

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

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Buckle up, everybody, because today we are taking a deep dive into ancient Israel, specifically a lecture by Dr. Ted Hildebrandt on the books of Joshua and Judges. We're talking epic battles, moral dilemmas, surprising heroes. Awesome.

But here's the twist. We'll be looking for those unexpected connections to our lives today. Think of it as ancient wisdom for modern living.

One of the most fascinating things Dr. Hildebrandt points out is this seeming contradiction. Oh. Joshua claims total victory in the promised land.

Right. But Judges is full of ongoing conflicts. It's like, wait.

Didn't they already win? Yeah. You'd think it would be all sunshine and roses after conquering Canaan. You would think, right.

So what's going on there? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt suggests we consider Joshua's perspective. He's an older man reflecting back on a lifetime of God's faithfulness. Maybe those grand pronouncements in Joshua are more about the overarching narrative than the nitty-gritty details on the ground.

I see. So it's more about the big picture than a blow-by-blow account of every single skirmish. Exactly.

It reminds us that context is key when interpreting scripture. Oh, always. Joshua's words capture the big picture of God's faithfulness, while Judges zooms in on the messy reality of daily life, the pockets of resistance that remained.

So it's not about a factual error, but different layers of truth emerging. Kind of like how we tell a story differently, depending on who we're talking to or what we want to emphasize. Precisely.

And that nuanced approach is crucial as we enter the world of Judges. Okay. A period Dr. Hildebrandt describes as one of chaos and fragmentation.

Oh, boy. That's where that famous line comes in. Oh, yeah.

Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Ooh, that hits a little too close to home sometimes. Yeah, it does.

But before we get too introspective, let's talk about these Judges. Okay. They weren't exactly presiding over courtrooms, were they? Not quite.

Dr. Hildebrandt explains they were more like regional leaders. Okay. A mix of chieftain and military hero.

Got it. So less Judge Judy and more like William Wallace rallying the troops against oppression. And their stories in the book of Judges, they have this fascinating cyclical pattern.

Yeah. Almost like a spiral staircase. Yes.

It's this recurring pattern. Okay. The people turn away from God, face oppression, and cry out in repentance.

Okay. God raises up a Judge; victory and rest follow. Yay.

Then the cycle starts all over again. Oh, no. It's almost like watching a drama unfold, knowing the plot twists are coming.

Okay. So here's where Dr. Hildebrandt gets really interesting. Okay.

He asks, how often do we see the cycle reflected in our own WN lives? Ooh, good question. Do we have those moments of straying, facing consequences, then turning back? It's a powerful question because it's not just an ancient story. It's a reflection of human nature.

It really is. And perhaps no Judge embodies this cycle more vividly than our first deep dive, Ehud. Ehud, let's talk about him.

This guy's full of surprises. Oh, I love surprises. Yeah.

So what's so surprising about Ehud? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt highlights this seemingly insignificant detail about him. Okay. He's left-handed.

Left-handed. Interesting. So that's a big deal.

What a world designed for right-handed people. Yeah. That becomes a huge advantage.

Okay. I can see that. I'm starting to see where this is going.

Right. And it plays a crucial role in his daring assassination of King Eglon. Oh, wow.

We're jumping right into the action here. Now, remember in the Old Testament, fat often symbolizes success and prosperity. Interesting.

So Eglon wasn't just any king. Got it. He was living large.

Literally. Living large, literally. Okay.

And the scene where Ehud takes him out, it's almost darkly comedic. Okay. I'm intrigued.

Tell me more. He uses this custom-made dagger and escapes through the latrine to, quote, the NLT translation. Through the latrine.

Okay. That's a vivid image. There's a certain irony there.

There is. And it leads to a question Dr. Hildebrandt poses. Get me with it.

What if the things we see as our biggest flaws or weaknesses are actually the very things God wants to use in extraordinary ways? Wow. That's a powerful thought. You're saying Ehud's left-handedness, which might have been seen as a disadvantage.

Where it becomes his secret weapon. Absolutely. So God can use our unique quirks and differences to accomplish his purposes.

Exactly. Hmm. It's like that saying, God doesn't call the qualified.

He qualifies the called. I like that. And that brings us to our next judge, Debra, a woman leading in a man's world.

Ooh, yeah. She's a prophetess, wife, judge, AND military leader. Talk about breaking barriers.

Now this is where things get a little tricky because Dr. Hildebrandt points out the apparent conflict with certain passages in Paul's letters that seem to limit women's roles in leadership. Right. There's that tension that we often see in scripture.

So how does Dr. Hildebrandt address that? Well, he dismantles those weak arguments some use to explain Debra away. Like what? Like the idea that God only uses women when there are no good men available. Yeah, I've heard that one.

Dr. Hildebrandt says that's demeaning to both men and women. Totally agree. Instead, he emphasizes competence and gifting, not gender, as the primary qualifications for leadership.

You know, I think that's something a lot of us can relate to regardless of gender. Have you ever felt overlooked or underestimated because of societal expectations or stereotypes? I think we all have at some point. Yeah, for sure.

And Dr. Hildebrandt reminds us that God sees beyond those limitations. He sees our potential, our gifts, and our calling, regardless of what society might dictate. So he doesn't hesitate to use those who are willing to step out in faith, even if it means challenging the status quo.

Exactly. Speaking of challenging expectations, let's talk about Gideon. Okay.

A man who starts out hiding in a winepress, feeling anything but like a mighty warrior. Yeah, Gideon. The reluctant hero.

The reluctant hero. I like that. So set the scene for us.

What's going on with Gideon? Well, Dr. Hildebrandt explains the context here. Okay. These oppressive Midianites are stealing Israel's harvest.

Uh-oh. That's not good. And Gideon is threshing wheat in a pit.

A pit? Why a pit? Basically trying to avoid confrontation. Oh, I see. Hiding it.

So not exactly a picture of courage. Not at this point. Can you imagine an angel appearing to you while you're hiding out in a hole? Oh my goodness.

Talk about an awkward encounter. And the angel calls him a mighty warrior. Right.

The irony is not lost on Gideon. He's like, um, are you sure you have the right guy? Right. He's full of doubts and insecurities.

Yeah. Like most of us. Which makes him incredibly relatable.

I can definitely relate to that. And then we get to the famous story of Gideon's fleece. Oh, the fleece.

Everyone loves a good fleece story. He asks God for a sign, not once, but twice. Twice.

Come on, Gideon. To confirm his will. So he already knew God's will.

He was just looking for reassurance, maybe a little handholding. And who hasn't been there? We all want that extra confirmation, that neon sign flashing. This is the way.

That's so true. But Dr. Hildebrandt cautions us not to misuse this passage as a DIY guide to finding God's will. Exactly.

It's not about manipulating God into giving us the answers we want. Right. He offers a more holistic approach to discerning God's direction.

Okay. I like that. Tell me more about this holistic approach.

Well, it involves aligning our choices with God's character, pursuing our passions, recognizing our gifts, discerning a sense of calling, and trusting God's timing. That makes a lot of sense. And sometimes those seemingly random threads in our lives come together in ways we never could have imagined.

Right. Absolutely. And it brings us to one of the most dramatic stories in Judges.

Oh, I'm ready for some drama. Gideon's epic battle against the Midianites, also known as the Battle of 300. 300? That doesn't sound like a lot.

Well, that's the point. This is where God takes center stage. I'm sensing a theme here.

God using the underdog, the unexpected. Exactly. So how does this epic battle unfold? Okay.

So Gideon starts with this massive army. Okay. But God whittles it down.

God whittles it down. Why? First, through fear. Okay.

Then through this very specific drinking test. A drinking test. Interesting.

It's as if God's saying, nope, too many. I want to make it clear that I'm the one who gets the credit for this victory. So it's less about military might and more about God using the unexpected to achieve his purposes.

Absolutely. Which, come to think of it, is a recurring theme in Judges. It is.

And it leads us to an important question. Okay. What's the question? What seemingly insignificant detail or weakness in your own life might God want to use for his glory? Wow.

That's a good one to ponder. It is. Definitely something to chew on.

Speaking of chewing on things. Oh boy. Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't let Gideon off the hook after his victory.

Oh, what did he do? He makes some, shall we say, questionable choices. Like that whole golden ephod incident. Ah, yes.

The golden ephod. Taking the spoils of war and creating this elaborate priestly garment that ultimately becomes an object of idolatry. It's a cautionary tale for sure.

It is. Even after experiencing God's miraculous power, it's easy to slip back into old patterns to try and control things or create our own versions of God. It's so human, isn't it? It is.

So what are our modern-day golden ephods? Ooh, that's a good question. The things we cling to that become substitutes for genuine intimacy with God. What are those things that make us feel secure and in control, but ultimately lead us away from true faith? Those are some excellent questions to ponder.

They are. And it's something we'll continue to explore as we delve into the stories of the other judges. But for now, let's take a moment to reflect on what we've learned from Ehud, Deborah, and Gideon.

Okay. These seemingly ordinary individuals with their flaws and imperfections were used by God in extraordinary ways to accomplish his purposes. And it reminds us that God can do the same with us.

Absolutely. It's about recognizing that God sees our potential even when we don't see it ourselves. And he's not waiting for us to be perfect to use us.

He meets us where we are and works through us, flaws and all. And sometimes those flaws, those things we see as weaknesses, become the very tools he uses to achieve his greatest victories. It's a powerful reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

He often chooses to work through the unexpected. The unconventional. Even the downright weird.

And that's something to celebrate, not fear. I love that. Embracing the weirdness, God working through our imperfections.

It's a message that gives me hope. Me too. It's interesting how the book of Judges doesn't shy away from the flaws of its heroes.

Yeah, it's very real. Dr. Hildebrandt really emphasizes that even after a huge victory like Gideon's, there's still that human tendency to mess things up. That whole Golden Ephod incident, turning spoils of war into an idol.

It's kind of a reality check for us. It is. And it makes you think about what Dr. Hildebrandt calls the cardinal sins.

Okay, what are those? Money, sex, and power. The big three. He actually says, and I'm quoting here, if you're going to sin, do power.

It's the clean one. Okay, I'm sensing some sarcasm there. Yeah, he's being a bit tongue-in-cheek, obviously.

Obviously, but there's a deeper truth there, right? Absolutely. Power, unlike the other two, can be so subtle in its corruption. You don't even realize it's happening.

It doesn't always leave obvious marks, but it can slowly twist your intentions, make you think you're above the rules. And we see this play out with some of the other judges, right? Yes. Samson comes to mind: this guy with superhuman strength.

Right. But also some serious weaknesses. Definitely.

It's not a simple good guy versus bad guy situation. Not at all. Dr. Hildebrandt points out that Samson's story isn't really about physical strength.

Okay. About those internal battles we all face. So it's more about character than superpowers.

Exactly. Temptation, making bad choices even when we know better, and then dealing with the consequences. The classic human struggle.

It's interesting because when you think of power in the Bible, you might picture kings and armies. Right. But Dr. Hildebrandt is talking about something much more personal.

Makes you examine those areas in your own life where you have influence. Yeah. Even if it's just within your family or workplace.

Exactly. And that's where the book of Judges gets really relevant for us today. I like that.

Bringing it back to our everyday lives. It's not just ancient history. It's a mirror reflecting back those timeless human struggles.

So true. So let's talk about Samson. Okay.

Super strength, but also a weakness for Philistine women. Yeah. That was a big no-no at the time.

Big time. Dr. Hildebrandt goes into the whole Delilah situation. Oh, Delilah.

It's a classic example of how unchecked passion can lead to a downfall. It really is. And what's fascinating is that even in Samson's failure, God still uses him for deliverance.

So there's still hope even when we mess up. Always. He pushes down the pillars of the Philistine temple, bringing about his own death.

Oh, wow. But also freeing the Israelites. Talk about going out with a bang, but it raises a tough question.

How far can you stray from what's right and still be used by God? Is there a limit? That's something the theologians have debated for centuries. But I think the key takeaway from Samson's story... Okay, what is it? ...isn't about finding loopholes or excuses. It's about recognizing that God's grace is bigger than our mistakes.

He can work even through our brokenness. Okay, that's comforting. It is.

But it also makes me think about consequences. Right. Our actions have an impact.

Samson's actions had serious repercussions, not just for himself, but for others. We can't just gloss over that. We can't.

And that leads us to another judge whose story is full of tragedy. Oh, boy. Jephthah.

Jephthah. He makes this rash vow to God, promising to sacrifice the first thing that comes out of his house if he wins a battle. Oh, I remember this one.

And tragically, it's his own daughter who greets him upon his return. That's right. Okay, that one always leaves me heartbroken.

You can hear the anguish in Jephthah's voice when he realizes what he's done. It's a stark reminder of the power of words and the weight of vows. We have to be careful what we promise God.

We do. And Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't offer easy answers. Okay.

He challenges us to wrestle with the text to acknowledge the complexity of this story. I appreciate that. It's not always black and white.

Right. There are questions about the nature of God's sovereignty, the consequences of human choices, and the limits of religious obligation. It's a story that forces you to confront those uncomfortable truths about faith in life.

Sometimes there are no easy answers. Right. No tidy resolutions.

Sometimes we have to sit with the tension, the ambiguity, and trust that God is still at work, even in the midst of our brokenness and pain. That's hard, but it's true. Jephthah's story, as unsettling as it is, ultimately points us towards the need for grace and forgiveness.

And it reminds us that our actions have ripple effects, impacting not just ourselves, but those around us. Speaking of ripple effects, Dr. Hildebrandt ends his lecture with one of the most disturbing stories in Judges. Oh, this one's tough.

The Levite and his concubine. This one is particularly difficult to discuss. It's a brutal account of violence and the breakdown of societal norms.

I remember this one. It's really hard to read. It is.

A Levite's concubine is gang-raped and left for dead. Ugh, just awful. This sparks a civil war among the Israelite tribes.

So it has these huge repercussions. It does. It's a story that makes you question everything: justice, morality, the very fabric of their society.

It really does. Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't sugarcoat it. Yeah.

He talks about the cyclical nature of violence, the way trauma can be passed down through generations. Right. And the danger of unchecked power.

And yet, even in this dark narrative, there's a glimmer of hope. OK, tell me about that. This horrific event ultimately leads to a call for unity and a renewed commitment to justice.

So it's like a wake-up call. It's like a desperate plea for something better, a longing for leadership that can bring order out of chaos. So even in the midst of tragedy, there's this potential for positive change.

There is. And it makes you think about those moments in history or even in our own lives where something terrible happens, and it forces us to confront those uncomfortable truths about ourselves, our communities, our world. Right.

And sometimes that's the catalyst for real change. Like hitting rock bottom and realizing we need to do things differently. It can be.

And in the context of the Book of Judges, this tragic story sets the stage for a significant shift. What's that? The desire for a king. Ah, so they're looking for a stronger, more centralized form of leadership.

Exactly. The people are tired of the chaos, the instability, the lack of centralized leadership. They want someone who can unite them and lead them forward.

They're looking for someone who can unite them, protect them, and lead them into a new era. Which is a whole other deep dive waiting to happen. It is.

But before we jump ahead to the monarchy, I want to pause and reflect on what we've learned from these later judges. OK. Samson, Jephthah, even the story of the Levite and his concubine.

They paint a pretty bleak picture. Yeah, they do. But there are also glimmers of hope.

There are. Yeah. And I think those glimmers of hope are what make the Book of Judges so relevant for us today.

I agree. It's not all doom and gloom. It reminds us that even in the midst of brokenness, failure, and tragedy, God is still at work.

God is always at work, even when we can't see it. He can redeem our mistakes, heal our wounds, and use even the most difficult circumstances for good. That's a beautiful thought.

It's a reminder that we're not alone in our struggles. And that even when things seem hopeless, there's always the possibility of a new beginning. Absolutely.

And that leads us perfectly into the final chapter of Judges and its implications for the future of Israel. But before we get there, why don't we take a moment to hear from our sponsors? OK. We are back and ready to wrap up our deep dive into the Book of Judges.

It's been quite a journey. It has. We've covered a lot of ground, from military victories to moral failures, and it's been a wild ride.

It really has. And as we enter this final chapter, Dr. Hildebrandt reminds us that the Book of Judges isn't just a collection of isolated stories. Right.

There's got to be some kind of overarching message here. There is. There's an overarching narrative, a message woven through the tapestry of these lives.

OK. So what's the big takeaway? What's the thread that ties it all together? Well, one of the most prominent themes is this idea of cycles. Cycles.

We see it in the individual stories, like Gideon's rise and fall. Yeah. And in the overall arc of the book, it's a pattern of turning away from God, facing consequences, crying out for help, experiencing deliverance, then repeating the whole process all over again.

So it's like that saying: those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Exactly. Dr. Hildebrandt emphasizes how each generation in Judges seems to forget the lessons of those who came before.

Oh, that's so human. They make the same mistakes, fall into the same traps. It's like we're doomed to keep making the same mistakes over and over.

Well, it's a cautionary tale about the importance of remembering. Remembering. Of learning from history, both our personal history and the history of humanity.

I think that's something we all struggle with. It makes you think about those cycles in our own lives, doesn't it? It really does. Those patterns of behavior we keep repeating, even when we know they lead to negative consequences.

Exactly. And Dr. Hildebrandt challenges us to ask ourselves, what are the golden calves we're creating in our own time? That's a good question. What are our modern-day idols? What are the things we're putting our trust in, even when they ultimately lead us away from God? Money, power, success, comfort.

Are we worshipping at the altar of success, comfort, or approval? Yeah. Instead of seeking God's will and aligning our lives with his purposes. Those are tough questions to wrestle with, but important ones, I think.

I agree. If we want to break free from those destructive cycles. And live lives that are truly aligned with God's heart.

But let's get back to the book of Judges. Dr. Hildebrandt ends his lecture with one of the most disturbing and thought-provoking stories. This is the one I was thinking about.

The Levite and his concubine. Yeah, this story is hard. The story is graphic and unsettling.

It is. It involves a Levite and his concubine, who is brutally assaulted and left for dead. It's just awful.

And a horrifying act of vengeance that spirals into a tribal war. Yeah. It just shows how quickly things can escalate when sin goes unchecked.

It's a dark depiction of the consequences of unchecked sin and the breakdown of societal norms. And Dr. Hildebrandt doesn't shy away from the hard questions the story raises. Not at all.

He talks about the cyclical nature of violence. The way trauma can be passed down through generations. Yes.

And the failure of leadership to protect the vulnerable. And it's in this final chapter, amidst the chaos and despair. Yeah.

That we see a glimmer of hope. OK, I need some hope right now. What's the glimmer of hope? The Israelites, horrified by the events that have unfolded.

Yeah. They cry out for a change. Makes sense.

They've hit rock bottom. They recognize their need for a king. OK.

Someone who can unite them. OK. Establish justice and bring order out of chaos.

So this terrible event, in a strange way, becomes a turning point. It does. It exposes the flaws of the existing system.

Yes. And creates a longing for something better. A leader who can bring stability and security.

A king. Right. Which takes us right into the next phase of Israel's history.

But before we move on, I think it's important to pause and reflect on what we've learned from judges. I agree. What are some of your key takeaways? Well, first of all, it's a reminder that even the best of us are flawed.

These judges were heroes, but they also made some pretty big mistakes. Yeah, they were human. And I think that's encouraging in a way, because it means that God can use anyone, even those of us who mess up.

He doesn't wait for us to be perfect. Right. He meets us where we are and works through us, flaws and all.

And I think that's the beauty of the Book of Judges. I agree. It's a reminder that God's grace is bigger than our mistakes.

And that even in the midst of darkness and despair, there's always hope. Always. Because God is still at work.

He is. He's always working to redeem our brokenness and bring about His purposes. And that's a message that gives me hope.

Me too. It's a message that we all need to hear, I think, especially in the times we're living in. Absolutely.

Well, thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the Book of Judges. It's been a pleasure. It's been a fascinating and challenging journey.

It has. And we hope you'll join us again next time as we continue to explore God's Word together. Until then, keep seeking truth.

Keep asking those hard questions. And keep trusting in the God who is always at work. Amen to that.