

# **Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 15, Theology of Numbers**

## **Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 15, Theology of Numbers, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt covers the Book of Numbers, exploring themes of interracial marriage in ancient Israel, the potential authorship of Numbers 12:3 (considering Moses' humility or oppression), God's changeability and relationship with humanity, and the consequences of faith and doubt. It also examines key events like the sending of spies to Canaan, the Korah rebellion, and Moses striking the rock, ultimately connecting these narratives to broader theological concepts of forgiveness, consequence, and the nature of God. The lecture concludes with a reflection on the mystery of God and the importance of daily choices.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 15 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Introduction → Old Testament Literature).**



**Hildebrandt\_OTLit\_  
Session 15.mp3**

### 3. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 15, Theology of Numbers

#### Numbers: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 complete sentences.

1. What is the initial conflict between Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in Numbers 12?
2. What is the significance of God's statement about how He speaks to Moses compared to other prophets?
3. How does Dr. Hildebrandt interpret the irony in Miriam being struck with leprosy?
4. What are two ways Dr. Hildebrandt suggests the word translated as "humble" in Numbers 12:3 could be understood?
5. What is the significance of Kadesh Barnea in the context of Numbers 13 and 14?
6. Why is the phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" potentially misleading?
7. What was the accusation the Israelites leveled against God after the spies returned from the Promised Land?
8. What two reasons does Moses give to God for not destroying the Israelites after they refused to enter the Promised Land?
9. According to Dr. Hildebrandt, is it possible to be forgiven while still facing consequences for one's actions?
10. What does Dr. Hildebrandt suggest is the fundamental issue behind God's judgment against Moses for striking the rock?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The conflict arises from Miriam and Aaron criticizing Moses for marrying a Cushite woman, who is possibly Ethiopian and dark-skinned. They also challenge Moses's exclusive prophetic authority, questioning whether God speaks only through him.
2. God states that He speaks to other prophets through visions and dreams, but He speaks to Moses face-to-face, clearly, and not in riddles, emphasizing Moses's

unique status as a prophet. This unique status suggests a deeper intimacy with God than other prophets.

3. Dr. Hildebrandt interprets Miriam's leprosy as ironic justice. Miriam's objection to Moses's dark-skinned wife leads God to punish her with white, leprous skin, effectively saying, "You like white, I'll make you solid white."
4. Dr. Hildebrandt suggests the word translated as "humble" could also be understood as "oppressed." This shift emphasizes Moses's weariness with the constant demands and challenges from his people, as well as his own family. The context favors an understanding of "oppressed" as more fitting given the circumstances.
5. Kadesh Barnea is significant as the place from which the spies were sent into the Promised Land. It is also the place where the Israelites wandered for 40 years, making it a location associated with their disobedience and delay in entering Canaan.
6. The phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" is misleading because the "milk" is likely goat milk, not cow's milk, and the "honey" is likely date jam. Americans often picture a land of plentiful cows and sweet honey, which is not what the phrase likely intended.
7. The Israelites accused God of bringing them to the Promised Land only to die by the sword, and that their wives and children would be taken as plunder. They suggested they should select a leader and return to Egypt, demonstrating their lack of trust in God's ability to protect them in the Promised Land.
8. Moses argues with God, stating that destroying the Israelites would negatively impact God's reputation by making the Egyptians think he was not strong enough to bring them to the Promised Land. Also, Moses appeals to God's character as one who is slow to anger, abounding in love, and forgiving, so it would be out of character for God to destroy them.
9. Dr. Hildebrandt argues that it is possible to be forgiven, but still experience consequences. He uses the example of forgiving his brother for stabbing him; the wound healed, but a scar remained. Even though God might forgive, consequences for actions still persist.
10. According to Dr. Hildebrandt, the fundamental issue behind God's judgment was not about hitting the rock itself, but Moses's lack of trust in God, not honoring

God as holy, and failing to follow his instructions, and thus Moses's action represented a sin of the heart rather than an inappropriate physical action.

## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Develop a well-organized essay addressing each of the following questions, drawing from the lecture.

1. Analyze the significance of the interactions between God and Moses in Numbers. In what ways does Moses challenge God, and what do these interactions reveal about God's character and the nature of prayer?
2. Dr. Hildebrandt discusses the concept of God's dynamic nature in relation to his immutability. Explore the implications of God being both dynamic and unchanging, and how this relates to the question of whether God can change his mind.
3. Explore the concepts of humility and oppression, as discussed by Dr. Hildebrandt in Numbers 12:3. How might the translation of "humble" as "oppressed" affect our understanding of Moses, and what broader implications does this have for understanding the nature of pride and humility?
4. Discuss the significance of the spies' report and the subsequent refusal of the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. How do the events of Numbers 13-14 highlight the importance of faith and the consequences of disobedience?
5. Consider Dr. Hildebrandt's analysis of human change in the context of the story in Numbers. To what extent are people able to change, and how does the lecture address the relationship between human free will and God's sovereignty?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cushite:** A person from Cush, often associated with Ethiopia. In Numbers, Moses's Cushite wife is the source of criticism from Miriam and Aaron.
- **Kadesh Barnea:** A significant location in the Sinai desert, from which the spies were sent into Canaan and where the Israelites wandered for 40 years.
- **Promised Land:** The land of Canaan, promised by God to the Israelites.
- **Giants/Anakim and Rephaim:** The tribes said to have inhabited Canaan that the spies reported as fearsome and large in size, inspiring fear in the Israelites.
- **Static vs. Dynamic (God):** Static refers to God as fixed and unchanging, while dynamic refers to God as interactive and changeable in his actions but not in character.
- **Rhetorical Question:** A question asked for effect rather than to elicit an answer, often used by God in the text to engage Moses and the Israelites.
- **Mediator:** One who intercedes between two parties to reconcile them. In Numbers, Moses acts as a mediator between God and the Israelites, except in the Korah rebellion when Moses becomes the anti-mediator.
- **Anti-Mediator:** A figure who does not intercede on behalf of others but rather against them. In the context of the Korah Rebellion, Moses does not mediate for the people but rather asks God to reject them.
- **Sheol:** A Hebrew word referring to the underworld, the place of the dead, sometimes used as a general term for the grave, and sometimes for a shadowy afterlife.
- **Anthropomorphism:** The attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities, in this case, to God.
- **If-Then Conditional:** A philosophical concept referring to a statement that lays out a condition and a subsequent result, which in this case Dr. Hildebrandt ascribes to God's conditional promises with humans, allowing for human freedom.

## 4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes, ideas, and facts from Dr. Hildebrandt's lecture on the Book of Numbers:

### Briefing Document: Dr. Ted Hildebrandt's Lecture 15 on the Book of Numbers

#### I. Introduction

- This lecture focuses on the Old Testament Book of Numbers, exploring key narratives and theological themes.
- Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes the importance of understanding the text in its historical and literary context.

#### II. Key Themes and Ideas

- **Interracial Marriage and Prophetic Authority (Numbers 12):** The narrative involving Moses' Cushite wife highlights issues of prejudice and challenges to Moses' authority. Miriam and Aaron question Moses' leadership, using his marriage as a pretext.
- "she's dark skinned. That's part of the issue here and so Cushite is possibly Ethiopia."
- God defends Moses' unique prophetic status, emphasizing His face-to-face communication with Moses:
- "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles. He sees the form of the Lord."
- God punishes Miriam with leprosy, which Hildebrandt interprets as ironic justice: Miriam is upset with Moses's dark-skinned wife and God makes Miriam "white as snow".
- The discussion shifts from the marriage itself to the authority of Moses as a prophet.
- **Humility vs. Oppression (Numbers 12.3):**
- The description of Moses as "very humble" is examined. Hildebrandt questions if Moses could have written this about himself, suggesting it could be a later insertion by Joshua.

- Hildebrandt proposes that the word for "humble" ( *oni* ) could also be translated as "oppressed," arguing it fits the context of Moses's struggles:
- "Now Moses was a very oppressed man more oppressed than anyone else on the face of the earth."
- This highlights the burdens of leadership and the challenges Moses faced.
- **The Spies and the Promised Land (Numbers 13-14):** God commands Moses to send spies into the Promised Land, refuting the idea that sending spies showed a lack of trust.
- "the Lord said to Moses 'Send some men to explore the land of Canaan.'"
- The spies report back with mixed messages, highlighting the abundance of the land but also the presence of giants.
- "They saw giants, the descendants of Anak...and we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes"
- The majority of the spies instill fear, leading to a lack of faith in the people who say:
- "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?"
- Only Caleb and Joshua express confidence in God's ability to deliver the land, highlighting the importance of faith and courage.
- The people's disbelief and rejection of God's promise cause God's anger.
- **God's Nature: Static vs. Dynamic, Can God Change His Mind? (Numbers 14):** Hildebrandt questions if God is static or dynamic and what that means for interaction and relationship.
- "How is relationship possible with someone who never changes?"
- He explores the idea of God's ability to change, raising questions about God's perfection and omnipotence. He wonders if God can make a choice "in the now"
- He uses the narrative of Moses interceding with God to prevent Israel's destruction as a key example of where God changes his mind.

- "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.'"
- "The Lord replied 'I have forgiven them as you asked.'"
- This emphasizes the significance of prayer and how it can impact God's decisions.
- Hildebrandt discusses if God changes His mind when there are multiple good options or paths he can take, which allows for freedom.
- He notes a possible contradiction that "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should change his mind" (Num 23:19) but reconciles it by suggesting God doesn't change from bad to good, but rather chooses between multiple good options. He also points out that God always keeps his promises and does not change them.
- **Forgiveness and Consequences:**Hildebrandt highlights that forgiveness does not eliminate consequences, using personal anecdotes and examples of real-life tragedy.
- The example is given that those who did not enter into the Promised Land because of their sin were forgiven because God did not strike them down, but still suffered consequences (wandering 40 years).
- **The Significance of Prayer:**Moses's prayer to God leads God to forgive the people.
- "The Lord replied 'I have forgiven them as you asked.'"
- Hildebrandt emphasizes that prayer is not just for obedience but can impact God's decisions and should be used to approach the God of the universe.
- **Korah's Rebellion (Numbers 16):**This narrative explores the desire for special status and the dangers of challenging God-ordained leadership.
- Korah and his followers, Levites, demand equal rights to Moses and Aaron, but God judges them harshly.
- The ground opens up and swallows them.
- Moses takes on an "anti-mediator" role by saying, "God don't accept their offerings" - which is very unusual.
- **Moses as Prophet and Sheol:**Moses' short term prophecy about the ground opening up is fulfilled, emphasizing his prophetic authority.



- The meaning of 'sheol' is discussed and the lecture points out how the understanding of afterlife and hell was less defined in Old Testament times.
- **The Limits of Human Change:**Dr. Hildebrandt explores how difficult it is for people to change on a core level and uses examples such as smoking, diet after bypass surgery, and relationships with others to emphasize this point.
- He also notes that while change is hard, the Holy Spirit can facilitate change at a core level.
- He notes that the agents of change are people who choose to shape their future.
- He encourages his students to "make daily choices" to be people who change the world for good.
- **Moses' Sin at the Rock (Numbers 20):**Hildebrandt contextualizes the event with the deaths of Miriam and Aaron, portraying it as a particularly difficult time for Moses.
- He argues that Moses' sin was not about hitting the rock, but about his lack of trust in God:
- "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."
- He explores the idea that leaders have higher responsibilities.
- He also emphasizes that actions have consequences, both positive and negative.
- **The Bronze Serpent on the Pole (Numbers 21):**This event is not only about the Israelites' immediate salvation from snake bites but prefigures the crucifixion of Christ:
- "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."
- It emphasizes God's love for humanity and the path to salvation.

### III. Theological Implications

- **The Nature of God:** The lecture explores God's dynamic nature, His capacity to change His mind, and His relationship with humanity. It encourages a posture of wonder towards God's mysteries.

- **The Importance of Faith and Trust:** Key events underscore the necessity of trust in God's promises and His power, and that a lack of trust is the root of sin.
- **The Role of Leadership:** Moses' life demonstrates both the blessings and the responsibilities of leadership. Leaders are held to a higher standard and have significant impact for good or for bad.
- **The Significance of Human Choice:** People make choices that matter and it's important to choose good for the world.
- **The Impact of Prayer:** Prayer is a powerful tool for believers and can truly affect outcomes, not simply an exercise in obedience.
- **The Continuity of God's Redemptive Plan:** The bronze serpent on the pole is a clear type for the work of Christ, illustrating the continuity of God's plan of redemption throughout history.

#### IV. Conclusion

- Dr. Hildebrandt encourages students to wrestle with complex theological questions while maintaining a posture of wonder and devotion to God. He wants them to move away from thinking they know something they don't.
- The lecture emphasizes the importance of applying these lessons to one's own life, urging students to make choices that will have a positive impact on the world.

This detailed briefing document captures the essence of Dr. Hildebrandt's lecture, highlighting the key narratives, theological themes, and practical applications of the Book of Numbers.

## 5. FAQs on Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 15, Theology of Numbers, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### FAQ on the Book of Numbers

1. **What was the central issue in the conflict between Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, and what does it reveal about God's view on race and leadership?** The conflict arose when Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses for marrying a Cushite woman (likely from Ethiopia), who was dark-skinned. This reveals that the issue was rooted in prejudice, and that God was not concerned with race, but rather was concerned with proper leadership. God rebuked Miriam and Aaron not for Moses' marriage but for challenging his unique prophetic authority. God emphasized that He speaks to prophets in visions and dreams but speaks face-to-face with Moses. This suggests that God values faithfulness and humility more than skin color. The incident also highlights the irony of God turning Miriam leprous and "white as snow" as a form of ironic justice for criticizing Moses' wife's darker skin.
2. **How can we interpret the verse, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth," and is it possible for a humble person to know and state they are humble?** The verse is problematic because it appears to be an arrogant statement, which seems contradictory. It's suggested that Moses did not write it, but it was added later by Joshua. Another interpretation is that the Hebrew word for "humble" can also be translated as "oppressed." This alternate reading, "Now Moses was a very oppressed man, more oppressed than anyone else on the face of the earth," makes more sense in the context of Moses' struggles. This is due to the continual complaints of the Israelites and the conflict with his own family. This highlights the need to consider different possible meanings of words and the challenges of self-perception, since pride is often easily seen by others but not in oneself.

3. **Why did Moses send spies into the Promised Land, and what was the significance of their report?** Moses sent spies into the Promised Land because God commanded him to do so. The spies' mission was to explore the land and report back, not because of a lack of faith. However, their report created a crisis of faith. Ten of the spies focused on the challenges such as giants in the land, which they felt were overwhelming and portrayed the Israelites as weak and vulnerable. This report fueled fear and doubt in the Israelite community and caused them to rebel against God. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, gave a positive report, expressing faith in God's ability to help them take the land.
4. **Can God change his mind, and how does prayer interact with God's decisions?** The text suggests God can change his mind based on interaction with people. God initially threatened to destroy Israel and make a new nation with Moses. But then Moses argues with God based on both God's reputation among other nations and God's own merciful character, which he had revealed to Moses in the past. After Moses' intervention, God relented and forgave the Israelites. This example supports the idea that prayer can influence God's decisions and does make a difference. This is further complicated by other passages such as Numbers 23:19, which say God doesn't change his mind, therefore the lecture concludes that God may have multiple good options, and therefore the change of mind was a choice between these options, not a shift from wrong to right.
5. **What is the relationship between forgiveness and consequences?** The text highlights that while God forgives sin, consequences can still follow. Though God forgave the Israelites and did not destroy them, they were still punished by having to wander the desert for 40 years until the generation that lacked faith died out. This distinction demonstrates that forgiveness doesn't erase all consequences, and that there can still be long-term repercussions even after forgiveness is granted. The consequences don't negate God's forgiveness.

6. **What was the significance of the Korah rebellion, and what did it demonstrate about God's view on leadership and humility?** The Korah rebellion was a challenge to Moses and Aaron's leadership, with Korah and his group demanding equal status. God's response, the ground swallowing the rebels, demonstrates his view that challenging appointed authority is a serious offense. The ground swallowing them up was a separation they wanted, and the consequences they faced were ironic. The text also features Moses in an unusual role, becoming the "anti-mediator" and asking God to not accept the rebellious group's offerings. The narrative demonstrates the importance of humility in leadership and the consequences of pride and rebellion against God's order. It also shows the importance of prayer and its ability to mediate for others.
7. **What does the incident of Moses striking the rock reveal about trust and leadership?** The incident of Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it, as God had commanded, demonstrates that God is concerned with the heart of a person, specifically concerning the matter of trust and obedience. Although, physically hitting the rock was not an inherently wrong act, the lack of faith and trust was. Moses' action showed a lack of faith, which disqualified him from leading the Israelites into the Promised Land. It also shows that leaders are held to a higher standard and will be judged more severely for their mistakes. Finally it underscores the principle that actions have consequences.
8. **What was the significance of the bronze serpent on the pole, and how does it connect to the New Testament?** When the Israelites were plagued by venomous snakes, God instructed Moses to put a bronze serpent on a pole. Those who looked at the bronze serpent were healed from the snake bites. This is more significant than just how to heal the Israelites. This incident is a major foreshadowing of Jesus's crucifixion. In the New Testament, Jesus refers to this when talking to Nicodemus, stating that, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. This illustrates that God's love and salvation is found in Jesus and is available to all those who believe. This illustrates the extent of God's love.