises, and how we respond to them.

And that, believe it or not, has real repercussions for us today, even if we're not, you know, living in tents and herding sheep. So if someone's never even heard of a covenant before, how would you explain it? What's different about it from, say, just a regular contract? Well, a covenant in the Bible is more than just a legal agreement. It's this deep promise that's rooted in relationship.

It involves commitments from both sides, God and humanity, with blessings and obligations all mixed in together. It's kind of like the bedrock of the relationship, and it sets the stage for everything that comes after. Okay, that makes sense.

One of the most vivid images that sticks out in my mind about this covenant is in Genesis 15, with the smoking furnace passing between those divided animal sacrifices. I was reading Meredith Kline's *By Oath Consigned*, and he suggests that whole scene foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus. Is that a common way of looking at it? Kline's interpretation is definitely thought-provoking.

You know, it's not universally accepted, but it does make you think about the symbolism here in a deeper way, seeing those divided sacrifices as like a prefiguring of Christ's sacrifice on the cross that creates a really powerful connection between the Old and New Testaments. That's such a cool example of how these ancient stories can still have something to say to us today. Another part of the covenant that caught my eye was the promise of land, you know, from the River of Egypt unto the Great River, the River Euphrates.

It's in Genesis 15, but it comes up again in Deuteronomy and Joshua 2. It's clearly a central part of the deal, but how literally are we supposed to take it? Yeah, it's definitely a core element of the covenant. But how it's actually played out in history has been a bit messy. You know, you've got the Israelites conquering the land under Joshua, then David expands the kingdom, then Solomon's reign sees a fuller realization of the promise.

But then, of course, you have the exiles and all the displacement. So do those periods when they weren't in the land; do those just invalidate the promise? What happened to it being everlasting? Well, the promise isn't really dependent on, like, perfect continuous possession. It's tied to God's commitment to his people, and that commitment endures.

Jeremiah even connects Israel's existence to, like, the permanence of creation itself. The idea being that God's promise is as sure as the sun and moon. Okay, so this everlasting covenant bridges the Old and New Testaments, but how does it change? I mean, is it the same deal for both? Yeah, that's where things get theologically interesting.

A lot of scholars propose this idea of one big overarching covenant of grace, one that covers both Testaments, even if it's expressed differently in each, like, different flavors of the same agreement. Okay, can you give me an example? Sure. Think about circumcision, you know, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

In the New Testament, we see baptism becoming the central practice. And Paul in Galatians even talks about how the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles is broken down in Christ. It raises all kinds of questions about, you know, do distinctions like Jew and Gentile, male and female, do they still matter in light of this big overarching covenant? Wow, okay.

Lots to think about there. But before we dive into all that, let's go back to the story for a minute. What about Abram's name change to Abraham, meaning father of many nations? That happens in Genesis 17, right after God reaffirms the covenant and mentions kings coming from Abraham's line.

It feels like God's setting the stage for something much bigger. Oh, for sure. The name change itself is hugely important.

Abram, meaning God is exalted, gets shifted to focus on Abraham's descendants. It's like God is saying, this isn't just about me. It's about a lineage of people, a future that will change the world.

And to really get the weight of that impact, we have to talk about the Akita, you know, the binding of Isaac. That story is powerful, but man, it's hard to wrap your head around it. God asks Abraham to sacrifice the son who's supposed to fulfill all these promises.

How do we even begin to make sense of that? It's true. The Akita, it kind of shakes us up, doesn't it? It feels like it goes against everything we think we know about God's love and faithfulness. But maybe that's the point.

It forces us to dig deeper, to wrestle with what it means to have faith and obey, even when things seem impossible. Yeah, I guess that makes sense. And that's what we'll pick up in the next part of our deep dive.

We'll unpack those tough questions about the Akita and see what we can learn from the story that's both perplexing and ultimately faith-affirming. Okay, so let's dive right back into the Akedah. I mean, it really does make you think, right? How could God, I mean, after making all those promises about Isaac being the heir and bringing forth all those descendants, how could he then turn around and ask Abraham to sacrifice him? Yeah, it's a real head-scratcher for sure.

It feels so contradictory, you know, like it just doesn't line up with what we think we know about God's love and faithfulness, but maybe, just maybe, that's kind of the point, you know, like it's pushing us to go deeper, to wrestle with what it means to have faith and to obey when things don't make sense. Yeah, I see what you mean. But what about those verses in Genesis 22? Yeah.

You know, where God seems to tie Abraham's obedience directly to the fulfillment of the promise. As it says, because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son in blessing, I will bless you. It sounds kind of transactional, like a reward system.

Ah, yeah, because it definitely trips people up. Some commentators even try to just kind of like dance around it, but others, like John Calvin, they offer a different take. They argue that God's blessings aren't something you earn.

You know, they're not merited. Instead, they're presented as a reward to kind of motivate us, you know, to move us towards godliness. So it's more like encouragement than a strict cause-and-effect thing.

Yeah, right. Exactly. It's like God saying, hey, I'm going to bless you regardless, but aligning yourself with me, pursuing obedience, that'll lead you to a deeper experience of those blessings.

It's not about earning God's favor, but about how his grace naturally pours out in response to our faith. Okay. Yeah, I can see that.

But didn't Klein, you know, the guy who wrote about the smoking furnace, take a more merit-based view? Yeah, you're right. Klein did see Abraham's faith as having a real impact on how God's plan unfolds. He thought there was genuine merit in Abraham's obedience.

But even Kline admitted there's a mystery here. You know, this interplay of God's sovereignty and our human responsibility that's just beyond our full comprehension. It's like we're trying to solve a puzzle, but we're missing some pieces.

We can analyze the text, look at different theological perspectives, but at the end of the day, we have to accept that some things are just going to remain a mystery, at least until we get to the other side. Absolutely. And I think that's a healthy place to be.

It's okay to wrestle with these questions, to feel the tension. But ultimately, we have to rest in God's wisdom and goodness, even when it doesn't all make perfect sense to our little human minds. So if we zoom out a bit from all this mystery and tension.

Yeah. What's the big takeaway from the Akedah? What can we learn from Abraham's experience, from his willingness to go through with something so painful? You know, for me, the Akedah is about radical faith. It's about trusting God even when it hurts, even when we don't understand, even when it seems impossible.

And it reminds us that real faith gets tested, refined in the fires of tough situations. It's like that passage in Hebrews, right? The one that talks about Abraham's faith in the face of the Akedah. He says he was willing to sacrifice Isaac because he believed God could even raise him from the dead.

Talk about trust. I know, right? It's incredible. And I think it highlights that faith isn't about blind obedience or ignoring our doubts.

It's about holding on to hope, clinging to God's promises, even when the path ahead looks dark. It's about believing. He's working behind the scenes, even when we can't see it.

Man, that's powerful. And it makes me think about another piece of the Abrahamic covenant that we talked about earlier, circumcision. You know, it's usually seen as a physical sign, but Dr. Vannoy emphasized that it points to something deeper: this circumcision of the heart.

What did he mean by that? He's getting at the idea that just being a descendant of Abraham physically, that's not enough. True belonging, true participation in the covenant, it requires an inward transformation, a cleansing and renewal of the heart. So it's not just about going through the motions of religious rituals.

Nope. It's about a real change of heart, a turning towards God that goes beyond external actions. It's about aligning our desires and our motivations with his will.

Yeah, that makes sense. And it connects to those verses in Deuteronomy that talk about circumcising the foreskin of your heart. But those verses, they also seem to suggest that it's something God does to us, not something we do ourselves.

How do we make sense of that? It's one of those both-and things, you know, like a dance between divine grace and human responsibility. God starts the change. He offers us this gift of a new heart, but we have to choose to respond, to open ourselves to his work in us.

I'm hearing echoes of what we talked about earlier, you know, with God's blessings not being earned, but freely given. We can't create a circumcision of the heart on our own, but we can position ourselves to receive it. Exactly.

It's all about surrender, about acknowledging that we need God's grace and allowing him to do his thing. And that transformation, that inward circumcision, that's what ultimately allows us to fully embrace the promises of the covenant and experience all the blessings that come with it. Okay.

So how does this circumcision of the heart idea fit in with the New Testament? It feels like things shifted with Jesus coming on the scene. Remember Paul's letter to the Romans, the part where he talks about Abraham being justified by faith before he was circumcised. Paul uses that example to show that salvation doesn't come from outward rituals like circumcision.

It comes from faith in God's provision and specifically in Jesus Christ. So the focus moves from a physical act to a heart posture, a trust in God's grace revealed in Christ. How does that play out in our lives today, though? What does a circumcision of the heart actually look like in the 21st century? It's about recognizing that we all need that inner transformation.

You know, it doesn't matter what your background is or what you believe. It's about letting God work in our hearts, softening those hard places, uprooting pride and selfishness, and planting seeds of love, compassion, and generosity. It sounds like it's a continual process, right? Like a never-ending journey of surrendering to God's transforming power.

Oh, absolutely. It's not a one-time event, but a lifelong pursuit of becoming more like Christ. And it's a journey worth taking because it leads us to a richer, deeper experience of God's love and grace.

Okay, so we've talked about the individual transformation, but there's that other piece of the puzzle, right? The promise of blessing to all nations through Abraham's seed. That's where we'll pick up in the last part of our deep dive. Stay tuned, folks, because this is where things get really exciting.

Okay, so we've explored all the ins and outs of the covenant, wrestled with that intense story of the Akedah, and gotten into that whole idea of the circumcision of the heart. Now it's time for the grand finale, right? The promise of blessing to all nations through Abraham's seed. It feels massive, almost cosmic.

It is. This promise weaves its way through the entire biblical narrative, and it gives us this glimpse of God's ultimate plan for humanity. It's not just about Abraham and his descendants.

It's about this blessing that goes out and touches every part of the world. Okay, so what does that blessing look like exactly? Is it just a spiritual thing, or does it have real-world implications? It's both, actually. The blessing includes all those spiritual riches like forgiveness, redemption, being in a right relationship with God.

But it also has these tangible benefits like well-being, prosperity, even society's flourishing. It's like this whole picture of God's goodness flowing out to all creation. Wow, that's incredible.

I never thought of it that way. But how does this blessing actually get to all the nations? Is it just about being biologically related to Abraham? That's the question, isn't it? And it's something that the New Testament really helps us understand. Remember back in part one when we talked about the covenant bridging the Old and New Testaments? Well, this is a perfect example.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, says something pretty bold. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. Who is Christ? Wait, so Jesus is the key.

He's the ultimate fulfillment of this promise. Exactly. As a descendant of Abraham, Jesus becomes like the channel through which the blessings of the covenant flow out to everyone who believes in him.

It's not about physical lineage anymore, but about this spiritual connection, about being grafted into God's family through faith in Christ. That makes the Abrahamic covenant so inclusive, right? It goes beyond any cultural or ethnic boundaries. It's this message of hope and redemption for literally everyone, no matter where they come from.

It really is. It's this radical departure from the exclusivity that you see in a lot of ancient cultures. It reminds us that God's love isn't limited by our human categories.

His heart is for everyone, and he wants to bless every nation through what Jesus did. That's seriously mind-blowing. Okay, so what does this mean for us, like practically speaking? How can we, you know, living in the 21st century, tap into this ancient promise and be a part of this global blessing? Well, it starts with understanding that we, through faith in Christ, are a part of this covenant family.

We've inherited those promises, those blessings that flow from Abraham's line. It's not just history; it's our story too. So it's more than just my own personal faith journey.

It connects me to this bigger story, this incredible plan of God's that's been unfolding for ages. Exactly. It gives our lives context, purpose.

We're not just individuals floating around. We're part of something much bigger, a story that's still being written, and we get to play a role in how it all unfolds. That's exciting, but it's also kind of daunting.

What does our role look like? How can we actually be a part of bringing this blessing to the nations? It's about living out those covenant values, you know, love, generosity, justice, compassion, and letting those values shape how we interact with the world around us. It's about being a blessing to others, being a channel of God's grace and peace in our families, our communities, even in our global interactions. So it's not about forcing our beliefs on people, but about just living in a way that reflects God's love and character.

Exactly. It's about letting our lives be a testimony to what the covenant can do, you know, showing the world what it means to be a part of God's family. Man, this has been an amazing journey.

We've gone from this ancient covenant with a nomadic patriarch to a promise that embraces all of humanity. It's incredible how it all fits together to reveal God's big plan for the world. It really shows how powerful and relevant Scripture is.

You know, even thousands of years later, these stories, these promises, they still speak to us, they challenge us, they inspire us, and the story's not over. The Abrahamic covenant, it's still unfolding, still rippling outward as more and more people encounter the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through faith in Jesus Christ. So as we wrap up our deep dive, what's the one thing you hope our listeners will take away from exploring the Abrahamic covenant? I hope they grasp just how vast God's love and faithfulness are.

You know, this covenant, it's a testament to his unwavering commitment to us humans, his desire to bless us and draw us into a relationship with him. And it's a reminder that we're not just watching this grand narrative unfold. We're active participants in it.

We're called to be agents of his grace and love out in the world. That's an amazing message to leave with. And as we go from here, let's remember that we're part of something way bigger than ourselves, something that started with a promise to a nomadic patriarch and continues to unfold in the lives of all who choose to believe.

Thanks for joining us. And until next time, keep exploring, keep asking those tough questions, and keep discovering the richness of the stories that shape our faith and our world.