

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 20, War, Judges: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon

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 20, War, Judges: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt examines the biblical books of Joshua and Judges, focusing on the themes of war and pacifism. He contrasts pacifism with "just war" theory, using biblical examples like Joshua's conquest and the actions of various judges. The lecture also explores the roles of women in leadership, referencing Deborah and challenging traditional interpretations. Finally, it discusses the concept of God's will and how to discern it, using Gideon's story as an example. The lecture concludes with an analysis of the Judges' cycle and Gideon's battle against Midian.

2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 20 – 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_
Session20.mp3**

3. Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 20, War, Judges: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon

Old Testament: War, Judges, and Gideon Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the core belief of pacifism, and how do its adherents support this belief biblically?
2. What is the primary problem with a universal adoption of pacifism according to the lecture?
3. According to just war theory, what distinguishes a just cause for war from an unjust one? Give one example of each.
4. How did the role of the judge as described by Moses differ from how the judges actually functioned in the book of Judges?
5. How does the book of Joshua's description of Israel's conquest differ from the book of Judges?
6. What is the "Judges Cycle," and what are its key components?
7. Explain how Ehud's left-handedness was used in the defeat of Eglon.
8. Why did God reduce Gideon's army from 32,000 to 300 before the battle against the Midianites?
9. According to the lecture, what are three factors to consider when trying to determine God's will?
10. How can the story of Gideon's victory over the Midianites be understood as an example of the principle that "God's strength is made perfect in weakness"?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Pacifism centers on the idea of non-violence and peace as the core of God's kingdom. Pacifists often cite Isaiah's descriptions of the lion lying down with the lamb and Jesus's non-violent approach to his crucifixion as evidence of their claims.

2. The problem with universal pacifism is that it may leave people vulnerable to evil aggressors. The lecture uses Hitler as an example of the type of evil that cannot be resisted by pacifist means alone.
3. Just war theory says that a just cause is one that prevents genocide or similar atrocities, while unjust causes are materialist, such as acquiring oil. An example of a just cause is stopping Hitler and an example of an unjust cause is bombing another country to gain access to their resources.
4. Moses described judges as administrators of justice, especially for the vulnerable (widows, orphans), who were not to take bribes. However, the judges in the book of Judges functioned primarily as military deliverers, saving Israel from their oppressors.
5. The book of Joshua claims Israel conquered all of the Promised Land and fulfilled God's promises, while the book of Judges presents the reality that pockets of resistance remained, particularly in the plains, due to the presence of iron chariots.
6. The Judges Cycle describes a pattern of Israel's behavior. This cycle involves Israel's sin of worshiping false gods (like Baals), followed by God selling them to oppressors, then the people's repentance, after which God raises a judge to deliver them, leading to a period of peace.
7. Ehud's left-handedness allowed him to conceal his weapon on his right thigh, deceiving the guards who expected weapons on the left. This unexpected method enabled Ehud to assassinate King Eglon successfully.
8. God reduced Gideon's army to ensure that it would be clear that the victory was due to God's power, not the strength of the Israelite army. By reducing the size to such an extreme, the lecture argues, God demonstrated his hand in the victory.
9. Three factors to consider when determining God's will are whether it is moral, whether it will produce good, and whether it aligns with one's passions and gifts. The lecture mentions the feeling of God's call as a fourth factor, and includes an example of God using one's unexpected skillset.
10. Gideon's victory demonstrates that God's power is made perfect in weakness by utilizing Gideon's weak army against a vastly superior foe. God chose a small group to illustrate that their victory was because of Him, not their own military prowess.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question with a well-organized essay that draws upon specific examples and concepts from the source material.

1. Analyze the tension between the concepts of pacifism and just war theory as presented in the lecture. How do these opposing views interpret scripture differently, and what are the practical implications of each approach for engaging with conflict in the world?
2. Compare and contrast the leadership styles and roles of Joshua and the judges in the Old Testament. What does this comparison reveal about the nature of Israel's relationship with God and the challenges of leadership in the ancient world?
3. Discuss the significance of the "Judges Cycle" in the book of Judges. How does this cycle reveal Israel's struggles with faithfulness, and what does it suggest about the relationship between sin, repentance, and divine intervention?
4. Explore the role of women in the Old Testament as portrayed through the characters of Deborah and Huldah. How does their leadership challenge traditional interpretations of gender roles in biblical narratives, and what does their presence reveal about God's use of diverse individuals?
5. Analyze the story of Gideon's calling and victory over the Midianites. How does this narrative demonstrate the principles of finding God's will and relying on His power in times of weakness?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Pacifism:** The belief that violence and war are always unjust and should be avoided.
- **Shalom:** A Hebrew word often translated as "peace," but encompassing wholeness, harmony, and well-being.
- **Just War Theory:** A set of principles outlining when it is morally permissible to go to war, often focusing on just causes and proper conduct.
- **Geneva Convention:** A series of international treaties that establish rules for the conduct of war and the treatment of prisoners and civilians.
- **Judges:** Leaders in ancient Israel who served as military deliverers and administrators of justice during the period after Joshua and before the monarchy.
- **Judges Cycle:** A recurring pattern in the book of Judges that involves Israel's sin, oppression by enemies, repentance, deliverance by a judge, and a period of peace.
- **Baals:** Canaanite gods often associated with fertility and nature worship.
- **Asherahs:** Canaanite goddesses often associated with fertility and nature worship.
- **Covenant:** A sacred agreement between God and his people, often including specific promises, blessings, and requirements.
- **Sinaitic Covenant:** The covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, which includes the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses.
- **Megiddo/Armageddon:** A valley in Israel known for its strategic importance, often associated with the final battle in the book of Revelation.
- **Tel:** An artificial mound created by the accumulation of layers of human settlement over time.
- **Threshing Floor:** A flat area, often on a hilltop, where grain is separated from the chaff after harvesting.
- **Chaff:** The dry, scaly husks of grain that must be separated from the edible kernels.

4. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document synthesizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture transcript on the Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges:

Briefing Document: Themes of War, Leadership, and God's Sovereignty in Joshua and Judges

Introduction:

This document summarizes key themes and concepts discussed in a lecture on the books of Joshua and Judges. The lecture delves into complex issues of war, peace, leadership, and God's role in Israel's history, challenging simplistic interpretations and encouraging nuanced understanding. It explores the complexities of divine command, moral behavior, and God's use of unique individuals.

Key Themes & Ideas:

1. Pacifism vs. Just War Theory:

- The lecture opens by acknowledging pacifism as a valid Christian position, emphasizing the importance of peace and harmony, referencing Isaiah's vision of the lion and the lamb and Jesus's non-violent response on the cross. The lecturer states, "I love the fact that there's a presence of pacifists here and I think it's kind of like salt or like leaven."
- However, the lecturer raises concerns about universal pacifism: "if everyone were a pacifist, what would have happened with Hitler? We'd all be speaking German probably."
- The Just War Theory is presented as an alternative, arguing that war is sometimes necessary for a "just cause," such as stopping Hitler's atrocities. The lecturer suggests that a good cause should not be simply material, for instance bombing a country simply for not selling oil.
- The book of Joshua's depiction of war is cited as evidence that "war is the answer sometimes". The lecturer asserts, "You just can't make that statement because you don't know that. So you need to think about some of these things, Joshua went to war."
- The lecturer challenges blanket statements like "war is not the answer", suggesting that sometimes it is part of the solution, citing Joshua's conquest of Jericho.

1. **God as Warrior:**

- The lecture highlights a often-overlooked theme: God as a warrior leading his people to victory. The lecturer states "nobody mentions the fact that God is often portrayed as a warrior leading his people to victory--military victory."
- This theme challenges simplistic ideas of God as only love and peace and suggests that God gets involved in the world, including through conflict.

1. **Biblical Interpretation & Context:**

- The lecture stresses the importance of proper biblical interpretation, specifically regarding the use of biblical imagery. The lecturer cautions against taking scripture out of context and trying to make it say whatever one wants. For example, a common interpretation of the sword of Jesus is that it is truth and justice, however the lecturer states, "This is the battle of Armageddon and the sword was slaying people." The imagery of the sword needs to be understood within the context of the passage.
- The lecture stresses the importance of not universalizing and absolutizing every statement in the Bible. "Be careful about taking a Scripture passage and universalizing and absolutizing it. You don't want to absolutize or universalize a lot of the statements in Joshua. He's making comments and in a grandiose kind of way. It's okay to do that."

1. **Rules of War and Moral Conduct:**

- The lecture touches on the need for rules of engagement, referencing the Geneva Convention, and noting the issue that groups such as Al Qaeda do not follow these conventions.
- The lecture presents several reasons for war as described in the Bible. The reasons include: acquiring land, divine command, moral violations, and insults.
- The lecture also brings up the complicated question of preemptive war and first strikes.

1. **The Transition from Joshua to Judges:**

- A key point of conflict is presented concerning the book of Joshua, which claims that Israel took all the land promised to them and Judges, which argues that there were still pockets of resistance in the land.

- The lecture reconciles this conflict by emphasizing the perspective of Joshua as an old man reflecting on his life, not focusing on every little detail. The lecturer asserts, "Joshua was just reveling in God's goodness to him."
- Judges depicts a different reality, one with continuing battles and unresolved issues.
- The lecture establishes the transition from Joshua to Judges with the passing of the generation that had known Joshua, noting how a new generation came along with a different relationship to God. The lecturer states, "Does each generation have to know God?...Is there slippage between the generations?"

1. **The Role of Judges:**

- The lecture describes the dual role of judges, both as distributors of justice and military deliverers. The lecturer states that the role of the judge was a deliverer, a kind of "savior," to save Israel from the hands of these oppressors."
- The judges are described as more like military deliverers than judges that would be engaged in sitting in court cases.
- It is emphasized that God is the actual king during the time of Judges and these judges are tribal or regional leaders working under God's sovereignty.

1. **The Cycle in Judges:**

- The lecture details the cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance seen throughout the book of Judges. The lecturer states that, "the literary cycle will start out like this: people will serve the Baals and the Asherahs."
- It goes on to explain how, "when they get sold into the hands of the Moabites and Ammonites and other peoples, then cry out to God in repentance." Following repentance, God raises up a judge for the people.
- The story of Ehud is used as an example of this cycle. The lecturer describes Ehud as unique, being left handed, and that God used his uniqueness for his glory.

1. **God's Use of Unique Individuals:**

- The lecture emphasizes how God uses people's unique qualities for his glory, using the example of Ehud being left-handed. The lecturer says "the thing that you think is your weirdness is your biggest asset."

- This concept is expanded to include the idea that "the very thing that brings the one sense shame, and you try and cover it up, God uses that thing the most."
- The lecture also uses Deborah as an example of God using someone unexpected in a leadership position.

1. **Women in Leadership:**

- The lecture strongly refutes the idea that God uses women only when there are no good men, using both Old Testament and New Testament examples (Deborah, Huldah, Phillip's prophesying daughters).
- The lecture challenges the idea that Deborah was an exception, stating, "The exception proves the rule...that's one of the dumbest things I've ever heard." The lecturer argues that this idea is demeaning to both men and women.
- The lecture asserts that competence and gifts, not gender, are the issue.
- The lecturer also addresses the potential conflict between the books of Judges and the letters of Paul in the New Testament, asserting that, "when I think I see conflict in Scripture...we've got to say culture is probably informing some of that."
- The lecture also states that the cultural boundaries between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female are gone through Christ and are all one in Christ.

1. **The Insidious Nature of Power:**

- The lecture identifies money, sex, and power as three major areas where sin can be found.
- The lecture says of power, "power is the most insidious because it comes on a person...and it sucks the marrow out of their being before they can even know it."

1. **Gideon and God's Will:**

- The story of Gideon threshing wheat in a wine press is presented as a picture of the Israelite people hiding from their oppression.
- The lecture touches on finding God's will through seeking what is moral, good, and by pursuing passions, gifts, and a sense of calling.
- The story of Gideon reducing his army from 32,000 to 300 shows that victory is from God, not human strength.

- The lecturer highlights that "God takes the things that you think are the biggest problems and he turns them."

1. Open Hands Theology:

- The lecture concludes by highlighting the need for an "open hands theology," where one approaches God with humility, receiving things as gifts and trusting his direction. The lecture states, "You pray with open hands and God puts things in your hands. It's his grace."

Conclusion:

This lecture provides a thought-provoking examination of the books of Joshua and Judges. It underscores the complexity of biblical interpretation, the ever-present tension between war and peace, and the importance of recognizing God's sovereignty in all things. It calls on the audience to be thoughtful, nuanced, and open to unconventional ideas as they engage with the Bible. The lecture suggests that a student's unique gifts and weirdness may actually be used by God and not something that should be covered up.

5. FAQs on Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature, Session 20, War, Judges: Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Exploring Themes of War, Faith, and Leadership in the Old Testament

- What are the main perspectives on war presented in these sources, and what are their implications?** The sources present three primary perspectives on war: pacifism, just war theory, and the portrayal of God as a warrior. Pacifists believe that peace and harmony are the ultimate goals, often referencing passages about the lion lying down with the lamb. They highlight Jesus' non-violent resistance as a model. However, the text acknowledges a significant challenge: if everyone were a pacifist, how could evil like Hitler be resisted? Just war theory suggests that war is sometimes permissible for a just cause, like stopping genocide. The sources also highlight that God is portrayed as a warrior leading his people to military victory, emphasizing His involvement in the face of evil. These perspectives illustrate the complex moral and theological questions surrounding the use of force.
- How do the books of Joshua and Judges offer contrasting views of the conquest of Canaan, and what does this suggest about interpreting scripture?** The book of Joshua depicts a complete and successful conquest of the Promised Land, stating that all of God's promises were fulfilled and all the land was taken. However, Judges portrays a more nuanced reality, highlighting areas where the Israelites failed to drive out the Canaanites, especially those with iron chariots. This contrast reveals that biblical accounts may offer different perspectives or emphases, rather than universally applicable absolutes. It underscores the importance of considering historical context and literary devices when interpreting scripture. We should recognize that old people reflecting on their lives tend to look at the "big picture" and not necessarily every detail.

- **What is the "Judges Cycle," and how does it illustrate the relationship between Israel and God?** The Judges Cycle is a recurring pattern in the book of Judges that demonstrates the cyclical nature of Israel's relationship with God. It typically involves: (1) Israel serving false gods like Baal and Asherah, (2) God selling them into the hands of their enemies, (3) the Israelites repenting and crying out to God, (4) God raising up a judge to deliver them, and (5) a period of peace and rest. This cycle reveals a pattern of disobedience, judgment, repentance, and deliverance. It underscores that Israel's well-being and peace are contingent on their faithfulness to their covenant with God.
- **How are the judges presented in the book of Judges, and what does their role reveal about leadership in this period of Israel's history?** While Moses had established the role of judges as dispensers of justice, the judges in the book of Judges primarily function as military deliverers who lead Israel to war against oppressors. They are often regional or tribal chieftains who do not necessarily follow one another chronologically. Examples like Samson and Ehud highlight their roles in military action rather than legal proceedings. This reveals that leadership in this period was largely about military strength and deliverance from foreign oppression.
- **What is significant about Ehud's unique qualities, and what does it teach us about how God uses individuals?** Ehud, a left-handed man, used his unique trait to deceive and kill King Eglon. This suggests that God can use a person's unique qualities, even perceived weaknesses or oddities, for his purposes. The source argues that what is often seen as an individual's "weirdness" might be their greatest asset and emphasizes not suppressing these qualities, because they can be used for God's glory.
- **How does the story of Deborah challenge traditional gender roles, and what are the implications for interpreting scripture?** Deborah was a prophetess, judge, and military leader, which challenged traditional gender roles of her time. She serves as an example of God raising up and using individuals, regardless of gender. The source rejects the idea that God only used Deborah because there were no good men, or that she was an exception to a rule, arguing that such approaches are demeaning to both men and women. Instead, God uses people based on their competence and gifts, not gender. When cultural norms conflict with the broader message of scripture, we should not favor one part over another.

- **What role do failure and open-handed prayer play in understanding God's will?** Failure is presented as a potentially powerful blessing. The source uses the example of Michael Jordan and emphasizes that failure teaches us lessons. It can ultimately make us stronger and show us what we are supposed to do. When seeking God's will, it's essential to pray with "open hands," meaning to relinquish control and acknowledge that we are receiving God's grace as a gift rather than demanding specific outcomes. God puts "bouquets of grace" in our hands, and we should accept them as gifts from him.
- **In the story of Gideon, why does God reduce his army from 32,000 to 300 men, and what is the larger message?** God dramatically reduces Gideon's army not to show that "a few good men" can win, but to make it clear that victory belongs to God. By minimizing the size of the army, God demonstrates that it is his power, not human strength, that wins battles. The narrative aims to highlight that true success comes not from the number of soldiers or human ability but rather the power and sovereignty of God. Gideon and his 300 men are victorious through the power of the Lord, not through their own strategy.