

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 8, Sons of God, Map, Abraham 3 & 3 Kids

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Welcome to another Deep Dive. You guys are going to be exploring the book of Genesis, specifically chapters six through 17. Some really fascinating stuff in there.

Yeah, really fascinating stuff. And we are using as source material today a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt. His Old Testament History, Literature, and Theology class.

Yes. And so we're not just talking about the surface-level stories we all know, like Noah's Ark and- yeah, the flood. Adam and Eve.

Eve and Eve. We're really going to dig deep today. We're going to get into some things you may have never heard of before, like the Nephilim and- ooh, yeah.

Even Melchizedek. A very mysterious character. Yeah.

So I'm excited to get into this. What about you? Yeah, me too. I think this is going to be really interesting for people to hear, especially those who maybe are familiar with these stories, but haven't really had the chance to dig deep into them.

Yeah, absolutely. And Dr. Hildebrandt, he's great at that, and he even talks about how some of his interpretations have evolved over time. Oh, yeah.

Which I thought was really cool. Well, I think that's a good sign of a good scholar, too. Yeah, absolutely.

When they're willing to go back and revisit some of the things they may have thought they knew. Right. You've got to be open-minded.

You've got to be willing to- yeah, absolutely. Accept new evidence and new perspectives. That's right.

So, okay. Well, let's dive right into one of the biggest mysteries in Genesis, and that is the sons of God and the daughters of man. Right.

Now, Genesis 6 describes these two groups intermarrying, and that ultimately leads to divine judgment and the great flood. So what on earth are we to make of this? Well, you know, it's a passage that has sparked countless debates over the years and tons of different interpretations, but there are a few sort of main theories about what this could mean. And the first one we'll talk about is called the Sethite view, and in this view, the sons of God are the righteous descendants of Seth, and the daughters of men are from the ungodly line of Cain.

Oh, interesting. So it's like a cautionary tale about the dangers of believers, you know, mingling with non-believers. So you're saying it's like a warning against being unequally yoked, as the New Testament puts it.

Exactly. Yeah. It's that idea of, you know, not compromising your faith or your values.

Yeah, and that can lead to all sorts of problems, right? Exactly. Okay. So that's the Sethite view.

But another interpretation was called the kingship view. And in this view, the sons of God are actually powerful kings who abuse their authority by taking multiple wives and creating harems. Right.

And this is a view that, you know, connects with the idea of kings in ancient Mesopotamia, often claiming divine lineage. Oh, interesting. So it kind of fits with the historical context as well.

Yeah. And then it also kind of resonates with later biblical stories that highlight the problems associated with polygamy. You know, like Solomon.

Oh, yeah. With his 700 wives and 300 concubines. I mean- can you imagine? Can you imagine the family drama? Oh, my goodness.

Oh, my goodness. Okay. So that's the kingship view.

But then there's a third theory that's really captured people's imaginations. Yeah. And this is the angel view.

And this one proposes that fallen angels took on human form and intermarried with women. Right. And possibly giving rise to the Nephilim.

Right. Those giants. The giants mentioned in the Bible.

Yeah. So this is where it gets really wild. Yeah.

It does. And, you know, this interpretation draws on other biblical passages that mention sons of God- right. Presenting themselves before God.

And, you know, this idea that maybe we can encounter angels without even knowing it. Like they could be walking among us. Exactly.

It's a very mysterious- it's a spooky thought. It is. And it's something that's, you know, been explored a lot in art and literature and film and all that kind of stuff.

So- absolutely. It's a popular one for sure. Yeah.

And Dr. Hildebrand actually points out that the Hebrew word for violence used in Genesis 6.1 is *Chamas*. The same root word as the modern-day group Hamas, known for its, you know, militant activity. So- it's interesting how these ancient words- it makes you wonder about this connection.

The cyclical nature of violence throughout history. Throughout history. Yeah.

Absolutely. But he also cautions against getting too hung up on definitively proving any one of these theories. Right.

He says, you know, some biblical mysteries remain open to interpretation. Yeah. I mean, and that's, I think that's part of what makes studying the Bible so fascinating.

Yeah. You know, it's not always about finding a black-and-white answer. Right.

It's about wrestling with the text and, you know, engaging in the process of exploration and discovery. Yeah. What resonates with you the most? That's a good question.

I think for me, it's less about, you know, nailing down one specific interpretation. Yeah. And more about just appreciating the different layers of meaning.

Right. And how, you know, these ancient stories can still challenge us today. Absolutely.

Yeah. Okay. Well, speaking of challenging, let's move on to something that might surprise some people.

And that is the idea of divine grief. Okay. Genesis 6.6 says, The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

So this is a powerful image of God experiencing genuine sorrow and pain. Yeah. It really challenges, you know, that image of God as this distant, impassive being.

Aloof. Yeah. Aloof.

Exactly. It suggests that, you know, God is deeply invested in his creation and actually affected by the choices that we make. It's a very personal God.

Yeah. Very personal. It makes me think of that Eric Clapton song, Tears in Heaven.

You know, he wrote it after the tragic death of his young son. And it just, it makes me wonder: if God can experience grief, does that mean there are tears in heaven? That's a tough question. And, you know, Revelation 22 talks about God wiping away every tear.

So it implies that even in heaven, there will be a need for comfort and healing. So even in the midst of, you know, future joy and perfection. Yeah.

There's an acknowledgment of the pain and suffering that we experience in this life. That we go through. Which is, I don't know, I find that kind of comforting, actually.

Yeah, I do too. It suggests that our experiences, even the difficult ones. Yeah.

Aren't meaningless to God. That's right. He sees them; he feels them.

Yeah. He's with us in them. Okay, well, let's shift gears now and talk about a passage that's often been misinterpreted.

Okay. And even misused to justify some horrific acts. All right.

And that is Noah's curse on Ham. Yeah. This is one where, you know, understanding the historical and cultural context.

Yeah. Becomes really crucial. Yeah, absolutely.

We don't want to just impose our modern values. Modern-day values and assumptions onto these ancient texts.

Absolutely. So let's set the scene. Noah emerges from the ark after the flood, right? He plants a vineyard.

He's enjoying the fruits of his labor. Maybe a little too much. Ends up passed out naked in his tent.

All right. His son, Ham, stumbles upon this scene. And instead of, you know, discreetly covering his father, he runs off to tell his brothers.

Now, this is where the cultural context comes in. You know, in many ancient cultures, shame and honor were paramount. Exposing someone's nakedness, especially a parent, was a grave act of dishonor.

Oh, wow. It wasn't just a matter of, you know, seeing someone naked. It was a deliberate act of humiliation.

Like a violation. A violation. Of their dignity.

Exactly. And to understand how seriously this was taken, Dr. Hildebrand actually mentions this concept of corporate personality. Okay.

Where the actions of an individual can have consequences for the entire group. Now, this is a concept that, you know, might be difficult for us to grasp. Yeah, especially for us as individuals.

Yeah, living in a modern Western society. Right, we're all about. But in many cultures, identity is deeply rooted in the family or the clan.

Yeah, it's like a collectivist versus individualist mindset. And what one person does reflects on the whole group. It's like if your family was held accountable for something your distant cousin did, even if you had nothing to do with it.

Right. It's a different way of thinking about things. And Dr. Hildebrand brought up a really powerful example of this.

He talked about, you know, an Afghan farmer whose home is raided by U.S. Marines because of the actions of the Taliban. Oh, wow. Even though he may have nothing to do with the Taliban.

Right. He's still judged based on his group affiliation. That's a tough situation to be in.

It is. It's a very tough situation to be in. And it makes you think about, you know, the complexities of justice and responsibility.

Yeah. And how our actions can have these unintended consequences. Yeah, a lot to think about there.

A lot to think about. Okay, so going back to Noah. He wakes up, finds out what Ham did, and pronounces a curse.

Not on Ham himself, but on his son, Canaan. Okay.

And this is where things get really complicated. Because, unfortunately, this passage has been used for centuries to justify the enslavement of Africans. Right.

The logic went: Ham's descendants settled in Africa. Noah cursed Canaan. Yeah.

Therefore, it's okay to enslave Africans. That's a very dangerous misinterpretation. This interpretation is deeply flawed.

Yeah. And completely ignores the actual context of the curse. Yeah, you have to look at the whole picture.

You have to look at the whole picture. And Dr. Hildebrand is very clear that the curse is specifically on Canaan. Whose descendants settled in the land promised to the Israelites.

He suggests that this curse foreshadows future conflicts between the Israelites and the Canaanites. Interesting. And it's important to note that he connects this curse to the concept of *lex talionis*, which is the law of retaliation, often phrased as an eye for an eye.

Right. So he's suggesting that Noah is essentially saying, as you have shamed me, Ham, so your son will shame you. It's like a form of poetic justice.

Yeah. And the consequences of Ham's actions ultimately fall on his descendants. Exactly.

But Dr. Hildebrandt also points out that we need to be cautious about applying this ancient concept of *lex talionis* to our modern legal systems. Yeah, our understanding of justice. Right.

Our understanding of justice has evolved significantly. Has evolved a lot since then. Since then.

So we can't just take these ancient laws and plop them down in our modern context. Right. We have to be careful about that.

It's an interesting story. I think so, yeah. Let's meet Abraham, the man called God's friend.

Now that's a fascinating title. It is. It makes you wonder what it really means to have that kind of relationship with God.

Right. After all the drama and destruction of the flood, it's time for a story of hope and new beginnings. Absolutely.

Yeah. It is a story of hope and new beginnings, but it's also marked by a series of challenges and difficult choices. Dr. Hildebrandt describes them as cuts, like moments where Abraham has to leave behind the familiar and step out in faith.

Oh, wow. Like what? Well, the first and most dramatic cut comes when God calls Abraham to leave his homeland, his family, everything he knows, to travel to a land that God will show him. Wow.

Can you imagine just picking up and leaving everything based on a promise? Right. Talk about uncertainty. Yeah, and trust.

So God calls Abraham to the Ur of the Chaldees. Okay. And he's going to the land of Canaan.

And Dr. Hildebrandt points out, you know, this wasn't just like a, you know, a short trip. He talks about, you know, the geography of the ancient Near East and mentions, you know, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and these key cities like Haran and Mori. He even mentioned that there might've been two Urs, a northern and a southern one.

Yeah, isn't that interesting? It really is. It's like we're still piecing together so much about ancient history. It is.

It's like a giant puzzle. It is. And, you know, he talks about how archaeologists have uncovered thousands of ancient tablets at sites like Nuzi and Mari.

Wow. And these tablets, you know, give us incredible insights into the customs and culture of Abraham's time. I love it when those discoveries confirm details that we find in the biblical narrative.

Me too. It's so cool. Like it's all coming together.

Yeah. All right. So Abraham sets off on this epic journey, doesn't know exactly where he's going, but trusting in God's promise.

Right. Okay. And then along the way, he has this really intriguing encounter with this mysterious figure named Melchizedek.

Yeah. Who is this guy? Well, he's described as the king of righteousness. Okay.

And the king of Salem, which later becomes Jerusalem. Okay. He appears to Abraham after Abraham rescues his nephew Lot from a group of warring kings.

And what makes this encounter so significant is that Melchizedek blesses Abraham in the name of God Most High. Okay. So he's acknowledging the same God that Abraham worships.

Right. Even though he's not part of Abraham's family or tribe. Exactly.

And here's the really interesting part. Melchizedek is both a king and a priest. Well, hold on.

That's a big deal because it foreshadows Jesus, who is also both king and priest. So it's like this little glimpse of God's plan of salvation that extends beyond just the Jewish people and encompasses all nations. It's interesting to think about how God is working through people of different backgrounds and cultures.

Yeah, it really is. And Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes that this encounter shows us that, you know, God's grace and favor were never meant to be limited to one particular ethnic group. Oh, that's a powerful message.

Especially when you consider how religion has been used to divide people throughout history. Okay, so after meeting Melchizedek, Abraham experiences another pivotal cut. Another cut.

All right. This one involves a covenant ceremony where God makes a promise to Abraham, sealed by passing between the pieces of a sacrificed animal. Now, this ritual, as jarring as it might seem to us today, you know, was a common way to make a covenant binding in the ancient world.

Yeah. I am so committed to this promise that I am willing to be cut into if I break it. Oh, wow.

That's a powerful image. It is, isn't it? Yeah. It really shows you the seriousness.

So what did God promise Abraham? He promised him three things. Land ascendance, as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Blessings for all nations through him.

So it's a legacy that continues to shape the world even today. Exactly. I wonder if there are any, you know, modern-day ceremonies or rituals that echo this ancient practice of, you know, symbolic cutting or binding.

Maybe marriage vows or even signing a contract could be seen as, you know, distant descendants of these ancient covenants. Yeah. It's fascinating to think about how, you know, these ancient practices might still influence us in subtle ways.

Yeah. Okay. Moving on to the third cut in Abraham's life.

All right. Cut number three. We come to the topic of circumcision.

Oh, yes. Which Dr. Hildebrandt handles with his characteristic blend of sensitivity and humor. He does, doesn't he? Yeah.

Always a good combination. Yeah. He even shares a funny story about a student asking him to explain circumcision in class.

Oh, I can imagine that. Highlighting the fact that it can be a sensitive and even uncomfortable topic to discuss. Yeah, definitely.

But it's important to understand its historical and religious significance within the context of Abraham's story. So circumcision was a physical sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Okay.

It was a way of visibly marking their belonging to God's chosen people. And Dr. Hildebrandt also points out that, you know, circumcision is connected to the practice of infant baptism in some Christian traditions like Presbyterianism. Yeah.

Both are seen as signs of inclusion in the covenant community. It's interesting how these rituals have evolved over time and how they continue to hold symbolic meaning for people of different faiths. Right.

And what I find particularly fascinating about God's covenant with Abraham is that it's unconditional. God's promises to Abraham are not dependent on Abraham's perfect obedience. So it's like a testament to God's grace and faithfulness.

Exactly. Wow. That's a powerful message of hope.

Yeah. Like we don't have to earn God's love or favor. It's freely given.

Right. Wow. Okay.

Let's address the elephant in the room, or rather the camel in the tent. Okay. The Bible, as we know, has its fair share of critics, those who question its historical accuracy.

Right. Those who say it's just a bunch of made-up stories. Exactly.

But Dr. Hildebrandt points out how archaeological discoveries have often supported the biblical narrative. They have. Give us an example.

Okay. Well, one example he gives is the claim that camels weren't domesticated early enough for Abraham to have owned them. Right.

I've heard that one. Yeah. But archaeological evidence from Abla dating back to 2400 BC has shown that camels were indeed domesticated much earlier than previously thought.

Okay. So score one for the Bible. What other examples does he have? Another criticism used to be that the Hittites mentioned several times in the Old Testament never existed.

Okay. For example, archaeologists discovered the Hittite capital Bogazköy in Turkey. No way.

Along with a whole Hittite language and culture. Oh, wow. That's amazing.

It really is. Talk about a discovery that rewrites history. Right.

It just goes to show you that our understanding of the past is constantly evolving as new discoveries are made. That's so true. And we should approach ancient texts with humility.

Absolutely. Recognizing that there's always more to learn. Always more to learn.

Okay. Is there anything that the critics have sort of gotten right? There's one criticism that even Dr. Hildebrandt admits is a bit tricky. Okay.

I'm listening. It has to do with the mention of the city Dan in Genesis 14.14, which describes Abraham pursuing the kings who captured his nephew Lot. All right.

The problem is that the city wasn't named Dan until much later in the biblical timeline during the time of Joshua. Oh, really? It was originally called Lachish. So, like an anachronism.

Exactly. It's a detail that's out of place chronologically. Dr. Hildebrandt suggests that the text might have been updated at a later date, perhaps by someone like Joshua, who would have been familiar with the city of Dan.

Okay. It was a way of clarifying the location for readers who might not have known the older name Laishish. So it's like if I was writing a story today and I referred to a place as Salem Village, most people wouldn't know what I was talking about.

Right. But if I said Danvers, everyone in Massachusetts would know exactly where I meant. Exactly.

It's like that. Interesting. Okay.

So now let's talk about family dynamics. Okay. Abraham's story involves not one, not two, but three sons.

Three sons, right. Each born under very different circumstances. And this is where we have to, you know, really put our modern assumptions aside and try to understand the cultural norms of the ancient world.

Yes. Very different time. Very different time.

Very different culture. So who is son number one? So the first son we encounter is actually not a biological son at all. It's Eleazar of Damascus, Abraham's servant, who, according to ancient customs, would have inherited all of Abraham's possessions.

Wow. So even though he wasn't a blood relative, he was still considered like an heir. Exactly.

Ancient law codes like Hammurabi's Code highlight how important inheritance and lineage were in those days. You know, having a son was seen as essential for carrying on the family name and securing the future of the family's wealth and status. Wow.

So when God promised Abraham that he would have a son, even though he and Sarah were well past their prime, that was a pretty big deal. Huge deal. Yeah.

But before that promise was fulfilled, Sarah, being the proactive woman that she was. Yeah, she was. She came up with a plan.

Oh, boy. She suggested that Abraham have a child with her servant, Hagar. Oh, wow.

Now, this practice, you know, we might call it surrogacy today. Right. It was a way for a couple to have a child and ensure an heir if the wife was unable to conceive.

Right. It was a socially acceptable practice back then. It definitely pushes the boundaries of our modern sensibilities.

Yeah, it does. But it's important to understand that this was not considered adultery in that culture. It was a way to, you know, fulfill God's promise in their minds, I guess.

I guess so. So Hagar gives birth to Ishmael. Right.

And for a while, it seems like things are going according to plan. Right. But then the unthinkable happens.

Oh, boy. What now? Sarah miraculously conceives and gives birth to Isaac, the long-awaited son of promise. The plot thickens.

Oh, yeah. You can imagine the tension and the drama that unfolds after that. Yeah.

Jealousy rivalry. Yeah. And ultimately, Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away.

It's a heartbreaking story. Yeah, it is. It really highlights the complexities of family dynamics, even in biblical times.

It does. But, you know, even though Ishmael was born outside of the covenant promise, God still protected him and Hagar. He did.

It's a reminder that God's compassion and care extend to everyone, even those who are marginalized or cast out. I like that. Yeah, that's a good point.

Yeah. Okay, so now we've got Isaac. The son of laughter.

Yeah, his name means laughter, right? It does. Because both Sarah and Abraham laughed in disbelief when they learned they would have a child in their old age. It's a beautiful image of God's faithfulness and his ability to do the impossible.

Yeah. But it also sets the stage for some future challenges and tough decisions for Abraham. Because, as we know, God isn't finished testing his friend just yet.

That's right. There's more to come. Yeah.

It really is amazing how much Abraham's story kind of, you know, just touches on these, like, timeless themes. Yeah. You know, faith and family and just the challenges of obedience and, you know, the power of God's promises.

Yeah. And the stories of his three sons, Eliezer, Ishmael, and Isaac, offer this fascinating glimpse into, like, you know, the complexities of inheritance and lineage and just cultural norms in the ancient world. It makes you wonder how we would even navigate these same challenges today.

Oh, gosh, I know, right? Especially with all the advances we've made in reproductive technology. Oh, my gosh. Can you imagine Sarah and Abraham, like, sitting down with a fertility specialist today? I know.

What a conversation. Okay. But I think one of the most important takeaways from Dr. Hildebrandt's lecture is this question he poses at the end.

And that is, given all the, you know, complexities we've been discussing, what do you think it truly means to be God's friend? Right. Like, what does that even mean? As Abraham was called. Yeah.

It's a question that really challenges us to move beyond just the surface level of the stories, you know? Right. And to really grapple with the deeper implications of faith and obedience and, you know, trust in the face of the unknown. Yeah, because let's face it, you know, being God's friend isn't always easy.

No, it's not. Abraham faced some serious trials and made some tough choices along the way. He did.

He definitely wasn't perfect. No, not at all. You know, he doubted; he questioned.

Right. He even made some mistakes that had, you know, lasting consequences. Yeah, but through it all.

But through it all. He kept coming back to God, seeking guidance and, you know, striving to follow his leading. Yeah.

And I think that's what makes his story so relatable and inspiring. You know, it's a reminder that we don't have to be perfect to be in a relationship with God. Right.

He meets us where we are in all our humanness. Right. And walks with us through, you know, the ups and downs of life.

I love that. Yeah, it makes me think that, you know, maybe being God's friend is less about achieving some level of, you know, perfection. Yeah.

And more about just, like, being willing to journey with him, to trust him. Yeah. Even when things get messy or uncertain.

Absolutely. It's about that ongoing relationship. Yeah.

That open communication. Yeah. That willingness to, you know, keep showing up and saying, OK, God, what's next? That's a beautiful way to put it.

Yeah. Yeah. My brain is like bursting with new insights and questions after this deep dive.

Thank you. It's amazing how these ancient stories can still speak to us so powerfully today. So to all of you listening out there, we encourage you to keep pondering this question.

What does it mean to be God's friend? And as you go about your day, as you encounter challenges, you know, as you make decisions, maybe just kind of think about how Abraham

might have approached those same situations. What can we learn from his example? And if you discover any new insights, be sure to share them with us. We would love to hear your thoughts.

Until next time, keep diving deep.