

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 1, Introduction, Theistic Proofs

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to the Deep Dive. This time, you guys sent in some pretty fascinating stuff: lecture notes, course descriptions, even a glimpse into this professor's digital Bible project. So it seems like you're really interested in how we understand the Old Testament and not just, you know, the stories themselves, but like the historical context, how it all speaks to us now.

Yeah, it's like we've got this map leading us to these hidden depths in the Old Testament. We're going to be exploring how cultural language, even geography, can shape how we read these really ancient texts. Yeah.

Okay. So let's just dive right in. This professor, he starts off with this really interesting point about Adam.

He actually questions whether Adam was even called Adam. Given that the Hebrew language came about so much later, it really kind of blew my mind. It's a really good way to, like, shake up those assumptions.

You know, we often read the Bible through this modern lens, but to really grasp it, we need to like step back in time, see it through the eyes of the people who first heard it. Yeah, for sure. And he even asked the listener if they've ever had communication issues in a different culture.

I thought that was such a clever way to make this ancient text relevant. You know what I mean? Oh yeah, totally. Imagine landing in a totally foreign country.

You don't know the customs. You're unfamiliar with the language. You can totally misinterpret what people are saying you're doing.

And it's the same thing with the Bible. Right. Yeah.

And he gives these great examples in his lecture, like comparing Hebrew poetry to American poetry. They're totally different. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme or use meter the way we're used to.

And that difference isn't just a stylistic thing. It shows a totally different way of thinking, a different way of experiencing the world. To really appreciate Hebrew poetry, we need to understand the cultural context that created it.

And he also talked about how geographical location can even influence your worldview. He compared Tennessee to Massachusetts, and he said growing up in those places gives you a very different perspective. Yeah.

It's wild to think about how even the land itself can, like, shape people's beliefs and values. And I mean, if we can see these regional differences just within the U.S., imagine the differences between ancient Galilee and Jerusalem. Right.

So we're kind of starting to see that understanding the Old Testament isn't just reading the words on the page. It's like uncovering this whole other layer of cultural and historical context. It's like archaeology, but for meaning.

Totally. And as we like peel back those layers, we might even discover that some of our interpretations were kind of off base, but we'll definitely get a much richer, more nuanced understanding of what it all means. Okay, so let's shift gears for a sec.

The professor is clearly super passionate about making the Bible more accessible, and he created this thing called a Digital American Standard Version, the DACSV. Yeah. And this is where the story gets really interesting.

He talks about this visually impaired student who needed a 46-page test just because of the large font. Can you believe that? 46 pages. It really makes you think about the hurdles some people have to overcome just to access information.

And that experience, along with another student who was blind and needed an audio version, sparked this idea for the DASV [Digital American Standard Version]. He wanted to use technology to make the Bible available to everybody, no matter their ability. And the DASV is really something.

It comes in all sorts of digital formats: PDFs, Word documents, even HTML. He's recorded audio versions of the entire Bible. It's such a great example of how technology can democratize knowledge.

Yeah. Think about the impact for visually impaired people who learn best by listening, or anyone who just prefers digital formats. Yeah.

And he even talked about listening to audiobooks during his commute. I bet a lot of our listeners do that too. It makes you think, what other ways could we use technology to deepen our understanding of these old texts? That's a great question.

And it speaks to the innovative spirit of this professor. You know, he's not just teaching the Old Testament. He's finding new ways to make it come alive for people today.

And here's the thing. He's not even selling the DACSV. It's online for free.

And this is where you can see how dedicated he is to serving others. He talks about his background, you know, blue-collar roots, and his desire to make biblical knowledge accessible to everyone. He even joked about his wife- she's a CPA- teasing him for making zero profit on the project.

It's clear that this isn't about personal gain for him. This is about sharing the Word and helping others. His students must find that incredibly inspiring.

Oh, I'm sure they do. It's such a powerful example of putting faith into action, using your talents and your resources to make a real difference. I think we can all learn something from that, no matter our background or what we do for a living.

Absolutely. Now, speaking of helping others, this professor has this really unique approach to student learning. He has them transcribe lectures by famous scholars.

Yeah. And it's not just busy work. He specifically picks lectures that are relevant to the course and will benefit a wider audience.

It's like this big collaborative effort to create these valuable resources for the whole Christian community worldwide. His vision is amazing. He's really pushing them to go beyond just passively learning and actually contribute to something bigger than themselves.

It's about giving back, sharing knowledge, and building up the community. And he talked about how Gordon College, as a Christian institution, has this responsibility to use its privilege to help others. It's a powerful message about using your education and resources for something greater than yourself.

Right. It challenges us to think about our own roles and responsibilities. How are we using what we know and our skills to make a positive impact? What can we contribute to the world around us? So this professor, he's more than just an academic.

He's a mentor, an innovator, and someone who's super dedicated to serving others. But we can't forget that at the heart of all of this is his passion for the Old Testament itself. Exactly.

And he's not just interested in facts and figures. He wants his students to connect with the text on a personal level. He wants them to see the Old Testament as a living thing, a breathing word that speaks to us today.

And in the next part of our deep dive, we'll explore just how he does that. He uses personal stories, thought-provoking questions, even a bit of humor to help his students unlock the hidden depths of the Old Testament. It's going to be really interesting to see how he makes these old stories come to life for a modern audience.

And I think you'll even find some surprising connections to your own life and experiences along the way. You know, it's amazing how this professor brings together all that academic stuff with this really personal, engaging style. He even gets into some pretty tough questions about how the Bible's been, you know, transmitted and translated over the centuries.

Oh, yeah. I loved that part. He even jokes about how, like, God didn't write the NIV, which I thought was funny.

But he's making a good point, right? Like, all translations are done by people, and people make mistakes. Exactly. He reminds us that the Bible we have now, it's not like some magical thing that just dropped out of the sky.

It's the result of this long process of copying, translating, and interpreting. And at every step, there's room for human error or even just different ways of understanding things. Yeah, it's like a giant game of telephone.

But with, like, the most important message ever, he talked about how those original Hebrew texts had to be copied over and over. And every time there's a chance for a little slip up. Right.

And then think about translating from Hebrew to Greek, from Greek to Latin, and then finally to English. Every translation has its own unique set of challenges and nuances. It's not just swapping words.

It's about trying to capture the true meaning and the spirit of the original. And he even mentioned how different English translations can disagree with each other, which can be really confusing. I've definitely been there.

It just goes to show that there's no one perfect translation. Each one has its own strengths and weaknesses. And you know what? Engaging with different versions can actually give you a deeper understanding of the text.

It's like looking at a painting from different angles. I never thought of it that way. That's a great analogy.

Okay, so we've talked about translation. What about the historical context of the Old Testament? The professor seemed really big on that, too. Yeah.

He really emphasizes that to understand the Old Testament, you need to understand the world in which it was written. He's all about using archaeology and comparing ancient literature to understand the world of the Bible. So it's like we're putting together a puzzle, using all these different pieces to get a clearer picture of what life was like back then.

Exactly. By looking at the cultures and the civilizations surrounding ancient Israel, we get a much deeper understanding of their beliefs, their practices, and their worldview. He even gave this fascinating example about how the Book of Deuteronomy is structured a lot like the Hittite treaties from that time period.

Wow. So the Bible is reflecting the literary style of its time. That's pretty cool.

Right. And it shows that the Bible wasn't written in a bubble. It was part of this larger cultural and historical world.

And by understanding that world, we can appreciate the artistry and the depth of the text even more. Okay, so this is where I got really interested. The professor goes into the different proofs for God's existence.

He says you can't definitively prove it, but he presents some pretty compelling arguments for why believing is reasonable. Yeah. He doesn't shy away from the big questions, does he? He starts with what's called the cosmological argument, where it's all about cause and effect.

It basically says that everything needs a cause. And if you keep tracing back those causes, you eventually reach a first cause, which he identifies as God. Right.

And I remember he used this simple example. If you see a person, you assume they have parents. He pointed out that even with in vitro fertilization, there's still a chain of causes going back to some origin point.

Exactly. And he takes that same logic and applies it to the universe itself. Yeah.

He's saying that the universe existing needs an explanation. And the most reasonable explanation is a powerful and intelligent creator. Okay.

But what about people who ask, well, what created God then? How does he address that? That's a great question. He actually anticipates that question and says that the first cause, God, by definition, is uncaused. It's a tricky concept to grasp, but it's a key part of the cosmological argument.

I see. So it's in a different category altogether. Exactly.

Now, he also talked about the teleological argument. Which is based on the idea of design. He calls it his jolly green giant argument, which I have to admit, I found pretty funny.

Me too. It's not every day you hear a theological argument compared to a giant green vegetable. So remind me, what's that one all about? So imagine a giant shaking a building full of chairs and then setting it down.

What are the chances that all those chairs would land perfectly arranged, like in a classroom or an auditorium? Pretty slim. It would be chaos, right? Exactly. And he uses that to illustrate the incredible order and complexity we see in the universe.

He argues that it points to a designer. He compares it to finding a perfectly formed rock structure in the wilderness. You wouldn't think it just happened naturally.

You'd recognize it as something someone built. So he's saying that the universe is like that rock structure, but on a much bigger scale. And the hands, in this case, belong to a creator.

Precisely. He argues that the design of the universe, from the laws of physics to the balance of ecosystems, all of it points to a creator. And he's careful to say that this intelligent design idea is not just a religious thing.

It's a perspective shared by a lot of respected scientists. He even mentions William Dymfemsky, who has two PhDs from the University of Chicago, as one of the leading proponents of intelligent design. That's pretty impressive.

It is. And he also talked about a lecture by his friend, Dr. Perry Phillips, who has a PhD in astrophysics from Cornell and is going to discuss the Big Bang Theory and how it supports the idea of a creator. It's like he's saying, hey, science and faith don't have to be enemies.

It's refreshing to hear that because it seems like those two are always at odds. But this professor seems very comfortable with both his faith and his intellectual pursuit. Absolutely.

And he encourages his students to do the same. He shows them how to value critical thinking, being open-minded, and being willing to grapple with the big questions. It's about having the courage to explore different viewpoints and to hold on to your beliefs with conviction, but also with humility.

His classroom must be a really dynamic and engaging place. I'm starting to wish I could sit in on one of his lectures. Me too.

You know, what strikes me is that even though he clearly loves these intellectual debates, he never loses sight of how important personal spirituality is. You mean it's not just about having all the answers, but about having a relationship with God. Exactly.

He emphasizes that the Old Testament is so much more than just stories and rules. It's like a love letter from God, a way for him to reveal his character and his heart to us. He wants his students to approach the text with wonder, to see it as an invitation to a deeper relationship with the divine.

And he doesn't just talk about it. He shares personal stories to show how the Old Testament connects to his own life. Yes.

He makes it so relatable by showing how these ancient stories are still relevant in the 21st century. He wants his students to see that the Bible isn't just some old book. It's a living thing that can speak to us in powerful ways today.

I love that he encourages people to approach it with an open mind and heart, to not be afraid of the tough questions or the parts that seem confusing. He's all about honesty and being real. He reminds his students that it's okay to have questions, to struggle with difficult passages, to even disagree with some things they read.

He sees that as part of the journey, not a sign of weakness. So it's like he's giving them permission to be themselves, to bring their whole selves to their study of the Old Testament. Absolutely.

And that's such a valuable lesson, not just in faith, but in life in general. It's about embracing the messy parts, the complicated parts, the questions without easy answers. Yeah.

It's like he's saying, come as you are, bring your doubts, your questions, and let's explore this together. I think that's a really beautiful approach. But how does he handle the parts of the Old Testament that people might find problematic or even offensive by today's standards? That's where his emphasis on understanding the culture and history really comes in.

So he doesn't try to sugarcoat those parts or explain them away? No, not at all. He confronts them head-on, but he really wants his students to look at them through the lens of the culture and time period they were written in. He reminds them that the Bible was written thousands of years ago in a very different world than ours.

Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, we wouldn't judge Shakespeare by today's standards, would we? Exactly. He wants his students to wrestle with those tough parts, to ask the hard questions, to think about different interpretations.

But he always brings them back to the core message of the Old Testament, which is God's love and faithfulness. It's like he's saying, don't get so lost in the details that you miss the bigger picture. That's a great way to put it.

And it's not about ignoring those difficult parts. It's about engaging with them honestly and thoughtfully, and letting them help us understand both the text and ourselves better. So he's creating this safe space for his students to really explore these complex issues.

But out of everything we've talked about, what stands out to you the most? What really hit home? You know, honestly, it's his passion. It's contagious. He obviously loves the Old Testament, and he wants his students to love it too.

And you can see that love in everything he does, from his lectures to his digital Bible project. Yeah, I totally agree. It's not just about teaching.

It's about sparking something, a curiosity, a desire to dig deeper. He's a true teacher in every sense of the word. He's not just giving information.

He's inviting them to go on this journey of discovery with him. And he's not afraid to be vulnerable, to tell personal stories, to make jokes, to just be himself. It makes him feel so relatable.

For sure. He's breaking down those walls between academics and the real world, showing that the Old Testament is relevant to everyone, not just scholars and theologians. The fact that he created the DASV and made it free is truly inspiring.

It says a lot about his character and his desire to serve others and to spread the word of God. It really reminds you that knowledge is most valuable when it's shared, and it challenges us to think about how we can use what we have to help others, just like he's doing. Maybe that's one of the big takeaways from this deep dive: that studying the Old Testament isn't just an intellectual thing.

It's about connecting with something bigger than ourselves, engaging with ancient wisdom, and finding ways to make it relevant to our lives and our world. This has been such an amazing exploration. We've learned so much about the history and culture surrounding the Old Testament, the difficulties of translation and interpretation, and the importance of personal faith.

We've seen how technology can open up these ancient texts to more people, and how working together can create resources for Christians all over the world. But more than anything, we've been reminded that the Old Testament is a living word that still speaks to us today. It's a source of wisdom, inspiration, and challenge.

And it invites us to deepen our relationship with God and understand ourselves and the world around us better. As we wrap up this deep dive, we want to encourage you to continue exploring the Old Testament. Read it with a fresh perspective.

Question what you think you know, and let yourself be surprised and challenged by its message. And as you go deeper into this ancient wisdom, think about this. How might the Old Testament's themes of justice, mercy, and covenant shape how you see current social and political issues? It's something worth reflecting on.

That's a great question to think about. Until next time, keep diving deep.