

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 12, Exodus Plagues to Tabernacle

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Welcome to your deep dive all about Exodus. We got your notes. We're going to unpack Dr. Ted Hildebrandt's lecture.

Really excited to dig in. Especially the parts about the plagues, the tabernacle, and some interesting questions about Passover and the Exodus itself. Get ready for some surprises.

We found some points that you might've missed on a first listen. Yeah. Dr. Hildebrandt tackles some apparent contradictions head-on and encourages us to think critically about these familiar passages.

Right. Right from the start, he throws us a bit of a curveball. Did the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob actually know God's name, Yahweh, before Moses? Because Genesis seems to say yes, Exodus suggests no.

So how do we interpret these texts? One approach that Dr. Hildebrandt explains is the JEDP theory. Okay. It gets its name from the first letters of four supposed sources: the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly sources, which scholars believe were woven together over centuries to form the text we have today.

But Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't fully buy into JEDP because it's based on conjecture. That's right. Not concrete evidence.

Yeah. So what's his alternative explanation? Well, he proposes that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must have known the name Yahweh. Okay.

But they didn't grasp its full meaning as the covenant keeper, the one who faithfully keeps his promises. Right. It was Moses witnessing God's incredible liberation of Israel who truly came to experience Yahweh in this way.

So it's less about knowing a name and more about understanding who God is through his actions. That really reframes how I understand the significance of names and titles in the Bible. I never thought about it that way before.

Yeah. It's not just a label, but a revelation of character. Yeah.

Okay. So next up we have a rather strange scene. Okay.

Moses is on his way back to Egypt when suddenly God tries to kill him. Or was it his son? Right. The text is not entirely clear.

That's the Bloody Bridegroom passage. Yeah. And it's notoriously ambiguous.

Okay. Adding to the confusion is the Hebrew word for feet, which can also be a euphemism. A euphemism.

It's a less direct, sometimes more polite way of referring to something that might be considered offensive or taboo. Okay. In this case, feet could also refer to the foreskin, making the whole passage pretty open to interpretation.

That definitely makes it more complicated. So what are some of the explanations that Dr. Hildebrandt presents? There are three main interpretations from different scholars. Brevard Childs suggests Moses' son was sick and circumcision healed him, making the story an origin story or ideological tale for the practice of circumcision.

Walter Kaiser emphasizes obedience, arguing that Moses was disobedient for not circumcising his son sooner. Okay. He also points out the possibility that the son needed to be circumcised to participate in the Passover later on.

And finally, Alan Ross suggests that Zipporah's anger and her abrupt disappearance from this story stem from her cultural background, where circumcision was done at adolescence, making the idea of infant circumcision shocking and upsetting to her. Okay. So the passage's ambiguity leaves room for these different interpretations, but each one sheds light on different aspects of the story.

That leads us to another mystery. When exactly did this grand escape from Egypt happen? Ah, the Exodus timeline. Yeah.

It's a hotly debated topic. It is. You've got scholars arguing for an early date, around 1445 BC.

Okay. And others advocating for a late date, around 1260 BC. Okay.

What's interesting is the evidence they used to support their positions. So what is the evidence for the early date? For the early date, scholars point to biblical references. In 1 Kings 6.1, it mentions 480 years between the Exodus and the beginning of Solomon's reign, which would place the Exodus around 1445 BC.

They also use the Merneptah Stele, an ancient inscription dating back to 1200 BC, which mentions Israel already present in Canaan, suggesting an earlier arrival. And then there are the Amarna letters, a collection of clay tablets from around 1400 BC, where the King of Jerusalem complains to Pharaoh about the Habiru, possibly a group that included the Hebrews, invading his territory. Right.

All of these clues seem to support an earlier date for the Exodus. That makes sense. But the late date proponents have some compelling points too.

Yes, they do. Especially about the city of Ramses. That's right.

The book of Exodus mentions the Israelites building the city of Ramses. Yeah. But it wasn't constructed until around 1200 BC.

Right. During the reign of Ramses II. Yeah.

There's also evidence like, um, burn layers found in cities. Okay. Like Lake Kish.

Uh huh. That dates back to that period. These burn layers align with the biblical account of Joshua's conquest, suggesting the Israelites were present in Canaan around 1200 BC.

So we have a real historical puzzle on our hands. Yes, we do. The evidence seems to point in two different directions.

Right. And reconciling these conflicting clues is a challenge for scholars. It is.

But it gets even more mind-boggling when you consider just how many people were involved in this Exodus. Absolutely. Dr. Hildebrandt points out that the numbers in Exodus imply a staggering 2.4 million people.

Wow. Wandering in the desert. This is where even Dr. Hildebrandt admits to grappling with the text.

Right. Because if you do the math, based on these 600,000 men mentioned. Right.

Plus their wives and children. Yeah. That's an enormous population to sustain in such a harsh desert environment.

Just thinking about the logistics of providing food and water. Yes. For that many people, it is mind-blowing.

It really is. Imagine the amount of water needed. It's a lot.

And not just for drinking. Right. But for cooking and washing too.

Right. And what about food? It's hard to imagine manna miraculously falling from the sky. Yeah.

In quantities sufficient to feed that many mouths. Yeah. He recounts his own experiences in the Sinai Desert.

Oh wow. Where he needed a gallon of water a day just to survive. Wow.

Now imagine trying to provide that much water for 2.4 million people every single day. I can't even imagine. It really challenges our understanding of how this mass migration could have been possible.

Yeah. It certainly does. But how do we reconcile this massive number with the practical realities of surviving in the desert? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt leaves us to ponder whether ancient numbering systems might hold a key to understanding this.

Okay. Perhaps their concept of a thousand was different from our own, but it's an open question that continues to intrigue scholars and readers alike. That's a fascinating thought.

Yeah. So we have this huge logistical puzzle. We do.

But let's move on to the plagues. Okay. Dr. Hildebrandt presents them as more than just special effects.

Right. What does he say about their purpose? He highlights three key reasons for the plagues. First, they were a judgment on the Egyptian gods, showing Yahweh's power over their false deities.

Okay. Second, they revealed Yahweh's character, specifically his power, justice, and mercy. And finally, there's an element of lex talionis at play.

Lex talionis. I'm not familiar with that term. It's Latin for law of retaliation, the idea of an eye for an eye.

The plagues can be seen as a response to the Egyptians' cruel treatment of the Israelites. Oh, okay. Each plague mirrors, in a way, the suffering the Israelites endured under Egyptian oppression.

That's a thought-provoking perspective. It is. It's not about random acts of destruction, but about demonstrating justice and challenging the established order.

Exactly. So now there are 10 plagues. Yes.

Are there any that Dr. Hildebrandt highlights as particularly important to remember? Yes. He points out four that are key. The snake, the blood, darkness, and the death of the firstborn.

Why those four? Each one targeted a specific aspect of Egyptian power or belief. For example, the snake devoured a symbol of Egyptian power and authority. The Nile River, revered as a god, was turned into blood, a source of death and disease.

Then the plague of darkness challenged Ra, the sun god, demonstrating Yahweh's power over even the heavens. And finally, the death of the firstborn was a direct challenge to Pharaoh's authority, striking at the heart of Egyptian society and power. So it's amazing how each plague had a symbolic significance, challenging Egyptian beliefs and revealing Yahweh's power in very specific ways.

But I'm also curious about those magicians who initially opposed Moses. What happens to them? They undergo a fascinating transformation. At first, they seem like rivals to Moses, mimicking the miracles and trying to undermine his authority.

But as the plays intensify, they become witnesses to God's power, acknowledging that this is the finger of God. Oh, wow. They start as opponents, but end up recognizing the true source of power.

That brings us to the Passover, and Dr. Hildebrandt paints a very vivid picture of the ritual itself. He does. He focuses on three key elements: the lamb, the bitter herbs, and the unleavened bread.

He describes how the Israelites were instructed to roast a lamb, eat it, and smear its blood on their doorposts. The bitter herbs, often represented by horseradish today, symbolize the bitterness of slavery in Egypt, reminding the Israelites of their suffering and God's

deliverance. And the unleavened bread, made without yeast so it doesn't rise, represents the hasty departure from Egypt, leaving no time for the bread to rise.

Yeah. Warm bread in the Israeli grocery store, you'll never forget that. The fly in the bagel.

It's true. So it's interesting how each element of the meal has a symbolic meaning, connecting the physical act of eating with the spiritual significance of the event. Dr. Hildebrandt also talks about the role of children in the Passover celebration.

Why is that so important? He emphasizes the importance of children asking questions about the ritual. It's a way of passing on the story, strengthening family bonds through shared faith, and ensuring that the memory of the Exodus is kept alive for generations to come. I love how it turns the meal into a teaching moment.

It does. It fosters dialogue and deepens understanding within families. It's not just about following a tradition, but about engaging with its meaning and significance.

And Dr. Hildebrandt makes a beautiful connection between the Passover and the Last Supper. He points out that Jesus deliberately chose the Passover to die, fulfilling the symbolism of the meal in a profound way. This is where the Old and New Testaments come together in a powerful convergence.

Yeah. Jesus becomes our Passover lamb, his sacrifice offering us freedom from the slavery of sin. Right.

It's a new Exodus, a liberation on a spiritual level. Wow. Made possible through Christ's death and resurrection.

So it really is a new Exodus. And he points out a detail I found so striking. Just like the Passover lamb, Jesus's bones were not broken on the cross.

It highlights how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Passover imagery, offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice for the redemption of humanity. It's a powerful reminder of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. It's not just about different stories, but about a unified narrative of God's love and redemptive plan for humanity.

And that plan includes God's desire to dwell among his people, which is what we see in the next part of Dr. Hildebrandt's lecture, The Tabernacle. What's remarkable is how he doesn't get bogged down in the architectural details. No.

He cuts right to the heart of the matter, focusing on the key idea of God choosing to dwell among his people. He quotes the verse, I will dwell among them. He connects it directly to the name Immanuel, meaning God with us.

Right. It's an amazing concept. It is.

The God who created the universe, choosing to make his home among a group of former slaves. I love the image he uses. God dwelling in a tent, just like the Israelites.

It makes the divine presence so tangible and relatable. It challenges our notion of God being distant or aloof, residing in some far-off heaven. He chooses to be present in the messiness of our everyday lives, journeying alongside us, sharing in our joys and sorrows.

It's incredibly comforting to think about God choosing to be with us, even when we're wandering in the wilderness, so to speak. Absolutely. It gives me a sense of hope and encouragement.

Yeah. And that sense of hope extends to how we live our lives, which is where Dr. Hildebrand introduces the Sabbath. He presents it not as a restrictive rule, but as a foundational principle for a flourishing life.

He uses a great analogy to explain this. He talks about Wisconsin roads. I love that analogy.

I know, right? And how they are built to last, with a solid base that can withstand the harsh winters. The Sabbath is like that solid base for our lives. It's a rhythm of rest and renewal, a time to step back from the demands of work and reconnect with God, with ourselves, and with our loved ones.

It's a powerful reminder that we are not slaves to our work or our ambitions. He highlights the benefits of observing a Sabbath, remembering God's work, finding rhythm in our lives, renouncing work as our master, experiencing refreshment, and following God's example. Yeah, those are good.

Right. It's a great list. He even acknowledges the different perspectives on Sabbath observance in the New Testament, encouraging us to consider our own approach to incorporating this rhythm of rest into our lives.

Yeah. So we've covered a lot of ground in this first part of our deep dive, but I still have some questions. I bet.

Like, how does the Exodus story with its massive numbers actually make sense? And what does it mean for God to be both a warrior and a God of peace? Those are great questions, and they're not easy ones to answer. That's the beauty of diving deep. It opens up new questions and challenges us to grapple with the complexities of faith in history.

I'm definitely ready to explore these questions further. Let's continue our deep dive in part two. You know, as we unpack these questions about the Exodus numbers and God's role as a warrior, it brings up a deeper issue: that tension between faith and reason.

I'm all about logic and evidence, but this Exodus story with those millions of people wandering in the desert, well, sometimes it seems to defy logic. That's exactly the point. Sometimes faith asks us to embrace paradox, take those 2.4 million people in the desert.

Logistically, it seems impossible, but the text presents it as fact. So what do we do, dismiss it as exaggeration or grapple with what it means if God can truly do the impossible? I guess it's a choice between sticking with my usual logical framework or expanding my understanding of what might be possible. It's definitely pushing me to think outside the box.

And that's what deep dives should do. Dr. Hildebrandt reminds us that some things in the Bible might always remain a mystery, but wrestling with those mysteries can actually deepen our faith and expand our understanding of God. Okay, I can get behind that.

But what about God being portrayed as a warrior? That feels at odds with Jesus' message of peace and love. It's a tension we can't ignore. Dr. Hildebrandt acknowledges this, pointing out that God is portrayed as a warrior in both the Old and New Testaments.

But he also challenges us to consider what kind of warrior God is. So not just a vengeful, conquering deity. Right.

Think about the heart of the Exodus story. It's about liberation. God fights on behalf of the oppressed, delivering them from slavery.

It suggests that sometimes fighting for justice is necessary, even if it's not our ideal solution. That makes sense. It's not about glorifying violence, but recognizing that sometimes confronting evil requires strength and action.

Exactly. And even in the midst of these battles, God still shows grace and mercy. Remember, he spared the Israelites from those plagues that devastated Egypt.

That's a good point. It's not a black-and-white picture. God embodies both justice and mercy, fighting for his people while also offering forgiveness to their oppressors.

It's a complex portrayal, and I appreciate how Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't shy away from that complexity. Speaking of complexity, remember how Dr. Hildebrandt presented the two main possibilities for where Moses crossed the sea? There's the Bitter Lakes, and then the Gulf of Suez, which is part of the Red Sea. He even mentioned that guy from Wisconsin with his theory about crossing at the Gulf of Aqaba.

Okay, that last one sounds like a stretch, even for me. But I get why the location matters. It's not just about geography, right? It's symbolic.

The crossing is a pivotal moment of liberation, a definitive break from slavery. And where it happened adds another layer of meaning to that liberation. So crossing the Bitter Lakes might highlight God's miraculous provision, creating a path where there seemed to be none.

Exactly. But if it was the Red Sea, it could emphasize God's overwhelming power, parting this vast body of water to save his people. And then there's the mystery of Mount Sinai and its multiple proposed locations.

Dr. Hildebrandt seemed to present this as more of a curiosity than a problem. That's because the exact location isn't as important as the encounter itself. We may never know the precise mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments, but that doesn't diminish the significance of God revealing his law and covenant to his chosen people.

It's about that encounter with God, and what those laws, especially the Sabbath, tell us about how to live our lives. Remember Dr. Hildebrandt's analogy of the Sabbath as a foundational principle, like those Wisconsin roads built on a solid base. The Sabbath is that

base for our lives, a rhythm of rest and renewal that helps us remember God, find balance, and resist letting work become our master.

Violating that rhythm can really throw our lives out of whack. I can relate to that. I remember pulling all-nighters in college, writing papers, and feeling like a zombie the next day.

We all need that regular reset, that time to step back from the demands of life and reconnect with our Creator. And Dr. Hildebrandt acknowledged that Sabbath observance doesn't have to look the same for everyone. He pointed out that the New Testament doesn't mandate a specific day or set of rules.

It's about finding that rhythm that works for you, a rhythm that helps you live in a way that aligns with God's purposes for your life. That brings up an important point. This deep dive isn't just about gathering information about Exodus.

It's about exploring what this ancient story means for us today. Right. We've talked about the logistics, the battles, the location mysteries, even road construction.

So where does all of this leave us? What's the main takeaway from this exploration of Exodus? The Exodus is a story about liberation. It's about God stepping into human history to deliver His people from oppression. And that theme echoes throughout Scripture and human experience.

It reminds us that God is a God of action who fights for justice and offers hope even in the darkest of times. It's also a story about Covenant God creating a relationship with His chosen people and offering them a way of life designed for flourishing. And that covenant isn't just about following rules.

It's about embracing a relationship with a God who desires to live among us, to be present in our struggles and our triumphs. So the Exodus isn't just an ancient story. It's a timeless narrative that speaks to our deep longing for freedom, purpose, and belonging.

It invites us to consider what Egypt we need to escape from in our own lives. What forces are holding us captive, preventing us from living in the fullness of God's freedom? And how can we apply the principles of Exodus- trusting in God's power, committing to justice, and embracing a rhythm of rest to our own journeys? These are questions worth reflecting on as we continue to explore the truths of this powerful story. Ready for part three.

You know, as we've been exploring this Exodus material, one thing that strikes me is the sheer audacity of it all. Audacity? How so? Well, you have this group of former slaves led by a shepherd who talks to a burning bush going up against the most powerful empire in the world. It seems like a recipe for disaster.

It does seem that way, doesn't it? Like a David and Goliath story? But on an epic scale. But that's what makes it so compelling. It speaks to the power of faith and the courage to challenge the status quo.

It's about believing that liberation is possible even when the odds are stacked against you. That's right. It's not just about escaping physical slavery, but about breaking free from any form of oppression.

Any system that devalues human dignity and potential. That's why the Exodus story resonates so deeply with people across cultures and throughout history. It speaks to that universal human yearning for freedom, for justice, for a world where everyone can live with dignity and respect.

And Dr. Hildebrandt highlighted this beautifully with his discussion of the tabernacle. Yeah. It wasn't just a fancy tent.

Right. It was a symbol of God's presence dwelling among his people, even in the midst of their wilderness wanderings. It's amazing to think about that.

The God who created the universe. Yeah. Choosing to make his home among a group of former slaves.

It's a powerful image. It is. And it challenges our assumptions about God being distant or uninvolved.

Right. He chooses to be present in the messiness of our everyday lives. Walking with us through the highs and lows.

And that presence isn't passive. Yeah. We see God actively intervening.

Yes. Fighting for his people, providing for their needs, guiding their steps. Even when they rebel.

Yeah. Doubt and make mistakes. Right.

God's faithfulness never wavers. Right. He doesn't abandon them.

Uh-huh. But patiently leads them toward the promised land. That's really comforting, knowing that God's commitment to us doesn't waver, even when we mess up.

Yeah. It's a reminder of his unwavering love and faithfulness. It's also a challenge.

Mm-hmm. If God is so invested in our liberation and flourishing, what does that mean for how we live? How does it impact our choices and priorities? That reminds me of what Dr. Hildebrandt said about the Sabbath. Right.

It's not just a day off. No. But a way of life.

Right. A way of structuring our time and priorities around God's presence and purpose. It's recognizing that we are not slaves to our work.

Yeah. Our ambitions or the demands of the world. Yeah.

We are called to live as free people. Yeah. Empowered by God's grace and guided by his love.

So the Exodus story isn't just an ancient historical account. It's a blueprint for living. It is.

It's a call to action. Yeah. An invitation to partner with God in bringing about liberation and flourishing.

Right. Both in our own lives and in the world around us. And that's what makes it so relevant today.

As we face our own personal Egypts. Right. Whether they're personal struggles, injustices in the world, or even global crises.

Yeah. The Exodus story reminds us that God is with us. Yeah.

Fighting for us. Leading us toward a future filled with hope and possibility. So we've come to the end of this deep dive.

We have. But it feels like just the beginning of a much larger exploration. What Egypts do you, dear listener, need to escape from? What forces are holding you captive, preventing you from experiencing the fullness of God's freedom? And how can you apply the principles of Exodus trust in God's power, commitment to justice, and embracing a rhythm of rest to your own journey? These are questions worth pondering as we continue to grapple with the timeless truths of this incredible story.

Thanks for joining us for this deep dive.