

# **Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 24, Podcast Audio**

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

All right. So are you ready to dive deep? Today we're tackling one of the most intense stories in the Bible. Oh, yeah.

The Akita, the binding of Isaac. It's a big one. It is, right.

Genesis 22. We're going to unpack the whole narrative, look at different interpretations, and really try to understand what it tells us about Abraham. And our guide for this journey is a lecture by Dr. Robert Vannoy, an expert in Old Testament history.

A fascinating story, and one that continues to challenge us even thousands of years later. Right. I mean, right away you have to kind of grapple with big questions about faith and obedience and God's nature.

It's a lot. It's like God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. And this isn't just any son.

Right. This is the son who God promised would carry on the covenant, as a whole nation comes from this. Yeah.

That's got to create some conflict for Abraham, right? Absolutely. I mean, it throws a wrench in everything Abraham thought he knew, you know? God promised him descendants through Isaac, but now he's asking for Isaac back. And that's what makes it so interesting to interpret.

So walk me through some of those interpretations. I know one popular one is that whole God will provide idea. Right.

Yeah. That focuses on God's mercy and grace, right? So he steps in at the last moment and provides a ram, right? Yeah. A substitute.

Yeah. Right. So it really highlights that even when things look bleak, God will come in and kind of provide a solution.

It makes you think, like, how much are we in control versus a bigger plan? Yeah. But Dr. Vannoy mentioned other interpretations too, like one from Walter Kaiser. Right.

Kaiser really zeroes in on the test of faith aspect. Okay. He believes God's provision is central, but he kind of downplays the whole human sacrifice part.

Right. Which, I mean... That's a good point. Yeah.

It's strictly forbidden elsewhere in the Old Testament. Right. And it makes you wonder how people at the time reconciled those two ideas.

Right. But there's also Gerhardus Vos, who I understand has a very different take. Yeah.

Vos's interpretation is where things get a little bit more complicated. Yeah. He suggests that the Akedah actually implies that human sacrifice isn't inherently wrong.

Whoa. Okay. Hold on.

Which is a pretty controversial perspective. It is. Yeah.

Break that down a little bit more. Okay. So he's saying that ultimately this points to the concept of atonement.

Okay. Atonement. What exactly do we mean by that? Atonement basically means making amends for sin.

Right? Restoring a broken relationship. Okay. Now, Vos's interpretation raises eyebrows because it kind of suggests that God could actually endorse something that most people consider morally reprehensible then and now.

Right. So there's a lot of debate about that. Right.

And it makes you think about how religious thought changes. Right. So the Akita really is like a lens, you know, focusing on huge theological questions.

Yeah. And it's not just interpreting the story, but what those interpretations reveal about us and how we understand God. It really challenges us to think about our own beliefs.

Now, aside from the theology, the Akita also raises questions about Abraham himself. Right. Because he's seen as this hero of faith, but Dr. Van Noy says he wasn't without flaws, right? Absolutely.

Yeah. He had his share of human weaknesses. Right.

And those really come to light in those instances where he passes Sarah off as his sister, not once, but twice. But she's my sister episodes. That's going to be a tough situation for Sarah.

Yeah, for sure. And what's interesting is that Sarah's voice is absent in those narratives. Yeah.

We don't know how she feels about it. It's a good reminder that these stories come from a very different cultural context. Right.

And speaking of context, I know there's been some discussion about Sarah's age at the time. Yeah. She was 65, right? She was.

And Dr. Van Noy brings up the point that she was still considered very attractive at that age. OK. And he speculates that menopause may have occurred when she was 65.

Wow. Interesting. Lifespans were longer then in general, too.

Yeah. Right. He even brings up this recent news story about a 114-year-old woman.

That's crazy. But her age doesn't excuse what Abraham did, right? Right. So what happens is Pharaoh takes Sarah.

Right. Abraham gets gifts. And then God intervenes.

Right. Protects Sarah and ensures the lineage continues. Talk about divine intervention, right? Yeah.

Like, even when human actions seem to go against God's will, God intervenes. God's still there protecting. And this isn't the last time Abraham does the she's my sister thing.

The second time is in Genesis 20 with King Abimelech. And get this, it happens right before Sarah conceives Isaac. Wow.

So God is really emphasizing that he's going to fulfill his promise despite Abraham's deception. It really makes you think, like, how do we reconcile these flaws with him being the father of this nation chosen by God? It's really interesting, right? But before we get to Isaac's birth, I want to go back to the initial promise of a son in Sarah's barrenness, which is all in Genesis 15. And it's really important to understand the cultural context here.

Because back then it was common for a barren woman to offer her maidservant to her husband so he could have children. Right. Which I know sounds strange to us today.

But Dr. Vannoy makes it clear this was normal and even legally acceptable. It was. He even mentions this source called Chronicles News of the Past, which is like, imagine a historical newspaper.

I love that. Yeah. It's such a fun way to present these events.

It is. And he talks about an article called Sarah versus Hagar. Right.

And he even pulls from Hammurabi's code to show how normal this was. It's really helpful to have those concrete examples. It is.

Yeah. So Sarah offers Hagar to Abraham. Right.

They have a son, Ishmael, which seems like a solution at the time. Right. But ultimately they are still waiting for God's promise through Sarah.

Exactly. So that sets the stage for what happens next. It does.

And that's a good place to pause for now. Okay. So we left off with Sarah offering Hagar to Abraham.

Right. And they have a son, Ishmael. Yeah.

But we know that's not the end, right? No. Definitely not. And remember the whole thing with Elimelech? Yeah.

Where Abraham says Sarah's his sister again? Right. That happens right before Sarah gets pregnant with Isaac. Oh, wow.

It's like this perfectly timed moment where God's protecting the lineage, setting the stage for Isaac. It's almost like God is saying, don't worry. I got this.

Yeah, exactly. But back to the Akedah for a sec. Okay.

Dr. Vannoy made a point that really stuck with me. Yeah. Even when Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac, he still believed God would fulfill his promise somehow.

It's incredible. Right. Yeah.

That level of faith in God's power. Yeah. Even if it meant Isaac coming back from the dead.

Exactly. That's some serious trust. It makes you wonder if that's even possible today.

Yeah. It's a lot. But before we go too deep into that, I want to circle back to Sarah and Hagar.

Okay. We talked about how offering your maidservant was culturally acceptable back then. Right.

But what happened to their relationship after Hagar got pregnant? Well, things got complicated. Yeah. I mean, even though it was common, it doesn't mean it was easy for the women.

Right. Of course. You can imagine the jealousy, the power struggles, all that.

Yeah. Those are some pretty intense emotions. Yeah.

And the Bible doesn't shy away from showing that, right? Right. Sarah mistreating Hagar, Hagar resenting Sarah. Yeah.

It's a good reminder that even with different cultural norms, human relationships are messy. And always have been. Right.

So what ends up happening to them? Well, after Isaac is born, things get really bad between Sarah and Hagar. Okay. And Sarah actually demands that Abraham send them away.

Wow. That must have been a tough decision for Abraham. Oh, absolutely.

Sending away his son and the mother of his son. Right. But God reassures him that he will also make Ishmael into a great nation.

So even though Ishmael is not the son of the promise, God still has a plan for him. Exactly. It shows God's grace, you know, that he can work through everything.

Even the hard stuff. Exactly. And it makes you think about how we can't always see God's plan.

But Dr. Vannoy brought up something else that totally changed my view of the Akedah. He connected it to the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament. Oh, interesting.

Yeah. So he points to Genesis 15, where God makes a covenant with Abraham, and he passes between the pieces of a sacrificed animal. Right.

Symbolizing his commitment. Yeah. Powerful imagery.

Dr. Vannoy sees this as foreshadowing the Akedah. God provides a substitute sacrifice in both cases. And then he connects it to the New Testament, where it says, God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all.

Oh, wow. I see it. You see the parallel.

Yeah. Like Abraham being willing to sacrifice Isaac and God sacrificing Jesus. For humanity.

Yeah. It's like the Old Testament is hinting at these events. It's like a tapestry.

Yeah. Woven through history. Right.

Revealing God's plan. That's beautiful. But before we move on, I want to touch on something else about Abraham's character.

Dr. Vinoy says he had flaws, but ultimately sees him as faithful and obedient. Right. It's an important point.

Yeah. He wasn't perfect. No.

He made mistakes, had weaknesses. Right. But he was willing to follow God.

Yeah. Even when it seemed impossible. That's what makes him a hero of faith.

I think there's a lesson there for all of us, you know? Totally. We're all flawed. Yeah.

Make mistakes. We do. But that doesn't mean we can't experience God's grace.

Absolutely. Or that God can't use us. Right.

It's encouraging. Right. It's hopeful.

Knowing we don't have to be perfect to be used by God. Exactly. So, to wrap up this part of the deep dive, where do we go from here? Well, we've explored the Akedah, Abraham's tests, his character.

Right. Now, let's think about what it all means for us today. Okay.

How can we apply these lessons to our own lives? You know, it's amazing to me how these ancient stories, like the Akedah, can still resonate with us today. Oh, yeah. Like, even thousands of years later, they still provide these insights into faith.

I think they remind us of the struggles we face. Yeah, it does. You know, the questions we ask, people have been dealing with this for a really long time.

Right. And I think there's comfort in that. Yeah.

Knowing we're not alone. Absolutely. It's like a shared human experience.

But as we wrap up our deep dive into the Akedah, what are some of the key takeaways for you? What do you hope people listening walk away with? I think, first and foremost, I hope this has challenged everyone to really think critically about this story. Right. Because it's not simple.

Yeah. There are no easy answers. Right.

It forces us to consider really big things. Yeah. Like faith and obedience and even God's character.

It really does raise more questions than it answers, you know? Yeah. And that's okay. It is.

Yeah. It's about going deeper. Right.

Wrestling with these ideas and figuring out your own understanding of faith. I also hope people come away with a more nuanced view of Abraham. Yeah.

Because he wasn't perfect. He made bad choices. Yeah.

But God still chose him. Right. And he worked through those flaws to make his promises happen.

And that's really encouraging. It is. Yeah.

Because we know God can use us. Yeah. Imperfections and all.

Exactly. It makes me think about the promises in my own life, you know? Even when I don't see the whole picture. That's a great point.

It's easy to get caught up in our own limitations, but God's perspective is so much bigger. Right. He sees potential where we see flaws, possibilities where we see dead ends, and he can use even our mistakes.

It's incredible. Yeah. This has been such an amazing journey through the Akedah.

And Abraham's tests, it's just this powerful reminder that these ancient stories still have so much to teach us. Absolutely. About ourselves, about our faith, about our relationship with God.

That's what we love about these deep dives. I know. It's great.

It's about sparking that curiosity. Yeah. That passion for learning.

So as always, we want to leave you with something to think about. If God can work through someone like Abraham with all his flaws, what promises is he working out in your life? Even with our imperfections. Even with all of them.

It's a good question to reflect on. It is. Because we may not understand his ways or his timing, but we can trust that he is always working.

He is. That's beautifully said. Thank you.

And on that note, we'll wrap up this deep dive. Okay. Thanks for joining us.

Thanks, everyone.