

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Abraham: Sodom, Akedah, Jacob Session 9, 6-min. Video Overview

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Welcome to The Explainer. You know, this is where we get into the nitty-gritty of big ideas by going straight to the source. And today, we are diving deep into the book of Genesis.

And trust me, we're hitting some of its most challenging and maybe even weirdest stories. So have you ever read some of those stories in Genesis and just scratched your head? They can feel super ambiguous, right? Maybe even a little confusing. Well, what if they're not meant to be simple, straightforward tales? We're going to dig into the work of biblical scholar Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, because he argues that these stories show us something really profound about what faith actually is.

See, for Hildebrandt, it's not just about blindly obeying. Faith is actually framed as this complex, messy conversation. And get this, it's a conversation packed with things like negotiation, some serious deception, and tests you can barely even imagine.

Alright, so let's start with part one of this whole conversation. What we see here is a God who's actually, you know, willing to get in there and engage. And the heroes of the story? Yeah, they are a long, long way from perfect.

I mean, look at Abraham. He finds out God is about to wipe the city of Sodom off the map. And what does he do? He doesn't just sit back and say, okay, nope.

He starts haggling. He actually barter with God, negotiating him down from saving the city of Sodom to just 10. Can you believe that? So there's a term for this.

It's called anthropathic. And what's really wild here is that the text doesn't present this like it's just a storytelling trick. It's written like a real interaction.

The idea is that people, you and me, can genuinely impact God. We can influence him, whether it's through our grief, our anger, or, like Abraham, through some good old-fashioned negotiation. But listen, this whole back-and-forth, it's not some fairy tale about a perfect God and a perfectly noble man.

Not even close. I mean, the so-called heroes, the patriarchs, they are deeply flawed. You've got Abraham claiming his wife is a sister, and he does it twice.

Then there's Jacob, who cons his brother out of his entire birthright for a bowl of stew. And then he goes and deceives his blind old father to steal that brother's blessing. The point the text seems to be making is that God's big plan often works through these really imperfect, tricky, and sometimes downright cowardly people.

It's a messy, messy business. Okay, so this idea of a complicated, interactive faith, it all builds and builds until it hits this unbelievable climax. I'm talking about the story of Abraham and his son Isaac.

Now, think about this. For decades, God has been promising Abraham a son. He's been the great promiser.

And then, out of nowhere, he completely flips the script. He becomes the great tester, with one absolutely devastating command. And the way the story is told, it's just so stark.

It's cold. The text completely avoids telling us what Abraham is thinking or feeling. There's no description of his internal struggle at all.

Instead, it just lists his actions. Early the next morning, Abraham got up. That's it.

It just focuses on these plain, everyday details, which creates this incredible silence in the story. And it forces you, the reader, to step right into it. You know, he's saddled his donkey.

He cut enough wood. By giving us these totally ordinary details, the text creates this deafening quiet. It's an invitation, really.

It's asking us to supply the emotions to imagine the unbelievable weight and horror of that moment for ourselves. And then, the tension just becomes almost unbearable. Isaac, his own son, is literally carrying the wood for his own sacrifice when he turns to his dad and asks this innocent, absolutely heart-shattering question.

So you have to ask, right? What on earth is the point of a test this cruel? The answer, at least according to this interpretation, completely reframes what we think faith is all about. This story is so central to the tradition that it has its own name, the Akedah, which is Hebrew for the binding. And Dr. Hilbrand sees this as the final exam, the last stage in a really complex journey of faith.

So think of it in stages. First, there's easy faith, believing because you're going to get something good out of it. Then there's the faith of resignation, where you give something up, but you kind of convince yourself it wasn't that great anyway to make it easier.

But then there's pure faith. And this is where Abraham is. He's being asked to give up the precious, the one thing he loves more than anything, the thing he cannot devalue.

He can't just say, ah, I never really wanted a son anyway. This is the ultimate test. So why do it? The argument is that the goal wasn't about being cruel.

It was about forging a friend. This test, as horrific as it is, elevates Abraham to a whole new status. He becomes God's friend.

Think about this parallel. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only beloved son. And one day, God will sacrifice his only beloved son.

By going through this absolutely gut-wrenching experience, Abraham is brought into this incredibly sacred space. He is now one of the only people who can truly understand, who

can sympathize with the pain that God himself will one day feel. He's not just a follower anymore.

He's a friend who truly gets it. So when you look at it that way, this whole complicated, messy, incredibly painful story is so much more than just a simple test of blind obedience. Could it be about forging a relationship so profound, so deep, that you could actually begin to understand the very heart of God? It's about that interactive faith we talked about.

A struggle that, through the most difficult test imaginable, has the power to turn a follower into a friend.