

# **Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,**

## **Session 17, Deuteronomy: Institutions, Law**

Sponsored by [Biblicalelearning.org](https://Biblicalelearning.org) by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome back, deep divers. Today, we're cracking open the book of Deuteronomy. Ooh, Deuteronomy.

Yeah. Specifically, it's a take on law. You guys sent in a lecture transcript from Dr. Ted Hildebrandt.

Okay. And wow, it is packed with thought-provoking stuff. I bet.

So get ready to connect those ancient laws to modern life, gain some theological insights, and who knows, maybe even have some like aha moments along the way. Sounds like fun. To help us navigate this deep dive, we've got a resident expert in, well, all things biblical interpretation.

What makes Deuteronomy so, I don't know, unique in the Old Testament? What stands out to you? Well, Deuteronomy, it's kind of cool because it's like this bridge, you know, between the law given at Mount Sinai and how it's actually lived out as the Israelites were about to enter the promised land. It's almost like a constitution outlining not just the rules, but also the values and the structures for their society. It's like their blueprint for a whole new society.

Speaking of blueprints, Dr. Hildebrandt talks about these fundamental building blocks, the Ten Commandments. Of course. We all know them, right? But he uses this catchy mnemonic.

Oh, I love a good mnemonic. I know. Big LC Spam S. What? Yeah, to break them down.

Could you unpack that for us? Big LC Spam, huh? Well, it's definitely memorable. Get in it. But beyond just, you know, remembering them, we've got to understand the significance, right? These commandments, they're like the foundation for both Judaism and Christianity.

Yeah. And their relevance, honestly, it still echoes today. Okay.

So let's try to bridge that gap, right? Those ancient laws, modern life. Take, for example, the commandment against coveting. Dr. Hildebrandt has some really interesting thoughts on this, especially in our consumer-driven world.

Oh, absolutely. Coveting in ancient Israel. You know, you think about wanting your neighbor's donkey or their ox.

Right. But Dr. Hildebrandt, he brings it into the 21st century, right? To our consumerist society. Yeah.

We're bombarded with messages to, like, buy more, get the latest upgrade, keep up with the Joneses. Oh, totally. And it's not just stuff, right? We covet relationships, status, other people's opportunities, even their talents, you know? It makes you wonder: how can we even apply this commandment in a way that helps us navigate all those desires, that constant urge to want more? Well, Deuteronomy doesn't mess around, right? It digs deep into the dangers of coveting.

Yeah. It's not just the outward actions, but it's about the inner attitude of the heart. The heart of the matter, literally.

Literally. So practically speaking, it's about cultivating contentment, gratitude, and generosity. So shifting the focus from what we lack to what we have.

Exactly. True fulfillment. It doesn't come from accumulating more, but from right relationships with God and others.

That makes a lot of sense. Now, another commandment that seems straightforward on the surface, but has some surprising depth is, well, thou shalt not kill. Dr. Hildebrandt highlights a key distinction here.

Yes. The Hebrew word there actually translates more accurately as murder. Oh, interesting.

Implying premeditation and malice, you know? Okay. Even in the Old Testament, there's a recognition that not all killing is, well, morally equal. Right.

He gives the example of the cities of refuge. Right. These were designated places for someone who accidentally killed another person.

Oh, I see. They could flee there to be protected from, you know, revenge. So they had a system that distinguished between intentional murder and unintentional killing.

Exactly. Showing a concern for justice and fairness. Yeah.

But also mercy and understanding. That's incredibly forward-thinking for that time. Right.

It's not just blindly applying the law, but considering the context, the intent behind the action. It makes you think about the nuances of, well, even our modern legal systems. Right.

I'm really intrigued by Dr. Hildebrandt's point about the three key institutions the Israelites were meant to establish. Prophets, judges, kings. Okay.

It's like he's drawing parallels between those ancient roles and the challenges we face today. Yeah. Each institution represents this, like, crucial aspect of a society that's striving to, you know, live by God's values.

Take the prophets, for example. They were meant to speak truth to power, challenge the status quo, and remind people of their covenant with God. But as Dr. Hildebrandt points out, they often, well, they often rejected the prophets who spoke hard truths.

They did. And embraced those who told them what they wanted to hear. It's human tendency, isn't it? Yeah.

It's a little too familiar even today, isn't it? It is. We see it in our tendency to gravitate toward echo chambers and information bubbles, you know, where our beliefs are just reinforced instead of engaging with different perspectives. The challenge then is how to discern genuine truth from all that noise, all that spin.

Exactly. How do we become like the Bereans? They were commended for examining the Scriptures, you know, seeing if what they were hearing lined up with truth. That's a powerful challenge for all of us, especially now when we're bombarded with information.

Absolutely. And then there's the role of judges. Dr. Hildebrandt really emphasizes their accessibility to everyone.

Yes. Ensuring justice wasn't just for the wealthy or powerful. Right.

He even shares some personal anecdotes about how money and justice can get, well, uncomfortably intertwined even today. Oh, absolutely. It's easy to think those issues are things of the past.

Yeah. But it makes you stop and think: are those same dynamics still at play in our systems today? It really does. And finally, there's kingship.

Ah, yeah. Dr. Hildebrandt points out the Israelites weren't even supposed to have a king, right? God was meant to be their king. Exactly.

But they wanted to be like the other nations. So God, through Moses, gave them some pretty specific guidelines for how a king should and shouldn't behave. It's fascinating how those guidelines address the potential pitfalls of power.

Like those warnings against multiplying horses, wives, and gold. Right. Dr. Hildebrandt explains it wasn't just random rules.

Right. But ways to prevent the king from, you know, putting his trust in military might. Right.

Or getting distracted by too many things. Uh-huh. Or becoming corrupt by wealth and power.

That's like a timeless blueprint for leadership, isn't it? It is. It challenges us to ask, what do we put our trust in? Are we seeking security and fulfillment in the wrong places? And what would it look like to, like Dr. Hildebrandt says, write the law on our hearts, like the king was instructed to do? Letting those principles shape our values and actions. Powerful image, right? Speaks to inner transformation, not just external compliance.

Yeah. And it ties directly to this question of how we, as modern readers, wrestle with applying these ancient laws to our lives today. Absolutely.

Can we just pluck rules from a 3,000-year-old text and call it a day? It's a great question to ponder. Definitely something to think about as we move into the next part of our deep dive.

We've got these ancient laws, but how do we bridge the gap between then and now? Welcome back to our Deuteronomy deep dive.

We've journeyed through the Ten Commandments, those institutions of Israel, but now we're getting into those laws that Dr. Hildebrandt calls, you know, the laws that make you go, hmm. Ooh. The ones that seem a bit out of place in our modern world.

Right. The ones that make us think, how do we apply this ancient wisdom today? Exactly. And Dr. Hildebrandt, he jumps right into some of the, well, the tough stuff, like the laws concerning warfare.

Deuteronomy 20 lays out these guidelines for, you know, how the Israelites were supposed to engage in battle. Right. And some of these guidelines, they might surprise you.

Oh, I bet. What kind of surprises are we talking about? Well, for one, they were instructed to, get this, offer terms of peace. Really? To certain cities before attacking.

Huh. That's unexpected. Why offer peace if you're about to conquer them? Right.

It seems counterintuitive, but it suggests this, like, restraint. Yeah. A desire to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, which is pretty remarkable considering how brutal warfare was back then.

So it wasn't just like a free pass to go in and destroy everything. Not at all. But then there are other passages that, well, they paint a different picture.

For instance, there's a verse that says, when you capture a city, put to the sword all the men in it. Whoa, that's intense. Yeah.

So how do we reconcile that with this idea of offering peace? It's a tension, right? We can't ignore it. We have to acknowledge the historical context, you know? Warfare was brutal in the ancient Near East. Right.

But we also got to wrestle with how this fits with our understanding of God, you know? Right. Dr. Hildebrandt suggests, uh, holding those multiple perspectives in tension. Okay.

Recognizing that God might've been working within the limitations of that historical moment. Yeah. Even while his ultimate revelation points towards peace and reconciliation.

It's like seeing the bigger picture of God's work throughout history. Exactly. But how does that apply to us today? We're not exactly going to battle with swords and shields.

True, but we face conflicts, right? Personal ones, societal ones. Oh, yeah. And these ancient laws, those principles embedded in them.

Yeah. They can still challenge us to think about how we engage in those conflicts. So what are some of those principles that we can glean from this? Well, for one, that idea of exhausting all peaceful options before resorting to violence.

Oh, right. You know? Do we prioritize dialogue, negotiation? Or are we quick to, like, demonize those we disagree with? It's a good reminder to approach conflict with humility, you know? Absolutely. A willingness to listen.

Especially now, right? It's so easy to get caught up in that us versus them mentality. Yeah, for sure. And then there's the question of, like, how we treat those we see as enemies.

Do we dehumanize them? Right. Or do we strive to see them as, well, fellow human beings? Those are tough questions. They are, but important ones.

As Jesus said, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Right, that's radical. Radical.

It challenges us to operate from a different ethic, you know? One rooted in love and compassion, not fear and retaliation. Okay, so we've unpacked wars. What other unjust laws does Dr. Hildebrandt address? Well, let's talk about slavery.

Deuteronomy has this whole section on the treatment of slaves, and I know this can be a very sensitive and challenging topic. Yeah, definitely a word that carries a lot of baggage, considering the history, you know? Right, and it's crucial to remember, slavery in the ancient world, it was different. Different how? It was more like indentured servitude.

Oh. People might sell themselves into slavery to pay off debts. Absolutely.

They'd be forced into it as prisoners of war. So it wasn't the same system of racialized oppression that we think of today? No, not at all. Okay.

But even so, it's a topic that requires careful consideration. Right. Dr. Hildebrand acknowledges those ethical complexities, and he challenges us to, you know, wrestle with how we understand the Bible's stance on this.

So does the Bible condone slavery? It's complex. Dr. Hildebrand suggests the Bible reflects an evolving understanding of slavery. Okay.

He points to a progression from its acceptance as a social norm in the Old Testament to its ultimate condemnation in the New Testament. Can you give us an example of that progression? Sure. Paul, in his letter to Philemon, urges Philemon to welcome back his runaway slave, Onesimus, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

This suggests a radical shift in perspective. Yeah, it really does. So while the Bible doesn't explicitly condemn slavery in the Old Testament, we see this trajectory towards recognizing the inherent dignity and worth of every human being.

So we're seeing that development from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Exactly. But that doesn't mean we just toss out the Old Testament.

Not at all. It's still foundational to our faith, but we got to read it in light of the fuller revelation we have in Christ. It's like having different pieces of a puzzle.

Right. That fit together to form the complete picture. Perfect analogy.

It reminds us that we can't isolate individual laws or passages from the larger story of God's redemptive work. Okay. So we've got covenant, progressive revelation, but how do we actually apply all of this to our lives? Dr. Hildebrandt gives us this helpful framework.

Love. Love. Yeah.

Think about those two greatest commandments. Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Right.

And love your neighbor as yourself. Those are the foundation. Right.

They are. When we're trying to figure out how to apply these principles from Deuteronomy to our lives today, we can ask, "What does it look like to love God and love my neighbor in this specific situation? It's a great way to approach it. It shifts the focus, right? From rigid rule-following to cultivating a heart that's aligned with God's will.

Okay. One more challenging law before we move on. Okay.

Dr. Hildebrandt mentions a passage in Deuteronomy 22 that addresses what to do with a woman who's accused of not being a virgin on her wedding night. Yes. This law, it outlines a process of investigation and a very severe punishment if the accusation is true.

It sounds archaic and incredibly unjust from our perspective today. It is. And it's important to remember the Bible was written in a specific cultural context.

Yeah. Where a woman's virginity was highly valued. Right.

But even so, this law raises some serious ethical concerns. Like what? Well, for one, it puts the burden of proof entirely on the woman. Right.

Which is inherently unfair. Yeah. And the punishment for a guilty verdict is just disproportionately harsh.

It completely disregards her autonomy and her dignity. Exactly. This highlights that while the Bible contains God's revealed word, it also reflects the cultural norms and biases of the time it was written.

So how do we as modern readers navigate these, well, these problematic passages? Dr. Hildebrandt encourages us to engage with them honestly and critically. We acknowledge the historical context, but we can challenge the parts that don't align with our understanding of God's justice and love. So we appreciate the wisdom and insights, but also recognize its limitations.

Precisely. It's about reading the Bible with discernment, letting it challenge our own assumptions and biases. That's a good way to put it.

Yeah. You've covered a lot here. Warfare, slavery, a law that disregards a woman's agency.

It's a lot to process. It is. What would you say are some key takeaways for our listeners as we navigate these, well, these challenging passages? I think it's crucial to remember that the Bible, it's not just a rule book.

It's a story, a story of God's redemptive love for humanity. And in that story, we see this progression toward justice, mercy, and compassion. So even though we might wrestle with certain aspects of the Old Testament, we can also see how those laws point toward the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes in Christ.

Exactly. And these challenging passages can prompt us to examine our own hearts, our own actions. Are we living in a way that reflects God's love and justice? Are we working to dismantle systems of oppression to create a more equitable world? Those are great questions to reflect on.

As we move into the final part of our deep dive, how can we keep these insights in mind as we explore the overall message of Deuteronomy? I think it's about approaching the text with humility. Okay. Recognizing our own limitations, our own biases, being willing to wrestle with tough questions, and allowing the Spirit of God to guide us into all truth.

That's a perfect segue into our final exploration of this, well, this fascinating and challenging book. And we're back for the final stretch of our Deuteronomy deep dive. We've covered a lot of ground, you know, from the Ten Commandments to those laws that, well, those laws that really make you think.

It's been quite a journey, hasn't it? It has. So now, lift, pull back, look at the bigger picture. What are the overarching themes of this book? What's the so what for us today? I think a key to really getting Deuteronomy is understanding this idea of covenant.

Okay, covenant. That binding agreement between God and His people. Right.

But it's more than just, you know, a legal contract. Right. It's a relationship.

Exactly. It's a relationship based on love and commitment with both blessings and obligations. Deuteronomy lays out those terms, emphasizing both the privileges and the responsibilities that come with being in covenant with God.

So it's not just about following the rules to avoid punishment, but about living in right relationship with God and with each other. Exactly. And the laws themselves, they're an expression of God's love and His desire for His people to flourish.

That's a good way to look at it. And this leads us to another crucial concept that Dr. Hildebrandt talks about: progressive revelation. Okay.

Progressive revelation. Now remind me what that is again. So God's revelation unfolds gradually throughout history.

Okay. Adapting to the needs and the capacities of His people in that specific time. So the core principles are timeless, but the way they're expressed might change over time.

Right. Think about how Jesus takes the law to a whole other level. Okay.

Focusing on the heart, not just outward actions. Right. And then Paul, he emphasizes that we're saved by grace through faith, not by perfectly following the law.

So we see this clear development from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Exactly. We're not just tossing out the Old Testament, right? No, not at all.

The Old Testament is still foundational, but we've got to read it in light of the fuller revelation we have in Christ. It's like, well, it's like having different pieces of a puzzle, right? They fit together to make the complete picture. Perfect analogy.

We can't just isolate laws or passages from the bigger story of God's redemptive work. So how do we apply all of this to our lives? Like, what does this actually look like day to day? Dr. Hildebrand offers a pretty helpful framework. Love.

Love. Think about those two greatest commandments, right? Love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Right.

And love your neighbor as yourself. Those are the foundation for everything else, aren't they? They are. When we're wrestling with applying those Deuteronomic principles today, we can always ask, what does it look like to love God and love my neighbor in this situation? That's so practical.

It takes the focus off of just following rules and puts it on cultivating a heart that's aligned with God's will. And Dr. Hildebrandt reminds us that Deuteronomy doesn't just lay out the law. It ends with this powerful call to choose.

To choose what? To choose life and blessing or death and curses. It's a, well, it's a pretty stark choice, isn't it? It is, but it's a choice we face every day. So it's not about avoiding punishment, but recognizing that aligning ourselves with God's will leads to true flourishing.

Exactly. Embracing that abundant life that God desires for us. That's a powerful message.

As we wrap up our Deuteronomy deep dive, what's the one thing you want our listeners to take away? I hope they come away with a deeper appreciation for, well, for the complexity and the richness of this book. It's not just an ancient rule book, but it's a living word. It speaks to our deepest longings.

It challenges us to, well, to really live out our faith in a world that's often far from God's ideal. Absolutely. It's an invitation to this lifelong journey of learning, growing, and seeking to embody God's love in all we do.

Couldn't have said it better myself. Thank you so much for joining us on this exploration of Deuteronomy. We hope you've been challenged, encouraged, and, well, inspired to keep diving deep into God's word.

And remember, the journey doesn't end here. Keep wrestling with these ideas. Talk about them with others.

And let the Spirit guide you as you seek to live out your faith in a way that honors God and blesses the world. Until next time, deep divers, keep diving deep.