

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 15, Theology of Numbers

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All right, ready to dive deep into the book of Numbers. Numbers! Yeah, Numbers. I know, I know, not the most, uh, let's say, thrilling title.

Not exactly a page-turner, right? Right, but trust me, this one's packed with surprises. Oh yeah, tons of them. We're talking interracial marriage, debates about God, like, can he change his mind or what? Big questions.

The power of prayer, even a connection to, get this, John 3.16. No way! Way! And to guide us, we've got a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, who's bringing, like, seriously fresh perspectives to these old stories. What I love about Dr. Hildebrandt is how he connects these events to our lives today, you know? Yeah, for sure. He doesn't just tell the stories; he digs into what they mean for us now.

Individually. So, let's jump in. Dr. Hildebrandt starts with this story, which might raise some eyebrows, about Moses and his wife.

Oh, this is a good one. Now, we know from Exodus that Moses was married to Zipporah, right? Right. But there's some debate about whether this, this woman, this Cushite woman was Zipporah or a second wife.

Second wife. Yeah, either way, the point is her, her background. The Cushites were from the ancient kingdom of Cush.

Okay. Believed to be, like, modern-day Sudan. So, we're talking about a woman with probably dark skin.

Exactly, and that's where things get, well, interesting. Yeah. Moses' siblings, Miriam and Aaron, weren't exactly happy campers about this marriage.

Not happy at all. They criticized Moses, like, openly because of his wife's race. Talk about family drama.

Right. Sibling rivalry is one thing, but this, this is different. Totally different.

This isn't about, like, who gets the last cookie. Yeah. It's about prejudice and social norms and, wow.

So, how did this go over with God? Let's just say God was not having it. Not having it at all. Not at all.

He basically tells Miriam and Aaron off. Yeah. Big time for criticizing Moses.

Yeah. And then, boom, Miriam gets leprosy. Leprosy.

Leprosy. Her skin turns white as snow, which Dr. Hildebrandt thinks might be, like, deliberate irony. Whoa.

To show how messed up their obsession with skin color was. Exactly. Makes you think, right? Don't judge a book by its cover and all that.

For sure. But here's a thought. What if Miriam and Aaron were concerned about, like, something else besides race? Something else.

Yeah, like, maybe they saw this marriage as a threat to Moses' leadership, you know, or a distraction from what God wanted them to do. That's interesting. It's possible, right? Human motivations are complicated.

Right. But either way, God's message is clear. Criticizing someone based on race? Nope.

Not cool. Not cool at all. So, interracial marriage, divine judgment.

What else does Dr. Hildebrandt have for us? Oh, he takes us to this passage, Numbers 12.3, where Moses is described as very humble. Humble. Yeah, even more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.

Wait, wouldn't a truly humble person, like, never say that about themselves? Yeah, it almost sounds a little... Arrogant. Arrogant, right. So how do we make sense of that? Well, some scholars think maybe Moses didn't actually write this verse.

Maybe someone else added it later. Exactly. But Dr. Hildebrand suggests another possibility, and it's fascinating.

He says the Hebrew word *oni*, usually translated as humble, could also be translated as, get this, oppressed. Oppressed. So instead of Moses bragging about how humble he is... He's actually saying how much pressure he's under, how much criticism he faces from the Israelites, even his own family.

Makes sense. Right. Constantly stuck between God and this stubborn, rebellious people.

I'd feel the weight, too. Makes you wonder how many people we see as arrogant or distant are actually just carrying heavy burdens. Right.

You never really know what someone else is going through. And Dr. Hildebrand, he doesn't stop there. He takes us on this journey through the wilderness, through some of the toughest, most confusing moments for the Israelites.

Okay, you've got me hooked. Let's see where this wilderness adventure takes us. So the Israelites finally reach the promised land, Canaan.

They made it. They made it. But instead of marching in all confidence... I know, right? They sent out 12 spies to scout it out.

Okay. So they've seen God part the Red Sea, rain down food from the sky, but they're still scared. Yeah.

It's like, come on, guys. Haven't you learned anything? Right. What did the spies say? They came back with these stories about a land overflowing with milk and honey.

Sounds delicious. Right. But then they start talking about giants in these huge, fortified cities.

And that's when the Israelites completely freak out. Giants? Like, seriously? Yeah. They were comparing themselves to grasshoppers next to these giants.

Talk about a self-esteem issue. So what did God think about all this? Oh, God was not happy. Not happy at all.

At first, he was so angry, he wanted to just wipe out the entire Israelite community and start over, like completely fresh. Wow. That's intense.

Yeah, it is. But you can kind of see why, right? Yeah. He's done all this for them, and they're still doubting him.

It's like, hello, I parted a sea for you. But that's not the end of the story. There's more.

Oh, yeah. This is where Moses steps up and does something incredible. Okay.

What did he do? He argues with God. He actually argues with God. No way.

Yeah. He begs God to spare the Israelites, not just for them, but for God's own reputation. What do you mean? He's basically saying, look, if you destroy them now, everyone's going to think you weren't strong enough to get into the promised land in the first place.

That's pretty bold, arguing with God like that. It is. But it shows you how much Moses trusted God, how well he understood God.

Yeah. He wasn't afraid to speak his mind. Exactly.

And what's amazing is that it works. God actually listens to Moses and forgives the Israelites. So they were off the hook.

Well, not completely. They still had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years as punishment. But yeah, they were spared from total destruction.

That's a pretty big deal. It is. And this story raises a big question, a question that Dr. Hildebrandt really dives into.

What's that? Can God change his mind? Wow. That's a deep one. It is.

This story seems to say yes, but it's something people have debated for centuries. Yeah. I can see why.

Some people say God is unchanging. Yeah. He knows everything: past, present, future.

So how could he change his mind? Right. Right. But others say, no, God's relational.

He interacts with us. He responds to us. He can be moved by what we do.

So two very different views. Yeah. Very different.

Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't give us a simple answer, but he does throw out some really interesting ideas. Like what? Well, he suggests maybe it's not about God changing from a wrong decision to a right one. Maybe it's more about choosing between different goods.

Different goods. What do you mean? Like in this case, God could have destroyed the Israelites, and it would have been fair. But he also chose to show them mercy and forgive them.

And that's part of his character too. So it's not really a change of mind, but more like different ways of expressing his will. Yeah.

That's one way to look at it. But what about those verses, you know, that say God doesn't change? Oh, Dr. Hildebrandt addresses that too. He says maybe the way God changes is just different from how we humans change.

Okay. How so? We change our minds because, you know, we were wrong about something. Or we learned something new.

Exactly. But God's changes, if you want to call them that, maybe they're based on something else. Something bigger.

Curious. What could that be? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt points out that even back in the Garden of Eden, God gives Adam and Eve a choice, right? The whole apple thing. Exactly.

It's like, if you do this, then this will happen. A conditional situation. Yeah.

It implies choice, consequences, a response to what humans do. So maybe it's not so much God changing his mind, but him responding to our choices, all within his bigger plan. That's it.

Like, he knows all the possibilities, all the moves, but he lets us play our part. Okay. I like that analogy.

Like, God's the ultimate chess player. Exactly. And you see this if-then thing throughout the Bible.

Dr. Hildebrandt gives this example from 1 Samuel, where God tells King Saul, if you would obey me, your kingdom would last forever. Wow. So our choices really can change things, even in the grand scheme of God's plan.

They really can. And this whole debate, free will versus predestination- Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't shy away from it. He says, maybe we're just asking the wrong questions.

Okay. What are the right questions then? Instead of getting all caught up in, like, who's in control, us or God? Yeah. Maybe we should be focusing on our relationship with him.

Yeah. Like, how do we connect with him, understand him better? Exactly. It's not about being puppets on strings.

We're part of this story. We make choices. And Dr. Hildebrandt says that instead of getting stuck trying to solve these unsolvable mysteries, we should just embrace the wonder of it all.

He reminds us, you know, that God's understanding is way beyond ours. It's like, we don't have to have all the answers, right? We can just be in awe of God, recognizing that his ways are bigger than we can grasp. That's it.

It takes the pressure off. We don't have to figure everything out, but that sense of wonder, it should inspire us to keep seeking, keep learning about God, not to put them in a box, you know? Yeah. But to explore, to see how deep it goes.

Exactly. But, hey, let's switch gears for a minute. Okay.

Where are we going now? Let's talk about this big conflict that pops up in the Israelite camp. Oh, yeah. The rebellion.

The rebellion of Korah. This guy, he basically challenges Moses and Aaron's leadership, right? Like, who put you in charge? Yeah. Korah and these other guys, Dathan and Abiram, they want special privileges, a closer connection to God, they say.

Sounds like a power grab. Total power grab. And they start, like, stirring up trouble among the people.

Classic power struggle stuff. We see it everywhere, right? Politics, work, even families. Makes you think, why are people so obsessed with power? Right.

What's it all about? But here's what's interesting. Moses, who's usually the calm one, the peacemaker, gets angry this time; he actually prays against the rebels. Whoa, really? That's not like Moses at all.

I know, right? He's always the one pleading for mercy, trying to smooth things over. So what was different this time? It's like this rebellion really hit a nerve with him. Maybe he saw it as a direct attack on God, not just on himself.

Yeah. Moses was chosen by God, right? This was like a slap in God's face. Exactly.

And God, well, he responds in a big way. The earth opens up, swallows Korah, Dathan, Abram, their families, everything. Just gone.

Wow. That's intense. You'd think the other Israelites would learn their lesson after seeing that.

You would, wouldn't you? But nope. The very next day, they're back to complaining, blaming Moses and Aaron for, get this, killing the Lord's people. It's like, come on, guys.

An earthquake wasn't enough of a sign. I know. It's crazy, right? Makes you wonder, are some people just determined to be miserable? Maybe.

Some people just can't handle change, even when it's for the better. Dr. Hildebrandt compares it to someone trying to quit smoking after a heart attack. It's a struggle, a constant battle.

It's not just about seeing miracles, right? It's about being willing to change, to let go of old habits. Yeah. It takes humility, honesty, being willing to face yourself, you know? And that's not easy.

Not easy at all. But before we wrap things up, there's this one story Dr. Hildebrandt talks about that I find really fascinating. It's about the bronze serpent.

Oh yeah. This one's wild. The Israelites are complaining again, of course.

They love to complain. And God sends poisonous snakes to punish them. But then Moses makes this bronze snake and puts it on a pole.

Anyone who looks at it gets healed. Right. It's strange, but it shows you the power of faith and doing what God says.

Like a test, almost, right? Will they keep blaming God, or will they look to him for help? Exactly. It's about surrender, trusting God, even when it doesn't make sense. But the really mind-blowing part is the connection Dr. Hildebrandt makes to John 3.16. You mean, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son? That's the one.

What does that have to do with a bronze snake? I don't know. You tell me. Okay.

So in John 3.16, Jesus is talking to this guy, Nicodemus, and he compares himself to that bronze snake Moses lifted up. Whoa, really? I never thought about it that way. It's like the bronze serpent was foreshadowing Jesus, pointing to the ultimate healing, the ultimate rescue.

So looking at the bronze snake, it's like believing in Jesus. Exactly. You see how these Old Testament stories can, like, unlock the New Testament? Yeah.

It's like the whole Bible is telling one big story. That's the beauty of it. And Dr. Hildebrandt helps us see that, to look at these stories with fresh eyes, to ask questions, to dig deeper.

So as we wrap up our deep dive into the Book of Numbers, I think the biggest takeaway is this question Dr. Hildebrandt leaves us with. Okay. What's the question? Do the things you do today matter? Wow, that's a good one.

It makes you think about the choices you make, how they affect not just you, but other people. Exactly. We're not just watching the story; we're writing it.

Our choices, our actions, they all add up to something. So yeah, choose wisely. Live with purpose.

And don't forget the wonder, the wonder of it all. That's a perfect way to end it. Thanks for joining us for this deep dive, folks.