

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 7, Genesis 3, Fall, Cain/Abel

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, everybody, to another Deep Dive. Yeah. Today, I was going to be looking at Genesis Chapters 3 and 4. And we're going to be using as our source material a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, and it's on Old Testament history, literature, and theology.

And he just has a really fun way of making these ancient texts come alive. Yeah, I love Hildebrandt. Yeah, and he always brings in personal anecdotes as well as the academic side of things.

And so it's going to be fun. So we're going to be looking at the fall of man, Cain and Abel, and even kind of laying the groundwork for the flood, which we'll be talking about in a later episode. Yeah, these early Genesis stories, they really are foundational for so much of what comes later.

Yeah. And there are so many little questions, I think, that come up when you're really digging into these and trying to understand what's going on here. One of the things I always kind of trip up on is: how did eating the forbidden fruit make Adam and Eve more like God? Right.

Because that's what the serpent's saying, you know, you'll be like, God, knowing good and evil, but how does that actually work? Yeah, and it seems like the opposite. And he uses this really powerful analogy; he says it's like the difference between a 16-year-old and a 22-year-old. Okay.

The 16-year-old often feels invincible, you know, like actions don't really have lasting consequences. But by the time you're 22, hopefully life has taught you a few hard lessons about the weight of your choices. Yeah.

And that's what Adam and Eve experienced in that moment. That makes me think about the difference between knowing something intellectually versus actually experiencing it and understanding it on a deeper level. Yeah, there's that transition from innocence to experience.

Yeah. And that experience included shame, fear, and a fractured relationship with God. Hildebrandt even uses this theological term he talks about: Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Okay. And he says, before the fall, Adam and Eve experienced that closeness with God, and they walked and talked with him in the garden. Right.

But after the fall, there's this separation, and God becomes what he calls Absconditus. Absconditus. The hidden God.

Wow. Yeah. So it's not just humanity's internal state that's changed, but our relationship with the divine is altered as well.

It's like a door closed that was once wide open. Exactly. And Hildebrandt argues that much of the rest of the Bible is about this movement of God seeking to reopen that door.

Okay. To restore that broken relationship. Wow.

And it's not just humanity that's affected either. Oh, right. Because it talks about the earth being- it's back.

Remember Romans 8.22? I don't know it off the top of my head. It says the whole creation groans, longing for redemption. Yeah.

So the earth itself bears the weight of sin. That makes me think about natural disasters and just the struggles that we experience. Absolutely.

It's like this ripple effect. Yeah. This cosmic consequence that impacts everything.

But is there like a glimmer of hope? There is. Amidst all this fallout? There is. And Hildebrandt points us to the Proto-Evangelium in Genesis 3.15. And remind me what that is.

This is where God promises that the woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head. Okay. It's the first hint of a redemptive plan.

A promise of ultimate victory over evil. And it comes right on the heels of the fall. Wow.

Offering this hope in the midst of despair. Okay. And this idea of fighting against the curses of the fall is central to Hildebrandt's message.

Okay. He doesn't believe we should just passively accept the consequences of sin. Right.

But rather actively seek to overcome them. Okay. So how do we do that? Well, he gives a few examples.

Okay. One is that he challenges the notion that we should just accept pain and childbirth. Okay.

Because that's part of the woman's curse. Right. He says, "No, we should use medicine to ease suffering.

Okay. It's like saying, yes, this is a consequence of sin, but we're not going to let it define us. Right.

We're going to fight back with the resources we have. Yeah. Another example he gives is in the realm of work.

Okay. He encourages us to pursue work that aligns with our passions. Okay.

That brings meaning and purpose to our lives. Right. He talks about finding that sweet spot where vocation and passion intersect.

Yeah. I love that. It's an inspiring message.

It is. Yeah. Because it's not just about enduring work is this tedious consequence of sin.

Right. But rather finding fulfillment and purpose in it. Yeah.

Now, there's another fascinating point he makes about the woman's curse in Genesis 3.16. Okay. That verse says, "Your desire will be for your husband. Okay.

And he will rule over you. Right. That's been a very controversial verse.

Yes. Very much so. With lots of different interpretations.

Exactly. Some people focus on the sexual desire aspect. Right.

Others on the idea of subservience. Yeah. But Hildebrandt rejects both of those.

Okay. So what does he say then? He points to the same phrase used in Genesis 4.7. Okay. Where God speaks of sin desiring Cain.

Okay. And he says, this isn't about healthy desire; it's about a power struggle. Oh.

So it's not just like, you know, I desire my husband romantically. Right. It's more like, I desire to control him.

Exactly. It creates this parallel with the serpent's temptation. Oh.

Okay. Remember, Eve was tempted with the desire for power. To be like God.

Yes. To be like God. And now we see that same dynamic playing out.

In the human relationship? Precisely. Okay. So instead of this romantic or subservient interpretation, it's about this struggle for control.

Okay. So is that just ingrained in us now because of the fall? It's a consequence of the fall. Yes.

So what are we supposed to do with that? Well, Hildebrand believes we should actively fight against this curse. Okay. So how do we do that? And the way to do that, he says, is not by trying to grab more power.

Okay. But by choosing to serve one another. Oh.

He uses the example of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Right. It's a radical act of humility and service.

Yeah. It completely flips the script on traditional notions of leadership. So instead of this, like, tug of war for control.

Exactly. It should be more like, how can I serve my spouse? That's the question we should be asking. How can I contribute to the well-being of this relationship? Right.

It's a total reframing of the dynamic. It is. And that shift in perspective can make a world of difference.

Yeah. Because instead of viewing marriage as a battleground. Right.

It becomes an opportunity for mutual growth and support and love. Exactly. And that's a powerful message.

It is. Yeah. Especially considering the challenges so many couples face.

Now, let's talk about the curse on the man. Okay. I think this is interesting because Hildebrandt points out that work itself wasn't the curse.

That's right. Adam was tasked with taking care of the garden before the fall. Exactly.

It was supposed to be a joyful, fulfilling endeavor. So what was the curse then? The curse isn't work itself, but the futility of work. Okay.

That feeling that no matter how hard we try, it's all ultimately meaningless. Right. That it's all going to turn to dust anyway.

And that connects to death ultimately. Exactly. Death is the ultimate consequence of sin.

Yeah. And Hildebrandt gets really personal here. Does he? He talks about his own father's battle with cancer.

Oh, wow. And his own deep aversion to death. Mm-hmm.

Raw and honest. Yeah. But then he shares something so beautiful and hopeful.

Okay. I'm intrigued. What is it? He says that Jesus came to earth and essentially said, "What's your biggest problem? Death.

Okay. All right. Watch this.

I'm going to conquer death by dying. Oh, wow. And through his resurrection, he offers us hope beyond the grave.

That changes everything. It does. It's a complete reversal of everything we thought we knew about the power of death.

Yeah. So even though we experience the pain and brokenness of the fall, we have this incredible promise of redemption and restoration. It's not about wallowing in those consequences.

It's about clinging to that hope. Exactly. Now, before we move on to the next part, we need to unpack another story.

Yes. And that is Cain and Abel. The first murder in the Bible.

Yes. And Hildebrandt has some really fascinating insights that challenge a lot of traditional interpretations of this very tragic tale. I can't wait to hear them.

Yeah. So this is where we see the consequences of the fall play out in a very real and devastating way. I like it.

It's about sibling rivalry, jealousy, anger, and the ultimate consequences of unchecked sin. Yeah. And we'll get into that right after this.

Okay. So Cain and Abel, this is one of those stories that always leaves me with way more questions than answers. It's a tough one.

Yeah. We have Cain the farmer offering some of his crops to God and Abel the shepherd offering a lamb. Mm-hmm.

And for years, I just assumed that Cain's offering was rejected because it wasn't a blood sacrifice. Yeah. You know, the whole idea is that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

Right. But Hildebrandt actually says that's a common misconception. Really? Yeah.

He points out that God accepted grain offerings elsewhere in the Bible. Oh, he did? Yeah. He even commanded them in Leviticus.

Huh. Okay. Interesting.

So it wasn't the... That was the problem. Right. So what was it then? It seems like it was more about the who.

It was about Cain himself. Yeah. Hildebrandt suggests that Cain's heart wasn't right.

Like he was harboring all this jealousy and anger towards his brother, and those negative emotions tainted his offering. It's like, it's the thought that counts. Yeah.

It's not just about going through the motions, but the heart behind it. Your internal state, your motivations, those matter. And that brings us to that infamous question that Cain asks after he murders Abel.

Oh, yeah. Am I my brother's keeper? It's a question that's haunted humanity ever since. It really has.

Like he's trying to convince himself that he has no responsibility for his brother's well-being. Yeah. It makes you think: do we have a responsibility to care for others, even those outside our immediate family? It's a huge question.

It is. And forces us to confront our values and beliefs about community, compassion, and social responsibility. Yeah.

Are we free to just focus on our own needs and desires? It's not an easy question to answer. No, it's not. But the story of Cain and Abel forces us to at least grapple with it.

And this whole idea of grappling with these really difficult questions, with complex relationships. This is something that Hildebrandt highlights throughout Genesis. What does he say? Well, he points out this recurring theme of sibling rivalry.

Oh, yeah. It's everywhere. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau.

Leah and Rachel. Joseph and his brothers. It never ends.

Yeah, it's like this never-ending saga of family drama. I bet he's got a good story. He does.

He tells this really funny anecdote about his own childhood. Oh, I love his stories. I know, right? So his brother threw a butter knife at him.

Why? I know. And it got stuck in his arm. Ouch.

I know it's kind of gruesome, but he tells it in such a funny way. Yeah, he does. But it just reminds us that these dynamics between siblings, they're timeless and universal.

We've all been there. And, you know, it's interesting that Cain's punishment for murdering Abel is also a form of isolation. How so? Well, he's cursed to wander the earth, separated from his family, from his community, and from God.

He's all alone. Yeah. And Hildebrandt connects this to the modern-day phenomenon of people moving frequently.

Okay. You know, feeling rootless. Always searching for a sense of belonging.

Exactly. Yeah. That makes sense.

Yeah. I mean, our modern mobility offers freedom and opportunity, but maybe it comes at a cost. Yeah.

This feeling of being unmoored, of lacking a true home. Right. I think that can really impact our sense of identity and well-being.

And it goes all the way back to that theme of separation from God. Yeah. That began with Adam and Eve hiding in the garden.

Like a chain reaction. Yeah. Each act of disobedience further separates us from our divine source.

And that brings us to another really intriguing passage in Genesis. Okay. Genesis 6. The sons of God taking wives from the daughters of men.

Yeah. What's going on there? Right. It raises so many questions.

Who were these sons of God? Yeah. And what were the implications of this intermingling? It's one of those passages that has sparked endless debate. So what does Hildebrandt say? Well, he offers three possible explanations.

Each with its own set of theological and historical implications. So does he pick one? No, he actually leaves it open. Yeah.

He encourages us to wrestle with the text, to engage with its ambiguity, and to come to our own conclusions. I really like that about him. Me too.

He's not trying to force a definitive answer. Right. It's more about sparking our curiosity and inviting us into the conversation.

And speaking of ongoing conversations, the story of the flood picks up right where this one leaves off. It does. It's like God hits the reset button.

Yeah. But as we'll see, the same patterns of sin and redemption continue to play out. Even after the waters recede.

Yeah. It's a powerful reminder that human nature, in all its complexity and contradiction, is a constant- it's throughout history. Yeah.

That struggle between our better angels and our darker impulses, it continues to shape our story. A story that feels both ancient and incredibly relevant. It does.

To our lives today. Let's dive into the flood and its aftermath. Okay, so the flood, I always think of it as this massive event, but Hildebrandt makes it really personal when he talks about the violence that was happening in the world before the flood.

He points to that detail in Genesis 6, where it says the earth was filled with violence because of the sons of God intermarrying with the daughters of men. Right. It's a direct connection.

So he's saying that the sons of God taking wives from the daughters of men led to this violence. That's what it seems to be implying. Wow.

And I thought this was really interesting. The Hebrew word for violence that's used there is *hamas*. Wow.

That's a- yeah. Yeah. That has some pretty strong connotations.

Yeah. So it's not just like a random word choice. It really carries a lot of weight.

It does. And I think it makes you think about the roots of violence. Yeah.

You know how it spreads and corrupts and how it can ultimately lead to devastating consequences. And in this case, the consequence is this massive world-altering flood. Right.

Like, God, grieved by this pervasive violence, decides to essentially wipe the slate clean. It's a cosmic reset button. But even after this dramatic intervention, human nature doesn't just magically change.

No, we see that right away with Noah's sons. Oh yeah. That's right.

That story with Ham. Yeah. It always made me kind of uncomfortable.

Yeah. It's a weird one. So Noah plants a vineyard after the flood, right? Mm-hmm.

And he has a little too much to drink. He gets drunk. Yeah.

And ends up naked in his tent. Okay. And Ham, one of his sons, sees him in this state.

Oh. And tells his brothers Shem and Japheth. Okay.

So why not just cover him up? Right. Exactly. It seems so disrespectful.

Yeah. Like he's almost mocking his father. Yeah.

Using this moment of vulnerability against him. Right. But instead, Shem and Japheth go in backward so as not to see their father's nakedness.

Okay. And they cover him with a cloak. That's better.

Yeah. And when Noah wakes up, he finds out what happened, and he curses Ham's son, Canaan. This is where it gets tricky.

Because there have been so many different interpretations of this story. And some have been used to justify really horrible things like slavery and racism. Right.

It's important to acknowledge that historical context. Yeah. And how this story has been misused.

Absolutely. But Hildebrandt steers clear of those interpretations. Okay.

And really focuses on the theme of honor and respect. Okay. Particularly within families.

So what's he getting at? Well, he points out that Shem and Japheth acted honorably. They protected their father's dignity. Even when he was in a compromised position.

Exactly. They showed respect for their father and for the boundaries of family. Okay.

Yeah. That makes sense. And this whole idea of respect for boundaries.

Right. For authority for your parents. It's a recurring theme in the Bible.

It is. And the consequences for dishonoring those boundaries, for disrespecting that authority. Right.

They can be severe. As we see with Ham and Canaan. Right.

It's a cautionary tale. It is. But it also makes you think about curses.

You know how they play out across generations. Right. Because is it fair for Canaan to bear the weight of his father's transgression? It's a tough question.

Yeah. It raises all these issues about justice and accountability. And even after this fresh start.

Yeah. This cosmic reset. Yeah.

We see those same struggles. Yeah. Between obedience and disobedience.

Blessing and curse. It's like humanity has this opportunity to do things differently. Mm-hmm.

But the potential for sin is still there. Yeah. It's woven into the fabric of human nature.

Yeah. That makes me think about our conversation about the fall. Right.

And how it impacted not just Adam and Eve but all of creation. It's like this tension between good and evil. Yeah.

It's always present. And that's why Hildebrandt emphasizes Genesis 1 through 3. Yeah. It really sets up the whole biblical narrative.

It does. It's this ongoing story of God's love for humanity. Right.

His desire to be in relationship with us. Yeah. And our constant tendency to mess things up.

Yeah. We're good at that. But even when we mess up, even when we choose poorly, God doesn't give up on us.

Yeah. He keeps pursuing us. Offering redemption and restoration.

Exactly. And so that's where the story of Abraham comes in. Right.

He's chosen by God to be the father of this great nation. A nation that will be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

New chapter in this ongoing saga. Yeah. Story of hope and promise.

Amidst the struggle. Okay. So before we wrap up, I have to ask.

Yeah. What's that final thought-provoking question that Hildebrandt leaves us with? He reminds us that the Bible isn't just a collection of stories. Right.

It's this grand narrative. Yeah. Of God's redemptive work in the world.

Right. And he asks, how does understanding this redemptive movement change your perspective on the stories and characters? Wow, that's a good one. It challenges us to look beyond the surface.

Yeah. To see how these stories are all interconnected. And to consider how they contribute to this larger overarching theme.

Of redemption and restoration. Yeah. It makes me realize that we're not just passive observers of these stories.

But we're active participants. In this ongoing dialogue. Yeah.

Between humanity and the divine. Exactly. Wow.

I'm definitely going to be pondering that. Me too. As I continue to explore the Bible.

It's a lifelong journey. It is. Well, thank you so much for taking this deep dive with us.

It was my pleasure. We'll see you next time for another fascinating exploration of who knows what awaits us. That's the beauty of it.