

Dr. Ted Hildebrandt, Old Testament Literature,

Session 19, Joshua: Jericho, Ai, Gibeon, War

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Welcome to another Deep Dive. Today, we're going to be exploring the book of Joshua with a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt. He's going to be our guide.

And it's a story filled with epic events and thought-provoking concepts. So we're going to be unpacking key events like the fall of Jericho and the Israelites crossing the Jordan River, along with examining archaeological findings and different interpretations of biblical accounts, especially those surrounding Jericho and the idea of holy war. Yeah, it's a fascinating journey where history, archaeology, and faith intertwine.

You know, the book of Joshua isn't just a collection of stories. It raises these fundamental questions about faith, obedience, and God's character. Yeah, for sure.

So Dr. Hildebrandt starts by highlighting a pretty pivotal moment, and that is the Israelites crossing the Jordan River, which is described as being at flood stage, by the way, which, I mean, that must have been pretty incredible to see. And then they take 12 stones from the riverbed, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel. And this is where it gets interesting for me.

Only nine and a half tribes actually enter the promised land, right? So why 12 stones? It does make you think, doesn't it? Maybe it's like a powerful image of unity, even though not all the tribes physically crossed at that moment. The 12 stones represent a future hope for a unified Israel bound by their covenant with God. And remember, those tribes who had already settled east of the Jordan were still very much a part of the nation.

Joshua required them to send their fighting men to help conquer Canaan. This was a collective effort, a shared destiny. Wow, that's a good point.

So their first stop after crossing is Gilgal, which quickly becomes a pretty significant place. They celebrate Passover there, their third since leaving Egypt. So what's the significance of this? This is where the story starts to click into place.

Historically and theologically, this Passover celebration not only signifies their renewed covenant with God, but it also helps us pinpoint the time of year. Passover takes place in the spring, which aligns perfectly with when the Jordan River would have been at flood stage. So we're talking historical accuracy and theological significance all wrapped up in one event.

And Gilgal is also where the man has stopped, signifying a huge transition from wilderness dependence to relying on the promised land. It's like they're finally putting down roots. Then there's the circumcision right before going into battle.

Talk about a vulnerable time. Why would God command this? That's one of those moments in the Bible that makes you pause and really think, you know, why would God command something that seems so strategically disadvantageous? It challenges our understanding of

God's ways and the role of obedience, even when it seems counterintuitive or potentially dangerous. Yeah, interesting.

So, okay, let's talk about Jericho. It's one of those well-known stories from the Book of Joshua. Marching around the city for seven days, the priest blowing trumpets, and the walls dramatically collapsing.

But then archaeology steps in. Yeah. And things get a bit more complicated.

Archaeology often adds layers of complexity to biblical accounts. In the 1930s, John Garstang, a well-known archaeologist at the time, believed he had found evidence supporting the biblical account: the Late Bronze Age walls of Jericho collapsing outward. Okay.

But then Kathleen Kenyon came along in the 1960s and, after extensive excavations, concluded that Garstang had misidentified the walls. So where does that leave us? Well, Kenyon's findings suggested that those walls that Garstang had identified were actually from a much earlier period, maybe around the time of Abraham, not Joshua. So she claimed there were no walls surrounding Jericho during the Late Bronze Age, when the conquest would have taken place.

Okay. So did archaeology just disprove the Bible? I mean, it feels like we're left with two conflicting viewpoints. What are the implications of each of these? Well, in the 1990s, Bryant Wood reexamined Kenyon's data and suggested she might have overlooked evidence.

Pointing to the existence of Late Bronze Age walls highlights the challenge of definitively using archaeology to prove or disprove biblical accounts. The data can be interpreted in different ways, and new discoveries can always change our understanding. Right.

And the book of Joshua also uses phrases like until this day, multiple times, referring to things that were still present at the time of writing. Yeah. Some scholars point to this as evidence for a later authorship, suggesting the book was written hundreds of years after the events.

If that's true, it would allow for legends to develop and potentially distort the historical accuracy. Okay. But Dr. Hildebrandt brings up an interesting counterargument to that.

He reminds us that Rahab, the woman who helped the Israelite spies, was still alive when the book was written. Right. And Rahab wasn't a baby at the time of the conquest.

She was a Canaanite woman, suggesting a much shorter time between the events and the writing of the book. So the until this day statements could very well refer to a time within living memory, not centuries later. Right, right.

Okay, let's shift gears and head north to a place Dr. Hildebrandt seems quite excited about, Mount Ebal. This is where things take a fascinating turn. Mount Ebal and its neighboring peak, Mount Gerizim, overlook the Valley of Shechem, a place rich in biblical history.

It's even mentioned in the New Testament as the location where Jesus met the woman at the well. It's amazing how these different layers of biblical history are all connected. Yeah, that's true.

So in the 1980s, archaeologists made a pretty remarkable discovery on Mount Ebal: a massive altar built with uncut stones and a ramp. It's a style consistent with Israelite practices, not Canaanite. Right.

Dr. Hildebrandt suggests that this altar could be the one described in Joshua 8.3, where Joshua builds an altar to God on Mount Ebal, if this is the altar from the biblical account. It raises an interesting question. Does this suggest that the timing of the Passover celebration at Gilgal was intentionally chosen to coincide with the flood stage, allowing them to move quickly to Mount Ebal and build the altar? It's like a giant puzzle where each piece fits together.

But of course, as with many archaeological discoveries, there's ongoing debate about the dating and attribution of this altar. It's important to acknowledge that these debates exist within the archaeological community, but it's still fascinating to see how archaeology can potentially illuminate biblical events. Totally.

Now, we can't talk about the Book of Joshua without mentioning the Gibeonites. They pulled off a pretty clever deception, tricking the Israelites into making a peace treaty with them. They really went all out, using worn clothes and moldy food to make it seem like they had traveled from a distant land.

And the Israelites fell for it, hook, line, and sinker. The Israelites failed to inquire of the Lord before entering this treaty, highlighting the danger of relying on appearances and assumptions, rather than seeking divine guidance. It's a reminder that we shouldn't get so caught up in what appears obvious that we forget to consult God.

It's a cautionary tale about those no-brainer decisions that can sometimes backfire. We've all been there, you know, thinking we have it all figured out, only to find ourselves facing unexpected consequences. The Gibeonite story emphasizes the need to always seek God's wisdom and guidance, acknowledging our limited understanding.

Yeah, I've definitely made a few of those no-brainer decisions. Now, get ready for the sun standing still. This event occurs during Joshua's southern campaign, as he's coming to the aid of his new and somewhat deceptive allies, the Gibeonites.

They're under attack by a coalition of five southern Canaanite kings. Remember, Joshua and his troops marched all night from Gilgal to Gibeon, a distance of about 30 miles. That's a long way, especially considering they were about to engage in a battle.

Yeah, no kidding. Imagine marching all night and then being expected to fight a battle. I'd be exhausted.

It's in this context, as the battle rages, that Joshua prays for the sun to stand still, giving him more daylight to defeat his enemies. And according to the Bible, it happened. This event has generated countless interpretations and debates.

Did the sun literally stop in the sky? Or is there a more metaphorical meaning behind the text? Yeah, let's be honest. The idea of the sun literally stopping for an entire day raises some logistical and scientific questions. Well, Dr. Hildebrand explores a few different interpretations.

One is that the Hebrew word translated as stand still could also mean be silent. OK, so could Joshua have been praying for relief from the scorching sun? The text does mention hailstones falling during the battle, which would have been accompanied by cloud cover and could have provided much-needed relief for his exhausted troops. It's an interesting possibility, especially considering the desperate situation they were facing.

Maybe they weren't asking for more daylight, but for a break from the intense heat. Another fascinating interpretation. This one's proposed by biblical scholar John Walton.

It draws on ancient Babylonian omen texts. So Walton suggests that this unusual positioning of the sun and moon described in the Bible might have been interpreted by the Canaanites as a bad omen. They might have thought the gods were against them.

Imagine the psychological impact on the Canaanites already facing a fierce Israelite army to witness what they believe to be a divine sign of defeat. Wow, that's a really interesting take. And we also have that intriguing reference to the book of Jashar in Joshua 10.13, which supposedly contained a more detailed account of this battle.

It's unfortunate that this book has been lost to history. It's like getting a glimpse into a lost world. It makes you wonder what other stories and perspectives are out there just waiting to be rediscovered.

But Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes one particularly striking detail from the account of the sun standing still. The text states that there has never been a day like it before or since a day when the Lord listened to a man. It really highlights the power of prayer.

God, in this instance, responded to Joshua's plea in such a dramatic way. It challenges us to consider the possibilities when we approach God in prayer, acknowledging his power and his willingness to intervene in human affairs. For sure.

But let's move on from this epic event to Joshua's northern campaign. He's facing Jabin, the king of Hazor. Hazor was a major Canaanite city located near the Sea of Galilee.

According to Dr. Hildebrandt, it's the largest archaeological site in Israel, covering a whopping 250 acres. Wow, that's huge. It was a strategically important city.

It controlled major trade routes and boasted a powerful army equipped with iron chariots. The clash between Joshua and Jabin took place in a valley known as the Valley of Har-Megiddo. Now that name might sound familiar.

Har-Megiddo. Doesn't that sound a lot like Armageddon? Yes. Har-Megiddo is the Hebrew name that becomes Armageddon.

When translated into Greek and then English, it's a place associated with the final battle between good and evil in the Book of Revelation. So we have this ancient battleground with

connections to both historical and prophetic events. It's a reminder of the enduring power of these stories.

But back to Joshua's northern campaign. As you might expect, Joshua is victorious, defeating Jabin and capturing the mighty city of Hazor. So far, Joshua and the Israelites have been on a roll.

They've conquered south. They've conquered the north. What could possibly go wrong? Well, they're about to face a few setbacks.

Dr. Hildebrandt talks about two significant challenges that really test Joshua's faith and leadership. The first is a surprising defeat at the hands of Ai, a seemingly insignificant enemy. Right.

Ai is described as being much smaller than Jericho. So Joshua sends some scouts to assess the situation. And they come back confident, saying it would be an easy victory.

There's that sense of overconfidence. They send a small force to attack, expecting a quick win. But shockingly, they're defeated.

It's their first loss in the conquest of Canaan. It must have been demoralizing. This defeat forces them to reevaluate their strategy and, more importantly, to seek answers from God.

They discover the reason for their loss: sin within the camp. Cool. Achan, one of the Israelites, had disobeyed God's command concerning the spoils of Jericho.

God had declared that everything in Jericho was harem, meaning it was devoted to God for destruction. But Achan took some of the gold and silver in a beautiful Babylonian garment. He essentially stole from God.

So this act violated the covenant. Right. Put the entire community at risk.

Exactly. It brings up that question of corporate responsibility versus individual accountability. In our modern Western culture, we place a strong emphasis on individual responsibility.

But in the ancient world, and even in many cultures today, there's a stronger sense of communal identity and accountability. The actions of one person can have significant consequences for the whole group. So even though Achan's sin was individual, it had huge repercussions for the entire Israelite community.

Right. And it highlights the importance of addressing sin quickly and decisively, acknowledging its impact on both individuals and communities. Achan confesses his sin and, along with his family, is stoned to death, a harsh punishment.

That emphasizes the gravity of their transgression. But for many modern listeners, it raises some pretty difficult ethical questions. It's important to try to understand these events in their historical and cultural context.

The ancient world had very different values and legal systems than our own. We can strive to understand these events without necessarily condoning or justifying the practices. Oh, yeah.

Dr. Hildebrandt also points out that the Israelites had grown accustomed to victory. They might have started to assume that God's favor and success would automatically be theirs, regardless of their actions or obedience. They fell into the trap of thinking that simply being God's chosen people guaranteed victory, regardless of their faithfulness.

I think Dr. Hildebrandt is drawing a parallel to modern churches or individuals who might presume on God's blessing without necessarily aligning their actions with his will. Yeah. That's a powerful reminder for us today that we should never take God's grace for granted or become complacent in our faith.

True faith isn't passive. It requires active obedience and a constant pursuit of righteousness. Exactly.

The second challenge Joshua faces involves our deceptive friends, the Gibeonites. Yeah. Their deception created quite a tricky situation for the Israelites.

They were obligated to honor the treaty. Even though it was based on a lie. It really does.

Dr. Hildebrandt uses this incident to highlight the danger of those no-brainer decisions. The Israelites saw the Gibeonites' worn clothes and moldy food and made a quick judgment. They didn't even consult with God.

What seems obvious or straightforward isn't always so. We don't have all the answers. Trusting God means acknowledging our limited perspective and embracing his wisdom, even when it doesn't initially make sense to us.

So the Gibeonites become part of Israel, but not as equals. They are given the tasks of chopping wood and carrying water, a constant reminder of the Israelites' hasty decision. It's an interesting consequence.

That highlights the lasting impact of choices made without seeking God's guidance. Now, after all the conquering and treaty-making, it's time to divide the promised land among the 12 tribes of Israel. Dr. Hildebrandt focuses on four key tribes and six important cities to help us better understand this part of the story.

Okay. He starts with a really helpful tip for finding Jerusalem on a map. Imagine a line drawn straight up from the top of the Dead Sea.

The city you hit is Jerusalem. Oh, okay. I like that.

That's a good tip. Just north of Jerusalem is the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, known for its most famous son, King Saul, the first king of Israel. And south of Jerusalem, you have the territory of Judah, the tribe from which King David and eventually Jesus would descend.

So we're starting to see the seeds of future conflicts and alliances being sown. Yes. Within these tribal territories are some of the most significant cities in biblical history.

We've already talked about Jericho, located just north of the Dead Sea. Then there's Gibeon, just northwest of Jerusalem, the home of our cunning treaty makers. And of course, Jerusalem, the city destined to become the heart of Israel's religious and political life.

Dr. Hildebrandt also highlights Bethlehem, located south of Jerusalem. It's the birthplace of King David and later Jesus. It's incredible to think about these places mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments.

They come alive when you understand their geographical and historical connections. Dr. Hildebrandt then shifts our attention south to Hebron, often referred to as the Queen of the South. It's an ancient city associated with the patriarch Abraham.

It's where he settled, where he bought the cave to bury his wife, Sarah, and where he himself was eventually buried. And lastly, there's Beersheba, the southernmost city in Israel, located in the Negev Desert. Beersheba literally means Well of Seven, referring to the seven wells dug there.

Yeah. It marked the southern boundary of the Promised Land. So we have these six cities spread out along a major north-south route.

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Beersheba, Jericho, and Gibeon. Each one holds a unique significance in the history of Israel. It's like a roadmap to understanding the unfolding story of the Bible.

Now, with the land divided, Dr. Hildebrandt moves into a topic that's both captivating and challenging: the concept of war in the book of Joshua. He specifically addresses the practice of harem. In this context, it involves the complete destruction of cities and their inhabitants, including women, children, and animals.

It's a very difficult concept for many modern readers. How do we reconcile this idea of a loving God with such seemingly brutal commands? This is a question that people have struggled with for centuries. There are no simple answers.

Dr. Hildebrandt offers a few different perspectives that can help us grapple with this. He emphasizes that the conquest of Canaan is presented in the text as a divine judgment on the wickedness of the Canaanites. God had given them over 400 years to repent, but their sin continued to grow.

Right. God deemed judgment necessary, and Israel acted as an instrument of that justice. Another perspective highlights the danger of idolatry.

God commanded the destruction of the Canaanites to prevent the Israelites from being influenced by their pagan practices. Right. Remember, the Israelites were easily influenced by the gods of the surrounding nations.

This often led them into idolatry and disobedience. So God was protecting them from spiritual contamination. It's also important to remember that the practice of harem wasn't widespread.

It was only applied to a few specific cities. Right. Ultimately, Dr. Hildebrandt acknowledges the difficult truth that God, as the creator, has authority over life and death.

That's not an easy concept to accept, especially from our modern perspective. It forces us to confront the complexity of God's character. We have to acknowledge his justice alongside his mercy, his sovereignty alongside human free will.

Yeah. Dr. Hildebrandt then expands the discussion of war to include different Christian perspectives on its morality and legitimacy. He introduces three viewpoints: non-resistance, pacifism, and just war theory.

Okay. The non-resistance position, often rooted in the teachings of Jesus, emphasizes loving your enemies and refusing to engage in violence, even in self-defense. They point to Jesus's words to turn the other cheek and his example of dying on the cross without resisting.

Right. They believe that true followers of Christ should not participate in war or any form of violence, even in service to their country. But Dr. Hildebrandt does acknowledge the challenges of applying this principle consistently.

What about situations where innocent lives are at stake? What about the need to protect oneself or one's family from harm? These are very complicated questions. The non-resistance position requires a deep commitment to the teachings of Jesus and a willingness to choose suffering rather than inflicting it. He also brings up the concept of dual citizenship.

Christians have responsibilities to both God's kingdom and their earthly nation. So how do we navigate that? It's something I've thought about a lot. It's a question that often leads to tension and debate within the Christian community.

It's a reminder that faith is not always lived out in black and white categories. There are gray areas, complex situations that require careful discernment and a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives. Dr. Hildebrandt touches briefly on pacifism, the belief that rejects all forms of war and violence.

Okay. Pacifists advocate for peaceful conflict resolution. They often draw inspiration from figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. They see nonviolent resistance as a powerful force for social change.

Finally, Dr. Hildebrandt brings up just war theory, which acknowledges that war, while tragic, can sometimes be morally justifiable under certain conditions. Just war theory outlines specific criteria, like a just cause, right intention, last resort, and proportionality of force. It's a framework that tries to balance the desire for peace.

With the reality of evil in the world. It seeks to provide guidelines for determining when the use of force might be necessary to protect the innocent and uphold justice. It's important to note that these are just brief introductions to these complex and often debated perspectives.

There's much more to explore within each viewpoint. It's worthwhile to engage with the arguments and understand the nuances of each position. Right.

It reminds us that there aren't always easy answers. Yeah. Especially when it comes to matters of faith.

It takes thoughtful engagement, prayerful discernment, and a willingness to wrestle with these challenging questions. And that's what I appreciate about these deep dives. You know, we're not just skimming the surface.

We're exploring, engaging with different viewpoints, and grappling with the complexities of faith. Absolutely. So as we wrap up this exploration of the book of Joshua, I'm left with this sense of awe.

It's a book filled with incredible victories, challenging ethical dilemmas, and enduring lessons about faith and leadership. What stands out to you? The book of Joshua reminds us that even when we face these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, God is faithful. He is with us.

It also highlights the importance of obedience. When the Israelites disobeyed God's commands, there were serious consequences. But when they sought his guidance and followed his instructions, they experienced victory and blessing.

I think that's something we can all relate to. Even today, we all face challenges and make mistakes. But ultimately, the book of Joshua points us to the importance of trusting in God's plan and seeking his will in every situation.

I'd like to leave you with this thought-provoking question. If you were in Joshua's sandals, facing seemingly impossible odds and morally complex situations, how would you seek God's guidance and discern his will? It's a question worth considering as we navigate the complexities of our own lives. Trying to live out our faith in a world that often presents us with challenging decisions.

That's a great question. It's been a fascinating deep dive into the book of Joshua. I hope this conversation has sparked your curiosity and inspired you to delve deeper into this incredible story.

And remember, there are always more fascinating topics to explore, more thought-provoking conversations to be had right here on the Deep Dive.