

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, OT History, Lit., and Theology, Lecture 15

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This is Dr. Ted Hildebrandt in his Old Testament History Literature and Theology course. Lecture number 15, on the book of Numbers.

A. Quiz Preview [0:00-0:54]

Class let's get started, for next week you guys are working on the book of Judges and Ruth. Judges and Ruth go together. There will be articles, we may be back to *Our Father Abraham* and there may be memory verses. So largely it will be Judges, Ruth, articles, the normal routine that we go through. So get that down and we'll make progress then with the books of Judges and Ruth that will be setting us up for the transitioning to the monarchy after that.

B. Interracial Marriage and the OT [0:55-6:03]

Today we've got a lot to go through as we'll be hitting the book of Numbers. We're going to be hitting some pretty interesting and difficult concepts today so let's jump into it. Numbers chapter 12: let me just read this to you and it's regarding interracial marriage. Interracial dating, by the way, I realize in our culture now the interracial thing is not a big deal but it has been in the past at various times and it was in the past for ancient Israel.

So here we are in Numbers 12 and it says: "Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife." Now what is a Cushite wife? The land of Kush is generally said to be the land of Ethiopia. What color are folks from Ethiopia?—Black. So Moses' brother and sister, Miriam and Aaron, are both older than he was. Remember his older sister when he was a baby and getting floated down the river? His older sister took care of him. Aaron was his older brother. So "Aaron and Miriam began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite." Now some people think that's Ethiopia and that Moses had remarried. Do you remember that his wife took off on him after the circumcision of their son. His wife disappeared from the narrative. Some people think she went back home and that Moses remarried someone else and it was a Cushite that he had remarried. Other people think that this is Zipporah.

In other words, Miriam and Aaron had not really met Zipporah very much, and therefore they were upset because she was a Midianite. Jethro was a Midianite. She was the Midianite but Midianite can be cast as Cushite. Cushite is a bigger category. Midianite is like a tribal name. So it's possible this is Zipporah. In either case, I'm going to suggest she's dark skinned. That's part of the issue here and so Cushite is possibly Ethiopia. They say, “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?” The Lord heard this and at once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam ‘come out of the tent of meeting all three of you.’ So the three of them came out and the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and he stood at the entrance of the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam and both of them stepped forward. He said to them ‘listen to my words.’” Then let me just see if we've got this. So what does the Bible say about this topic of interracial marriage in regard to Moses and his Cushite wife? This kind of sets it up. But then God switches this discussion here to their prophetic function because Miriam and Aaron are challenging Moses.

The Lord said, “Listen to my words. When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions.” How does God reveal himself to a prophet? In visions. He says, “I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.” So are we going to see the prophets dreaming dreams and we are we going to see the prophets use visions. What's the difference between dreams and visions? Dreams are at night when your asleep. Visions are when your wide awake and you see a vision. That's how God deals with prophets but then notice what he says here: “I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams; but this is not true with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face.” So God says, “with prophets I use dreams and visions, but with Moses we go face to face.” Is that a pretty big statement about Moses? Is Moses a unique prophet in the Bible. God goes to him head to head, face to face.

“With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles. He sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” So God rebukes Miriam and Aaron for what they did. Now, this raises another question here and I want to suggest to you that there's kind of ironic justice here. There's some irony here.

“And the anger of the Lord burned against them and he left them and when the cloud lifted above the tent there stood Miriam leprous, like snow.” You say, “Hildebrandt why do you say that’s ironic justice?” Here’s my take on this. Miriam gets upset with Moses’ black wife and God says, “Miriam, you like white? You like white? OK, I’ll make you white Miriam, I’ll make you real white.” He turns her skin “leprous, white as snow.” So I think there’s a play on this thing here. God says, “You like white I’ll make you solid white.” She becomes leprous and so I just take that as humorous irony.

Why wasn't Aaron struck with anything? Aaron doesn't get it here. Some people say why does he pick on women, is it possible Miriam was the main spokesperson. But is it also possible that what’s the problem with Aaron getting leprosy? Aaron is the what? He’s not just a priest. Aaron is the high priest. Aaron's the high priest for the nation. If he gets leprosy that's not good as it would affect the whole nation. So Miriam gets the leprosy and Aaron gets off the hook but he’s rebuked by God. This is a passage about the interracial marriage so what I’m saying is be careful about condemning interracial marriage. Aaron and Miriam did it and it had pretty serious the consequences. God got on their case.

C. Moses and Humility and the authorship of Num. 12:3 [6:04-13:14]

Now, there’s a verse I skipped here, and I want to kind of raise it. I skipped chapter 12 verse 3, this verse is used to show that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. Moses could not have written this verse in chapter 12 verse 3. It says in the midst of this conflict between Moses, Aaron and Miriam you get this statement. Now who's writing this I'm suggesting that Moses is writing this and here's the statement. How could Moses have written this? “Now Moses was a very humble man.” Now is Moses writing this: “Now Moses was a very humble man”? Does something strike you about that? People had conflicts with and they ask: how could Moses write that? That would be a very arrogant statement? “Now Moses was a very humble person.”

By the way, what is the nature of humility and what is the nature of pride? Is pride easy to see in somebody else? Is it almost impossible to see in yourself? Pride is very easy to spot in somebody else, very difficult to see inside yourself. This means then that

if you're dealing with pride as an issue, are you going to discover it yourself? Probably not. What do you need to help you? Now here's the religious answer, the Holy Spirit and that's a good answer. Do you need a friend? Would a friend be able to tell you whether you are proud and arrogant? Would a friend be able to see it in you?

Once upon a time I asked my wife the question. It's the last time I asked that question, she told me the truth. Does she know me? Yes, she does. I was thinking we had this loving relationship she'd be kind and gentle. She pulled out both guns and bam! That's the last time I asked that question. But what I'm saying is most likely she got it right. Can she see the contours of pride and arrogance in me. The answer is yes. So what I'm asking, do you have to have the ears to hear good friends telling you stuff? Be careful about pride and humility. Now Moses writes this statement. Is it possible for a humble person to know they're humble? I suppose it's possible.

Now let me read the rest of the verse: "Now Moses was a very humble person more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Now he's humble but more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. You got to be kidding me. Is that an arrogant statement? Now you say God told him to write it, so he just wrote it down. So how do you work with this verse. Some people say Moses could never have written this verse. This verse doesn't come from the pen of Moses. It would be odd from the pen of Moses. Is it possible that Joshua is writing this in here? By the way is Joshua going to finish the book of Deuteronomy? Where is Moses at the end of Deuteronomy? He's dead. From what I've been told it's pretty hard to write when you're dead. So Moses didn't write the ending of the book of Deuteronomy. So Joshua probably wrote the end of the book of Deuteronomy. Is it possible the Joshua went through these narratives and made comments at points? So is it very possible that Joshua could have said, "Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth." Is it possible that Joshua would have looked up to Moses and Moses was his mentor. So that's a very likely statement from the person of Joshua. So it's possible. By the way, the NIV puts it in brackets just to say that it may have been an insertion from Joshua or something like that.

Here's another way to look at it. Could a humble person write this. We've asked

that question before. Is humility really the issue? He's being attacked by his brother and sister, is humility really the issue? I'm not sure humility is really the issue. There's another way to translate this. This word *'oni*. It can also be translated another way. It can be translated not "humble," but that Moses was more "oppressed." The word that's translated "humility" here can also be translated "oppressed." Let me read this verse like this now with the word "oppressed" instead of "humility." The word can mean either. "Now Moses was a very oppressed man more oppressed than anyone else on the face of the earth." Could Moses have written that statement? Yes.

Moses is saying, "the people of Israel are on my case and I'm sick and tired of these people asking me for food and for water. The people are one thing, now my brother and sister are on my case and so now even my own family is doing this to me." So Moses was feeling more oppressed then. So if you take it in the sense of "oppressed" it fits Moses and it fits the context here really well. So to be honest with you I like that translation. Now what's the problem? Your NIV, your NSRV, your King James all say "humility" and Hildebrandt says "oppress" which one's right? No, actually, you realize Dr. Wilson did part of the NIV and Wilson's never wrong. That's just about the honest truth. But what I'm saying is that I've got to back off. It can be translated "humility." It may be "oppressed" so frankly I think it says "oppressed" but I could be wrong; all the other translations say "humility." So I've got to have a little humility here and say "oppressed" myself. I give it about a 60-40 split. I'm not saying it dogmatically or anything. I think it's probably right but I could be wrong too. But I like it, because I think it fits the context better.

D. Sending out the Spies into the Promised Land [13:15-14:14]

We're entering chapters 13 and 14 this is after Numbers 12, where Moses is described as the most humble man on the face of the earth. In chapters 13 and 14 Moses is going to send out spies into the land, and these chapters 13 and 14 are huge chapters in the Old Testament. This is absolutely huge because they're going to go out and spy out the Promised Land. Remember, you guys are the land of Israel. You guys are Jordan, sea of Galilee, Dead Sea. You guys are Israel. You guys are the Mediterranean Sea. They're

sending out spies from a place called Kadesh Barnea. Kadesh Barnea is down over here in the northern Sinai desert, and they're sending the spies up into the Promised Land right to here where this fellow is scratching his neck. He's Hebron. They're going to come up to Hebron and they're going to get these phenomenal grapes that are good even to this day. They're going to come back carrying these grapes back from the Promised Land.

E. Can God change his mind? Is God static or dynamic? [14:15-18:43]

So let's just kind of go through some questions then on this spying out of the promised. There's some questions that I want to ask of the text in Numbers chapters 13 and 14. First question is: can God change? If God is perfect, how can he change? Is God static or is God dynamic? Dynamic would have more the sense of change, static would have more the sense that God is fixed, he can't change. So God, is he static or is he dynamic? What does the text say? Is it possible for him to think or interact? How does God think or interact with people as part of change is when you go back and forth talking to people that you change and you interact with. How is relationship possible with someone who never changes?

What never changes? Have you ever had a relationship with a rock? Did you ever have a pet rock? Now you can talk all you want to the rock, you can pet it, dress it up and be nice to it but it's still a rock. The rock never changes so after you're done with it, you say, the rock is still the rock. How do you have a relationship with something that doesn't change. It's a problem, right? I don't care in whatever movie if the guy never changes its going to be a problem. So, here we go.

If he's dynamic, you say God does interact with people, if he is dynamic, in what sense or areas is he dynamic. Is everything up for grabs? I mean could God change everything? I mean if he gets up one morning and says, "you know I've been good all my life. You know being good is really boring, I want to have an exciting day maybe I'm going to try being bad today. I'm going to be bad and have some excitement today." If God wants to be bad, can he do that? It kind of goes back to those philosophical questions, what can't God do? Can God make a rock so big that he can't pick it up? You say well that's brilliant. There must be no God then because if God can't make a rock

that's so big that he can't pick it up so he must not be all powerful. Do you understand embedded in the question is the contradiction. So it's a dumb question is what it amounts to. But can God change everything about himself, or are there certain things that God can't change within himself and how do you work with that? Does God still experience choice, can God make a choice in the now? And you say, "Hildebrandt what does now mean for God." We're in this thing with time but can God make a choice now or did God make all his choices before the foundation of the world? Therefore now he's just trucking through I made these choices a long time ago so now I'm just going through this, this, this, and this. So now God's just going through what he chose a long time ago. Can God choose now, or were all the choices made already? So these are some kind of questions that come up with this.

F. Sending the Spies [18:44-21:45]

Now, here's the story Numbers chapter 13: Giants in the land. Was Moses wrong for sending out spies into the land? Someone once told me that Moses was wrong for sending out spies into the land because he should have just trusted God and gone up there and taken the land without sending out the spies. Why is that not right? Because in Numbers chapter 13 it says, "the Lord said to Moses 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan.'" Who told Moses to send the spies out? God did. So Moses was not wrong. By the way, would Joshua send spies out into Jericho? You guys have already read that! Joshua sent out spies and then they went and took Jericho. There's nothing wrong just because one serves God doesn't mean one has to be dumb. So you send out spies to spy over the land to see how you're going to take the territory. So God told them to send out the spies.

When the spies go out what did they see? A beautiful land chapter 13 verse 26 and following they go out and they see a land flowing with milk and honey. I love this phrase have you ever heard this phrase before "the land flowing with milk and honey?" I always get a kick out of this because when you guys hear milk, you guys think "Cow." Question, how do cows do in the desert? When it's talking about milk is it talking about cow's milk? No. What kind of animals do you have in the desert? Goats. So when its talking

about milk its talking about goats' milk, not cows' milk. When its talking about honey you guys are sitting there thinking about nice honey you pour out of the jar it's all this sweet honey. A lot of people think this milk is goat milk and this honey is date jam. In other words, they take the dates and beat them up into this jam that's really sweet. But the problem is if you tell Americans they go up to the Promised Land of "goats milk and date jam," every body's going to say I don't want to go up there. Let's stay down here and go to McDonalds. But that's probably the truth. It's "goats milk and date jam." Cows are up in the area of Bashan area.

G. Kadesh Barnea [21:46-29:33]

Actually I should tell you a story about Kadesh Barnea. Once upon a time I went to Israel and I was developing this program called *Get Lost in Jerusalem*. So my son, Zach, and I were shooting these pictures and we went down along here in the south by Egypt, and we pulled up to a checkpoint which was Egypt on the other side and Israel on this side. The Israeli soldiers came up and I said we want drive down this road. There was a road that went down and I wanted to drive down this road because down this road was this 2000 foot tall mountain that I could climb up and get a picture of Kadesh Barnea. Now why is Kadesh Barnea so significant? There's a spring there and when the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness where did they wander around? Kadesh Barnea right there. I could get a picture of it from up on this mountain even though its in Egypt I could shoot down. It's about 20 miles down.

So we pull up to the checkpoint and the guy says: "Hey, I can't let you in there because you have to either have an Israeli soldier with you or you got to have a gun. We didn't have a gun, so I thought. Stink I came all the way from America this guy's not letting me in there. I know this road goes down in there. So my son and I go about a half mile back down the road and I see this dirt road going off to the side so I thought to myself, "you know I bet you anything that dirt road goes around that checkpoint." I thought, "nuts on this, I didn't come all the way from America, I'm going to do this." So we get in this little car going down this dirt road you know rocks bouncing all over the place and guess what, it went right around the checkpoint they never saw us. So we get

back on this one lane road. There are not two lanes, one lane. We drive up it about 50 miles down, we get up on this mountain and I got the shot of Kadesh Barnea. I got it. Now, as were going down the Egyptian soldiers are driving back and forth on their Humvees and they've got machine guns and my son's screaming at me, "dad were going to get killed these guys are right there they can shoot us." We're under 50 yards away. So he's freaking out about these guys but obviously they didn't shoot us. We got there. We got the pictures. So he was harassing me about these machine guns and getting shot. So I thought he's desperately afraid of heights and I know that and this road is literally eight feet wide that's the whole road so we're going up on this mountain and I come to this place and I notice there's a couple hundred foot drop so I pull the car up right on the edge of it. I hop out and say, "Hey, Zach, let's get a picture. He opens the car door and its 400 feet straight down." You said, you wouldn't do that to your kid? I've been there, done that. You could just see the terror on his face he looks down straight down. There were no guard rails.

But that wasn't the real problem that was just for fun. Now, what happens is you drive about 150 miles down and now what the real problem is I come up to the checkpoint below Beer Sheva. Now what's the problem. On which side of the checkpoint am I now? I come down the road and I pull up to the checkpoint but what's the problem now. I'm on the do not trespass territory and I'm on the wrong side of the checkpoint and I pull up. So here's what you do when your caught and I thought, "O man, we are so fried. This is really bad because now we got to get out but we can't get out because we're in this no trespass zone kind of thing. So that's when you play the really stupid American. I'm just a dumb American. So I pull up and I say does anybody know where Beer Sheva is around here? Well, Beer Sheva is here, obviously I know the land like the back of my hand. The guy looks at me, what do you mean Beer Sheva? Well, I say we must be lost we can't find our way to Beer Sheva. Where is that? How do I find that? And also I understand Hebrew. Can I hear him talking in Hebrew to these other guys? I can understand what he's saying. He thinks I'm an American. Well, I could hear him it wasn't too good what he said. So then this sergeant guy pulls up and he says,

“Well, I'm going to Beer Sheva you can follow me.” So I say “OK, thank you, thank you. So we follow him up and got out of that mess but that was pretty tricky actually and that wasn't too much fun.

So the Israelites come up to Kadesh Barnea into the land. They bring back all these grapes saying, “Here is the fruit of the land, it's the land flowing with milk and honey.” But what's the problem? They've got grasshopper vision. They say basically chapter 13 verse 33 thereabouts it says, “we seemed like grasshoppers” to these Anakim and Rephaim. Do you remember these giants that are in the land? “The Anakim and Rephaim and we seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes and we seem the same to them.” These people up there are so big they'll squash us like grasshoppers. We can't go up there; there are giants up there. So they bail out.

Then comes the accusation against God. By the way, when the 12 spies went up there, who were the only two that didn't bail out? These names are important. Caleb and Joshua. Will Joshua take over for Moses after Moses passes off the scene. Caleb, did you guys read anything about Caleb in the book of Joshua? Do you remember Caleb got his own land, all the other people over 40 are going to die. Caleb, I call him the “dog man” Caleb means “dog.” Is this guy is a fighter, and do you remember even in his old age he's about 75 years old he says, “I'm going to go out and take the land just like when I was a kid. He comes out even when he's an old man taking over his territories. He's ready to fight for his land. So he's really a courageous person. God blesses both Caleb and Joshua.

But the people come up with this accusation against God in chapters 13 verses 3 and 4 check this out: “Why is God bringing us to this land only to fall to the sword, our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “we should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” By the way, does God get frosted at them for this bailing out on him? When they're ready to enter the Promised Land, they would not trust him to go into the land. They want to bail out and go back to Egypt.

H. God's resolve to destroy Israel [29:34-32:01]

Now, what is God's response? Joshua and Caleb were men of courage, men of vision, and they said, we can go up there and we can do it by the strength of the Lord. The others voted it down. So is the minority always wrong? Here you've got the minority, two against ten, and the minority was right. They should have gone up into the land. Joshua and Caleb are blessed by God.

But now what's the problem? Does God get torqued at the people? God's response, chapter 14 verse 11: The Lord said to Moses, notice how he does it. He does it in rhetorical questions. Here's God now coming on with rhetorical questions. "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me in spite of all the miraculous signs?"

If only I could see God do a miraculous sign I would believe in God for the rest of my life. Have you ever thought that? If only God would do a miracle in my days I'd believe for the rest of my life. Did these people see God? Yes. Did they believe in God? No. Even with miracles people don't believe in God. They had miracles all over the place, manna every day, and water from a rock, yet they still don't believe in God. "How long will they refuse to believe in me in spite all the miraculous signs I have performed among them."

Then God says, "I will strike them down with a plague, but I will make you [Moses] into a nation greater and stronger than they." Moses says, "God, these people been a pain in my backside too. Do it. Go for it God and make me into a nation. That's a great idea God. I like that!" No, wrong. What does Moses do? Moses then disagrees with God, does God say he's going to strike the nation down? God says, "I'm going to strike the nation down and I'm going to make you [Moses] into a nation greater than they are." That's what God says in verse 12. God says, "I'm going to strike them down, I'm going to make a nation greater than they are." Largely it was as a result of their unbelief and holding God in contempt.

I. Moses argues with God [32:02-35:05]

How does Moses argue with God? God says, "I'm going to wipe them out." "Moses said to the Lord, 'Then the Egyptians will hear about it, by your power you

brought these people up from among them and they will tell the inhabitants of the land about it.” Then let me jump down to verse 16: “And the Egyptians will say the Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath so he slaughtered them in the desert.” So, in other words, Moses is saying, “God your reputation is at stake, the Egyptians are going to say, ‘Hey, God brought them out of Egypt well enough, but he couldn't bring them into the Promised Land so he killed them in the desert because he wasn't strong enough.’ So God, if you kill them in the desert that's what the Egyptians are going to conclude. Your reputation is on the line here.”

Then Moses continues in the second part of his argument. He says, “Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed just as you declared.” God, you’re mighty, you’re strong, here is your strength Lord: “the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in loyal love and forgiving sin and rebellion.” Now where does this statement, “God is slow to anger, abounding in love” occur? Does anybody remember when Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock that God passed by and it was said that God was slow to anger, abounding in love? Moses is quoting that back to God here. So what you get is Moses is saying, “God you can’t destroy them because of your character. Your character is one who is slow to anger, strong to love, you’re a forgiving and a loving God. You can’t destroy them because of your character and your reputation.”

So Moses is praying to God, and then what happens? Down in verse 20, we see what happens. God does not strike them down. Verse 20 God says this: “And the Lord [Yahweh] replied ‘I have forgiven them as you asked.’ Does prayer make a difference? God says, and let me read the verse explicitly, “The Lord replied ‘I have forgiven them as you asked. Nevertheless as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt will go in.’” So that means that they wander for 40 years until all the older people die. 40 years in the wilderness and so anybody that saw the coming out of Egypt doesn't get in. Does the next generation go into the land with Joshua? The next generation goes in, the old generation dies out. Did the Lord spare them as Moses asked? Yes.

J. Forgiveness and consequences [35:06-36:25]

This raises another question about the nature of forgiveness? Is it possible to be forgiven and yet there's still consequences? When I was younger I thought, well you're forgiven and all the consequences just evaporate so that you don't have to face the consequences. You just pray for forgiveness and God just lets you go. There are no consequences. Did I ever tell you about the time my brother stabbed me in the arm? Now question: did I forgive my brother? Yes, I forgave him. But was there still a scar on my arm? Yes. So in other words he was forgiven but were there still consequences? It's kind of like I told you about my friend Eric, there's a drunk guy who kills a young person. Is it possible for the parents to forgive the drunk that killed their son? It's possible. Is the son still dead, do the consequences still stand? So I'm telling you be careful, consequences can follow even with forgiveness and these people were that way.

K. Can God change his mind? [36:24-37:35]

Now, let me go back and just hit some other things here. I want to deal with this issue: did God change his mind? In verse 12 he says, "I will strike them down and make you into a greater nation." Moses prays for seven verses and then in verse 20 God says, "I forgive them as you asked, I won't wipe them out. I was going to send a plague and destroy them and raise you into a nation. I won't do that now, Moses. I will forgive them as you asked." Did God change his mind here? My question is can God change his mind? I want to suggest that God can change his mind. Numbers 23 and 19 is what you're looking for. Anyways, so can God change his mind and the suggestion is that, yes, God changed his mind here.

By the way, can you change your mind? Can you do something God can't do? You say, "Well, I can sin and God can't sin." I'm talking just about changing one's mind not right or wrong. If you can change your mind and God can't change his mind, do you see what I'm saying?

L. Prayer and changing God's mind [37:36-39:04]

Did God change his mind here I'm going to wipe them out, Moses prayed. That tells you a whole lot of things about prayer, doesn't it? Does prayer make a difference? When I was younger I was taught you pray not because you're going to change the mind

of God, you pray because you want to be obedient to God. You pray because God has commanded you to pray. Is Moses praying here because God commanded him to pray, or is Moses praying because he wants to make a difference? Does Moses want to change the mind of God on this issue? Yes, he does. So he pleads with God, “God, you can’t do this” and he pleads with God. So I’m saying, does prayer make a difference? I want to say Moses prayed to God, and 8 verses later God says, “I won’t, I will forgive them as you asked.” What I’m trying to tell you is that prayer is very, very significant. Do you realize that in prayer we can address the God of the universe? The God of the universe, “Samuel,” means “God listens.” There are times to be honest with you, I’m a very boring person, there are times I can’t even get my wife to listen to me. God listens, the God that made the universe listens! He responds then, by saying, “I will forgive them as you asked.” This brings up this huge debate.

M. On choosing multiple goods [39:05-41:26]

Student Question: So we change our minds on what we’re going to do before it’s a mistake and we change it do a better option. So God changed his mind and then that was a mistake, but God can’t make a mistake. So how can he change his mind. If God is perfect, then how can God change his mind because God certainly was unable to make a mistake?

Hildebrandt Resumes: let me tackle it this way. I think you’re thinking about the perfect and the good as singular. What happens if the good is multiple? Have you ever changed your mind not because one was wrong and one was right but because there were two goods there and you could have picked either one and you picked one versus the other? Or maybe not even better, maybe you decided to choose the other one just to choose it? So what I’m suggesting is that there may be multiple good options and God can pick between them. Maybe the perfect isn’t *the* perfect but maybe there’s possibly multiple perfects out there that could get God from point A to point B. So that’s what I’m suggesting here. Maybe the future is not singular, but maybe the future has potential in terms of possibilities, and there are multiple possibilities. In other words, can God accomplish his purpose, and can he accomplish that purpose through multiple ways? And

if you allow for those possibilities, does that allow for human freedom, and does it also allow for God to interact with human beings then as far as how that future will be shaped?

N. God as unchangeable [41:27- 46:23]

Now, Hannah, I need you to pull Numbers 23.19 did anybody do Malachi? She's going to read a verse, she's going to contradict me here. Alright, I'll contradict myself, here, look in your Bible to chapter 23.19 staying in Numbers. We can go over to Malachi and do the same type of thing. In Numbers chapter 23 verse 19 it says that "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should change his mind." So that seems to contradict what I just said, right? That God cannot change his mind because he's not a man.

So maybe there's a difference in how God changes his mind and how humans change their minds. The suggestion over here is that we change our mind from something wrong to something better. Is it possible that God changes his mind between multiple goods and then that opens up possibility? Now, when can God not change? God cannot change when he's given us his promise. When he's promised something, does God have to keep his promise? So he can't change his mind when he's promised something.

Every time God opens his mouth is it always a promise? Every time you open your mouth is it a promise? Now by the way, can you make promises? Yes, but how much of your life is promises? By the way, is some of your life promises? Yes, but do you often talk in other ways and in all sorts of different ways. So what I'm suggesting here is that what this passage is saying is that when God gives us his word, he can't change his word because he's made a promise. He's told Abraham, I'm going to give you the land, the seed, and the blessing, so God can't change that. However, how God gives Abraham the land, the seed, and the blessing, the "how" of that, can change into all sorts of different ways that God could do that. Jesus has to be born at Bethlehem. Micah chapter 5 verse 2 says the Messiah's got to be born in Bethlehem of Judea. When Mary and Joseph came down is it possible they could have gone through Samaria or gone through the Philistine plain? Are there many ways that they could have gotten to

Bethlehem? What God is saying is that, “No, Jesus will be born in Bethlehem.” How you get there allows for human flexibility and human choice.

God comes to Saul I think it's in chapter 13 of 1 Samuel thereabouts I think it's 13.13, something like that, God comes to King Saul and he says, “Saul, if you would've obeyed me I would've made your descendants kings over Israel forever, if you had obeyed me.” What I'm suggesting here is, let me just put it this way in philosophical terms. Can God do an if statement? If you do this, then I will do this, but if you do that, then I will do that. Can God do conditionals, an if-then? Can he have multiple if-thens. If they do this, I will do this etc. This passage in Saul's case he says, “Saul, if you had, I would've made your descendants kings over Israel forever but you didn't so I'm going to seek out a man after my own heart,”--which is David. So there God definitely had two paths, Saul made the choice and then God responds and David becomes king. So yes, that passage in 1 Samuel is great, there's another great one in chapter 21 on the city of Keilah when we get are there I'll go over. So what I'm suggesting is that there's conditionality with God, not everything is fixed with God. Now, by the way, are certain things fixed with God? There are certain things that are fixed and there are others that are not fixed. Now does that allow for multiplicity and does that allow for human freedom?

O. Rumination on the mystery and wonder of God [46:24-56:35]

Now, you say, “Hildebrandt are you saying that you solved the free will versus predestination problem? And the answer is: no. The honest truth is what I'm trying to do is confuse you. But what I'm saying is that it's possible there are multiple perfects for God to choose from. Because I think God is big enough; I don't have to actually answer how God can deal with conditionals. All I'm doing is citing Scripture, God gave an “if” to Saul, and says, “Saul, if you had obeyed me, I would've made you king forever.” God himself says that, so now I'm not dealing with my conjecture of multiple perfects I'm dealing with what the Bible says. If Saul had obeyed God, then he would have been king forever, but since he hadn't now David's in the same situation. So God himself uses conditionals if statements.

By the way, I would say the conditional goes all the way back to the garden of

Eden as well. There's a tree in the garden, "If you don't eat it, your good. If you do eat it your bad and you're out of here." So I think right from the beginning, there is this if-statement with human beings and my guess is that the if-statement then comes from our Father who also makes choices.

Now, is it always okay to disagree on this issue? By the way, I'm not trying to convince anybody, I'm basically trying to confuse you. Is it possible that a professor can confuse students to try and break them away from God and to show fallacies in the Bible and show all the negative stuff and confuse students to break down their religious beliefs. Is that what I'm trying to do with this, and the answer is: no. I am trying to confuse you, but what I'm trying to confuse you for is for you move from thinking that you know something that you don't know, to saying God is wonderful--that God is full of wonder. The wonder rather than saying I can't understand you and I'm out of here. Is another way to do it would be like I would do with my wife. We've been married for over 36 years. Do I understand my wife?--no! And so I come into this women's head and I say I just do not understand, after 36 years you'd think I'd have a clue by now. Now if I don't understand you and I bail out is that one move. Is another move to come and say you are wonderful, I don't understand you please help me understand you? Is that a movement towards someone in love? What I'm saying is that God is wonderful and that wonder that confusion should attract us to him, to say, "I want to explore, I want to know more about God." I want to trace his thoughts to see how God moves, to see what God loves, what he likes and dislikes and how he thinks about things. That wonder, attracts us to a devotion to him and a pursuit. The wonder causes us to pursue God. Rather than confusion the mystery attracts us.

But what happens is that if we think we know about God then what? If we think we know do we pursue? No, because then we're satisfied with what we know. We feel comfortable. When I was younger I held one position and I would keep reading these scriptures where God is so dynamic. So I moved more towards the dynamic but a lot of my best friends are really into the predestination side of things and I've sort of moved away from it over the years largely because of texts like this.

Now, by the way, if you want ways out of my way of thinking about things or others ways of thinking about things you can say that God knew ahead of time that Moses was going to pray. He knew ahead of time that Moses was going to pray so this whole thing was he says, “Moses I’m going to wipe them out” because he wanted Moses to stand up for the people. He knew that Moses would, and he knew that he wasn’t going to wipe them out. So he was doing it more for Moses’s development. Does everybody see that? So God here is just doing this so that Moses will become a better man. Is any of that in the text here or did we just make that up? None of that is in the text. That is conjecture.

Now, the other way to work with this is to say that we as human beings cannot understand God. So God portrays himself like a human being. He portrays himself like a human being so that we can understand him. So it looks like God changed his mind although he never really changed his mind. God is portraying himself anthropomorphically. God puts himself in human terms so we can understand him. That's used also for these kind of passages they say God is just telling us a human way of looking at it but that's not really the way God really is. But again I don’t really buy that because are we made in the image of God, can we understand a whole lot about God?

Having said all that, let me jump to my favorite passage on this whole discussion and I think it is in Isaiah chapter 40 verse 28. Isaiah chapter 40 is one of the most incredible chapters in the Bible, and in Isaiah chapter 40 he says this. “Do you not know, have you not heard, the Lord is the everlasting God the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary.” Beautiful verse, right? And then it says this: “And his understanding no one can fathom.” That tells me are we ever going to figure this thing out? And the answer is: no. It works really well for bull sessions going half the night discussing with different people from different backgrounds but God says, “no one can understand my understanding.” We can understand a lot of about God. Can we say we understand nothing about God? We can’t say that because he has revealed himself in his word, but we cannot understand completely about God. We can’t encompass God with our thoughts. Can we get comfortable with how we think about God in our minds. Our

minds then become idols. In other words, we have boxes in our mind in which we contain God. What I'm wanting to do is blow those boxes away to say: God is God. This should raise mystery and wonder that attracts you to pursue him for the rest of your life.

Some of the contradictions like with Moses' humility are translation problems and to be honest with you some of those are pretty easy because you just get it. Other contradictions will be things like logical contradictions you can work through, there will be different types of solutions. Some of them will be cultural or linguistic differences and those we can work with. There's other big ones in Scripture like predestination versus free will that we're stumped on. I think that at that point that's when you move to wonder and mystery. In a certain sense, you have to realize in our own humanity that we're finite and God is infinite. Now by the way can finite understand some of the infinite? Yes, We can map some of the infinite but there's going to be parts of the infinite that you have no clue of but it's really part of the infinite that's around you. So at certain points there's a humility needed to say that his understanding is unfathomable. This leads me to pursue him more, not to give up. It leads me to pursuing God more. Not pursuing him to contain or to exhaustively understand him but rather to explore the wonders of God.

P. Korah Rebellion [56:36-62:01]

Now, let's get through this Korah rebellion. Chapter 16 in the book of Numbers is Korah's rebellion. Let me just kind of explain this and talk through this. In chapter 16 Korah, Dathan and Abiram are Levites who come to Moses and say, "Moses, you and Aaron aren't such hot stuff. We're Levites too. We want to be special to God too." When I say special what comes to mind? What makes you think you're so special to God? And so basically this is a demand to be special and separate. So Korah comes to Moses and says, "Hey, we want some of those rights you have as leader." So this is kind of how it goes down. In this narrative Moses does something that he rarely does anywhere else. Normally when people come at Moses, God steps in, and God gets angry saying, "I'm going to wipe them out." Here, Moses himself gets angry at the people and in chapter 16 verse 15: "Then Moses became very angry and said to the Lord, 'Do not accept their offering.'" Moses is praying for the people or against the people? He's saying, "don't

accept their offering.” So here Moses is taking a new role, this is the role of the anti-mediator. Normally, Moses is the mediator between God and his people, but in this case he’s the anti-mediator. He’s saying, “God don’t accept their offerings or sacrifices.”

Does God have a sense of humor. Well this is kind of an ironic sense of humor. God comes to Korah and says, “you want to be separate and special? OK, separate all your people over here.” God says, “and then I’ll separate you. I’ll separate you permanently.” The ground opens up swallows them all up wham-bam right down into the grave. So God says, “you want to be separated? I’ll separate you.” It’s kind of like Miriam, “you want to be white Miriam? Okay, I’ll make you totally white.” Here, you want to be separated, Okay I’ll separate you.” The ground opens up and swallows them all up and Korah goes down into the pit.

This has to do with power struggles among leaders, and people when you have a leader will people under the leader sometimes undermine the leader? They project all sorts of bad motives on the leader. What the passage warns against is that Moses is the leader and when these people come to say, “Moses, we don’t think you’re so hot; we want to have all the privileges you have.” God says, “No, Moses is my man. He’s the leader.” So you have got to be careful about undermining leaders and making bad statements and things and this passage is one of those passages.

Moses takes on this new role as the anti-mediator rather than the mediator. All through the book of Numbers he’s mediated as he’s prayed on behalf of the people. The mediator’s role is really important. Have you guys ever prayed for somebody where it really really matters? I’ve got four kids and I prayed for my kids and I only pray one prayer for my kids. It’s always been like this, “I tell God right from the start I pray one prayer, I’m a very simple person. It’s just Okay God it’s the same prayer every day: I pray that my kids grow up to love God with all their heart. I figure if they love God with all their heart the rest of life takes care of itself. So I said, “God, I want my kids to love you.” Now I’m lying. Last year right at this time my son was in Afghanistan and he said every day they went out they got shot at. He had friends that were blown to smithereens that he had to pick up parts of them. But anyway he says he hopes he can forget and that

he never wants to remember it. Things he saw he said “that no human being should ever see.” And it was really bad. I prayed to God last year at this time that he grows up to love God but I said, “God I’ve got one other thing. My son, I don’t want him getting killed. You know it’s like the old man is supposed to go first and then the kid. So please God spare the kid.” Question did I pray that God spare his life or did I beg God to spare his life? I begged. I begged. I just want to tell you I learned a lot about prayer last year. By the way, did God spare his life? God did. His head’s all messed up, but God spared his life. We just talk every night. We talk for hours and hours and work through a lot of this stuff that he’s still unsettled with. But anyways what I’m saying is does prayer change things?

Q. Moses as prophet and sheol [62:02-66:14]

Now Moses, this guy’s a prophet, he makes a short term prophecy. There are short term prophecies and long term. Moses says, “if I am the prophet of God, Korah and you are attacking me, if I am a true prophet, the ground is going to open up and swallow you down.” Guess what happens. Does the prophet’s word get fulfilled? Yes. And they get swallowed down. Moses is shown to be a true prophet because his word comes true exactly the way he said it. So the ground opens up [Numbers 16.33] and swallows them down into the pit. They went down alive into “the grave” as the NIV translates it. This word “grave” is the Hebrew word “sheol.” “Sheol” was the underworld, it’s sort of a murky word. It can mean “the grave.” It means the physical grave but it also means the grave beyond that like a murky world, the realm of shadows and the afterlife kind of thing. It’s a complex word but here it just means opens up the ground, they died and they were in the grave.

Did the Jewish people have a different view of hell than we do? It’s hard to know exactly what their view of hell was because I think their view of hell has also changed over time. Back in these kind of days it’s very murky. They did not have very much of a view of the afterlife. You know what I’m saying there’s not very much given. You guys have read a lot of the Old Testament now, is there a lot of talk about heaven? It’s the same thing with hell. It wasn’t really a clear cut kind of thing. By the time of Jesus and

the New Testament there seems to be much more data going to the place where the fire burned up. So there does seem to be foreshadows like Sodom and Gomorrah burning and things like that, places of burning and torment and that kind of thing but its real murky in the Old Testament. Largely its based of that word “sheol.” Sometimes the word “sheol” simply means they put the guy in the ground in a grave and sometimes it has this more expansive meaning. So it’s really tough in the Old Testament. If I’m not mistaken in this you actually see a development of the Jewish understanding and then coming up to the time of Christ it’s still in the process of change. So it’s a really good question.

Hell, we usually view as permanent separation from God but the problem with this term “sheol” is that sometimes it just means the afterlife and doesn't just mean heaven or hell. So while we make clear distinctions the Jewish people at this time did not. So I want to kind of leave it murky because the honest truth is that's the way it was back then. What determines the meaning of this word “sheol”? The context. In some contexts it means they just put them in the grave, nothing more. Others will be this limbo connotation area that's undifferentiated afterlife.

R. Can people change? [66:15-71:32]

Now, some people never learn. After these people get swallowed up, what happens in verse 41? Here it says, “the next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron, ‘You have killed the Lord’s people,’ they said.” And what happens, God says, “hey, we’ll fry them too. And now Moses switches roles. He says, “God don't do it.” Basically, these people never learn Now you say, I’m a young lady and I love this guy and he’s got all sorts of problems. He’s got all sorts of problems but I can help fix him. Yes, some of you are all shaking your heads because you know exactly what I’m talking about: Yeah, right! Question, I’m dead serious: is change in a person at core levels almost impossible? Now I come back to Eric who had it right: can the Holy Spirit change the core of a person? Yes. But is core change in a person really, really, hard? Can a good woman change a man? I’ve seen that happen too but is it really rare. So what I’m saying is be careful. When my daughters or a young women comes to me and says, “I’m going change this guy,” I’m always in the back of my head smirking

saying “naive.” I would never call anybody naive but I’m sure thinking it.

Changing...I know a guy I want to use another example. We’ll change that because it’s on tape but I know a guy who wanted to quit smoking. Now question, is smoking a pretty simple thing. Your body wants cigarettes and you smoke cigarettes. Now can a body change? Question: could he quit smoking?--no. You see that lasted 50, 60 years, and what I’m saying is that change is really hard for people. Did you know that people who have heart bypass surgery and they know they’ve got to change what they eat and they’ve got to start exercising, did you know that after people have major open heart surgery two years later of 90% of those people are doing the same thing they were doing beforehand. Can people change? Do you know what I’m saying? It’s scary when you think about it.

Now are you guys in an age of change? You are growing up and there are a lot of things changing. What happens, you hit 25 and you kind of fossilize? Actually, the honest truth you kind of change all your life. So it’s interesting you know what I’m saying is you blink and how old are you guys 18-19 years old. How fast did your life go by pretty fast? You blink again and all of a sudden you’ll be 25 graduated from Gordon College and in a career, blink again and your 35 and you’ll have kids. Then all of a sudden you blink again and you stop and then wait a minute you blink one more time and you’re an old man like me! What is the conclusion? Does anybody know that country song? The conclusion is “don’t blink.” What’s the point of the song? Does life go by really fast? How does that fit into this? Life goes by really fast, can things change? Who are the agents of change? Can you choose and shape your future? Can you make choices that change the future?

The world is out there we live in a day that’s incredible! As much as I hate to use it because of these stupid Mac computers, but Steve Jobs died. Question, did he make a difference in the world in a big way? What I’m saying is that some of you people here you’re going to be able to make choices that change the world. *Carpe Diem* - make your best choices you can to be the best person you can. Change the world for good! Are there people who are wanting to change the world for evil? You guys have got the vision. Make daily choices does that mean you’ve got to get up when its 5:30 to get up and do

your work? No, it's easier to sleep in. You do your work, you go after it. Make choices that will make you the kind of person who can change the world for good. We live in an incredible day today in which you have all kinds of choices in front of you, it's like a smorgasbord and what I'm telling you is: go for it. Make a difference in the world for good. Commit yourself to good and then make those choices. So anyway, can people really change?

S. Moses and the rock [71:33-77:12]

So what about Moses hitting the rock, you say even he blew it. I think a lot of people miss in chapter 20 with Moses. This is where Moses does a sin actually and God nails him for it. People always skip this. How does chapter 20 where Moses strikes the rock and he commits a sin and he's judged, how does this chapter start? "In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried." The chapter opens first with the death of Miriam. Was this a big thing for Moses? Miriam was the older sister when Moses was floating down in a basket and helped train him. She died. By the way, how does chapter 20 end? The story of Aaron's death. So chapter 20 has Moses in the middle of chapter 20 what does he do? He strikes the rock. Is chapter 20 a really bad day for Moses? His sister dies, his brother dies, and he strikes the rock. If I were writing the Pentateuch this is the one I would want left out.

This is Moses, he goes to the rock and God tells him to speak to the rock and water will come out. Why did God nail Moses so hard just for hitting a rock? Why did God judge Moses so hard just for hitting the rock? What's wrong with hitting a rock? Is there anything inherently wrong with hitting a rock with a stick to get water? No. So let me just run through this. What was wrong with hitting a rock? There was nothing wrong with hitting a rock except the real issue doesn't have to do with hitting the rock, the real issue is found in verse 12: "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I am giving them." Moses is going to wander with them for 40 years, Moses is going to wander this is the Dead Sea area. He's going to come up

along the side here and right where Eric is. Moses can't cross the Jordan River. So on Mt. Nebo here Moses is going to go up on the mountain where he's going to die. He's going to be able to look over the mountain, look and see Israel, but he can't go over there. He has struck the rock. Why? "Because you did not trust me." Is trust and faith a big deal? This is what Christianity is all about. This is it. "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness." Here, Moses did not trust God.

Does God judge the thoughts and intents of a person's heart? You may not be able to judge those thoughts and intents but God judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. Moses' heart was not right here. What he did physically was fine but his heart was not right, his heart was not trusting.

The other problem is the responsibility of leaders. Are leaders judged more severely than common folk? Leaders are judged more severely. I always have this nightmare that I've died and gone to heaven and all my students, that is you guys, are coming by and St. Peter's got me off to the side saying you can't go into heaven. I'm watching and all my students are going into heaven. He's saying, "Hildebrandt remember all those crazy things you said in class about me not changing my mind? Well, I changed my mind now stay outside here. Let all your students go in." So while you guys are trucking on in you can wave at me. Maybe one of you guys can be like mediator and say, "please, let him in."

But the truth is when you're up here talking all the time do I say a lot of stupid, crazy things. Frankly, I worry about that. Someday I've got a judgment for all the dumb things I've said in front of class. When you take a position of leadership is there a higher level of responsibility and you've got to be aware of that and be careful. Moses blew it.

Then lastly, are there consequences for actions? Do your actions have consequences? This is one of the fundamental things about wisdom, with actions, there are consequences. What's really neat is can there be positive consequence for actions? Can you do good things and then have good consequences? And there are negative things you can do to earn negative consequences. So there are consequences and what does that tell us? Does today matter? Do the things you do today, do they matter? Yes! Today

matters; the things that you do matter. It makes a difference. So, is life is so rich, grab each day. Each day the things you do matter. With Moses, what would have happened if he had missed that day that he struck the rock? He would have gone into the Promised Land. But he made some bad decisions that day and it affected the next 40 years of his life!

T. Snake on the pole (Num. 21) [77:13-79:44]

The people complain again in Numbers chapter 21. The people complain at what happens? God sends venomous snakes out and the snakes start biting the people. Now how does he get out of it? He puts a bronze snake on a pole and holds it up and says “you need to look at this snake that bit you. You look at the pole, you look and live.” Does anybody remember the song, “look and live, my brother, look and live”? An Old gospel hymn it went “look and live.” But this isn’t really why this is so important. In the New Testament Jesus is talking to Nicodemus and here’s how this goes. Jesus in the New Testament is talking to Nicodemus and he says no one had ever gone up into heaven except the one who came down from heaven. Who came down from heaven? The son of man. Nicodemus, just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the son of man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Why? “For God so loved the world, the he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” That snake on the pole what does that tell us? Does that tell us how much God loves us? The snake on the pole, becomes the son of man who is God’s son who is crucified on our behalf. “Whosoever believes in him shall not perish.” That snake on the pole is the setup for John 3:16 where Jesus is now saying the Son of Man is going to be put on a pole, and whoever believes in him--eternal life. It’s incredible but God loves us and each day counts. Let’s do it! All right, end of class see you guys.

This is Dr. Ted Hildebrandt in his Old Testament History Literature and Theology course. Lecture number 15, on the book of Numbers.

Transcribed by Henry Hagen

Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt 2