

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Sons of God, Map, Abraham 3 & 3 Kids Session 8, 6-min. Video Overview

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Welcome to the Explainer. Today, we are diving deep into Genesis, one of the oldest and, let's be honest, most confusing books in the world. We're going to see how understanding its ancient context, the world where these stories were first told, can unlock some of its biggest mysteries.

So here's the game plan. We're going to kick things off with a pretty wild story about giants. Then, we'll lay down a golden rule for reading any ancient text.

From there, we'll actually apply that rule to the life of Abraham. And we'll wrap up by seeing how modern archaeology is fact-checking history in some really surprising ways. Alright, let's just jump right in with one of the most puzzling and, frankly, just plain weird passages in the entire Bible.

We're talking Genesis chapter 6. So the text makes it sound like this was a world-breaking event. I mean, it was apparently so catastrophic that it's listed as one of the main reasons God decides to, you know, hit the reset button on all of creation with a giant flood. But what on earth actually happened here? You see, the whole meaning of this thing hinges on this one little phrase.

Who were these sons of God? And why was them getting together with human women such a massive problem? Well, over the centuries, people have come up with three main theories. Okay, so there are a few big ideas on the table. Were the sons of God just a godly family line mixing with a corrupt one? Or maybe they were powerful, abusive kings taking any woman they wanted.

Or, and this is the wild one, was it something supernatural like fallen angels having giant babies with humans? You can see how each of these views tries to explain why this was the absolute final straw for the ancient world. Alright, so how do we even begin to solve puzzles like this? Well, let's move on because the key is a single really powerful principle. And to show you what I mean, we're going to look at another famous story from Genesis, one that has been tragically, terribly misunderstood for centuries.

So the story goes like this. After the whole flood thing, Noah plants a vineyard, makes some wine, gets hammered, and passes out naked in his tent. His son Ham sees him, and instead of helping, he goes and tells his brothers all about it.

And this act of disrespect leads Noah to issue a seriously powerful curse. Okay, so here's the crucial point, and you really got to lean in for this. When you actually read the text carefully, the curse isn't on Ham, and it's not on his descendants who settled in Africa.

Nope. It's explicitly on his son, Canaan, whose descendants were the Canaanites, the future political rivals of the Israelites. So you see, this isn't some kind of racial curse.

It's a political prophecy, and it's totally rooted in the honor and shame culture of the ancient Near East. And that right there illustrates the golden rule for reading any ancient text. You just can't pull a verse out of its time and slap a modern lens on it.

You have to understand the historical, cultural, and literary world it came from. Like it says right here, context determines meaning. It's everything.

You know, sometimes understanding context also means spotting what we call anachronisms, things that are basically out of time. The city of Dan is a perfect example. See, scribes writing hundreds of years after Abraham would update the old place name Laish to the name their audience would actually recognize, which was Dan.

It's just like a modern historian writing that they met in New York City instead of using the old Dutch name New Amsterdam. It's not an error. It's just an update for clarity.

Okay, so with our golden rule, context is king, firmly in place, let's apply it to one of the most foundational figures in all of world history, Abraham. His entire life and his covenant with God can really be understood through three symbolic cuts that set him apart for a special purpose. First up, he has to completely cut ties with his past, his country, his culture, his whole extended family.

Then he takes part in this really intense ancient covenant ceremony where he literally cuts animals in half as a way of making a solemn oath. And finally, he accepts the cut of circumcision, a permanent mark on his own body, sealing the deal. You see how each cut represents a deeper and deeper level of commitment? So what does he get in exchange for this total life-altering commitment? He gets a three-part promise that echoes through the rest of the Bible and really through all of history.

He's promised a specific land for his people, descendants as countless as the stars in the sky, and a global blessing that would eventually extend to all of humanity through him. So we've looked at literary context, we've looked at cultural context, but what about the hard historical stuff? Let's wrap things up by looking at how archaeology has sometimes stepped in to shed light on details in these ancient stories, details that critics once just laughed off as pure fiction. Okay, check out these two classic examples.

For years, critics would say the Bible's wrong about Abraham owning camels. They weren't domesticated until way later. But then archaeologists digging at Ebla in Syria found tablets proving domesticated camels were being used 400 years before Abraham was even born.

Whoops. And it's the exact same story with the Hittites. They were basically considered a biblical fairy tale until, you guessed it, archaeologists literally unearthed the capital of their massive empire in modern-day Turkey.

So you see, whether we're talking about giants before the flood or a terribly misunderstood curse or even the history of camels, the lesson is always the same. To really, truly

understand these ancient texts, we have to do the hard work of stepping out of our world and into theirs. Context is the key that unlocks everything.

And that leaves us with one last thing to chew on. This whole skill, this habit of demanding context, it isn't just for dusty old books, is it? Just think: how much more might we understand about our own world, our own disagreements, even our own news headlines, if we just committed to digging for the full context before we jump to a conclusion?