

Genesis 22 – Akedah, Binding of Isaac

Dr. Robert Vannoy • Old Testament History • Lecture 24

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Abstract

Dr. Robert Vannoy's lecture on Genesis 22 addresses the Akedah (the binding of Isaac), highlighting the central theological theme that 'God will provide.' The lecture analyzes the ethical and theological debates surrounding the command to sacrifice Isaac, contrasting Walter Kaiser's focus on divine mercy and substitution with Gerhardus Vos's view on human sacrifice in the abstract. Additionally, Dr. Vannoy examines Abraham's moral lapses in claiming Sarah was his sister in Egypt and Gerar, using Near Eastern laws and archaeology to contextualize these deceptions and explain God's preservation of the covenantal line. This analysis covers ancient customs of wife-sister practices, camel domestication, and surrogate motherhood policies in Hammurabi's Code.

Outline

I. Introduction to Genesis 22 (The Akedah / Binding of Isaac)

A. Highpoint of Abraham's faith

B. The background of the command to sacrifice Isaac

1. Promise of the seed specifically through Isaac, not Ishmael (Gen 17:18-21; 21:12)
2. John Calvin's commentary on the tension between God's promise and His command

II. Theological Themes in Genesis 22

A. 'God Will Provide' (Jehovah Jireh / Yahweh Jireh)

1. Genesis 22:8: Abraham's assurance to Isaac
2. Genesis 22:14: Naming of the place after the ram's substitution
3. Translation and word study: Hebrew root 'to see' (passive form literally means 'in the mountain of the LORD it will be provided')

B. Anthropomorphic Expressions

1. Genesis 22:12: 'Now I know that you fear God'
2. Reconciling divine omniscience with temporal testing

III. Main Focus of the Akedah: Kaiser vs. Vos

A. Walter Kaiser's Ethical Perspective (Old Testament Ethics)

1. Prohibition and condemnation of human sacrifice (e.g., Molech)
2. Text introduced as a 'test' to aid the reader
3. Focus should remain on God's mercy, grace, and provision of a substitute rather than the ordeal

B. Gerhardus Vos's Theological Perspective

1. View that the command in the abstract implies human sacrifice cannot be condemned on principle
2. Argument that the OT deprecates the sacrifice of average, sinful human life, not human life as such

C. Kaiser's Rejection of Vos's Analogy

1. Contention that no post-Fall human life can function as a gift or blood atonement substitute to God
2. Re-emphasis on the narrative as a test of faith and demonstration of divine grace

D. Vannoy's Reflection and New Testament Parallel

1. Parallel between the Akedah and Golgotha (Romans 8:32: 'did not spare his own son')
2. Parallel with Genesis 15 (smoking furnace)
3. Abraham's total confidence: the conviction that God could raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill His promise (Hebrews 11)

IV. Abraham's Lapses and Failures: The 'She's My Sister' Deceptions

A. Introduction to Abraham's weaknesses

1. Biblical portrayal of heroes of faith as sinful men
2. God's grace and covenant overriding human failure

B. Genesis 12 Incident in Egypt

1. Famine forces migration
2. Deceptive strategy: representing Sarah as his sister to protect himself
3. Sarah taken into Pharaoh's harem; Abraham gifted with wealth

C. Genesis 20 Incident in Gerar with Abimelech

1. Reuse of the same deceptive tactic
2. Abimelech warned in a dream of death if he touches Sarah
3. Sarah released with her honor preserved

D. Nature of the 'Sister' Claim

1. A half-truth: Sarah was Abraham's paternal half-sister (Gen 20:12)

E. Chronological and Biological Questions

1. Sarah's age: 65 during the Egyptian famine; 90 during the Gerar incident
2. Discussion of beauty at advanced age, average life span (Sarah lived to 127), and speculation on menopause
3. Illustration from local history (Florence of Lansdale, PA, who died at age 114)

F. Significance and Divine Intervention

1. God's preservation of the promised line of seed despite human sin
2. Historical/Archaeological context from Joseph Free's Archaeology and Bible History
 - a. *Egyptian papyrus corroborating the danger of rulers killing husbands to take beautiful wives*

V. Archaeological and Legal Contextualization

A. The Question of Camel Domestication

1. Critical claims of anachronism regarding camels in Gen 12:16
2. Joseph Free's list of archaeological evidence for camel domestication long before Abraham
 - a. *Figured plaques, camel rope, hair, drawings, and bones dating back prior to 3000 B.C.*

B. The Context of Genesis 20 and the Birth of Isaac

1. Background of the imminent birth promise in Genesis 17 and 18
 - a. *'This set time next year,' 'at the appointed time,' 'according to the time of life'*
 - b. *Linguistic comparison with Elisha's promise in 2 Kings 4:16-17*
2. Protection of Sarah's purity to avoid any doubt of Isaac's paternity

C. Surrogate Motherhood and Slave Laws (Genesis 16)

1. Sarah's barrenness leads to taking Hagar after 10 years in Canaan
2. Parallels in the Code of Hammurabi and Nuzi Texts
 - a. *Legal rights and regulation of ranking between first wives and female slaves*
 - b. *Provisions for inheritance of children of slave wives when acknowledged by the father*