

# The God who is Able

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you that you speak to us through your word, the Bible. And Father, we thank you that although at first glance it might be hard to work out what you're saying, there are lessons for us to learn, things that are still relevant for us today.

And so, Father, we pray that you would give us minds to understand your word and hearts that would seek to live in light of it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the problem with promises is that you have to be able to keep them.

So, it's school holidays at the moment and my children wanted McDonald's for dinner. And so, they made this deal with me. They said they promised they would be good for a whole day.

You kind of think, well, that's realistic, I suppose, a whole day, not a whole week. They lasted half an hour. And they were arguing over who was sitting in which seat on the lounge room.

Although, you should, yeah, well, unless you say what, there are some people even at church who have special seats, but we won't go there, will we? But the point is, when it comes to trusting promises, you want to know that the person is not only willing to keep them, but able to keep them.

[ 1 : 20 ] Last week, we began a new series in Deuteronomy. And Deuteronomy is a sermon. Actually, it's three sermons by Moses to the second generation of Israelites from Egypt.

Because the first generation God rescued from Egypt, they came to the promised land, the land of Canaan. So, on the next slide, you might remember this map from last week.

I hope it's up there. So, there's the black dotted line. They've come from the land of Goshen in the north of Egypt. And they crossed the Red Sea, possibly around that point, we're not exactly sure, down to Sinai, Mount Sinai, and then up to the red dot, to Kadesh Barnea.

But they did not enter the land. They sent in spies and who came back, hence the kind of flick back. And do you remember what they said? So, if you've got your Bibles there, just have a look on the left-hand side of the page.

My lights are dying here. Have a look on the left-hand side of the page at chapter 1, verse 26. It says, It says, And so, because of this report, the people rebelled against God.

[ 3 : 09 ] And therefore, in judgment, God sent them wandering around the wilderness, which is what the little circle is to the bottom right of the map there. And they wandered around until that unbelieving first generation died out.

And now, the second generation have grown up. And they're back, up at the green dot, east of the Jordan, ready to cross into the promised land.

And it's at that green dot that Moses delivers this book of Deuteronomy, to encourage them to trust in God. And we saw last week that Moses began with a history lesson from the first generation, the parents.

He reminded the kids about how God had promised the parents three big blessings to Abraham. So, on the next slide, I think it is. Remember the tennis shot?

Lob, land, offspring, and blessing. And Moses said, look, God has already kept one of those promises to your parents, offspring. And so, the next slide, we've got a big tick.

[ 4 : 11 ] Okay, promise kept. And so, if God has kept one promise about offspring, then surely they can trust God to keep the other promise about land. That was last week.

Moses also reminded them last week about how their parents didn't trust God. And Moses basically said, don't be like them, because they missed out on the land.

And that's where we got up to it, chapter 2, verse 1. Have a look there, chapter 2, verse 1. He's still talking about the first generation. Then we turned back and set out toward the wilderness along the route to the Red Sea, as the Lord had directed me.

And for a long time, we made our way around the hill country of Seir. So, that was the first generation. They turned away from the promised land, and for a long time, almost 40 years, they wandered around the hill country until that first generation died out.

And now Moses turns, in chapter 2, verse 2, to the second generation. And he now turns to their history to remind them to trust God, because he knows it's going to be hard.

[ 5 : 17 ] After all, this second generation could still think, well, you know, keeping a promise about offspring is easy for God. I mean, we can have babies anywhere. We don't need to fight giants and fortified cities in the promised land to have children.

But the land, well, that's a big promise. That's a bit harder to believe. And so the question is, can God pull off this promise of land?

That is, is God able to keep this particular promise about land? And today, Moses answers that question. And he begins by reminding them about the detour past other nations.

So, point 1 in your outlines, and chapter 2, verse 2 in your Bibles. Then the Lord said to me, You have made your way around this hill country long enough, almost 40 years.

Now, turn north and give the people these orders. You're about to pass through the territory of your relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir.

[ 6 : 18 ] They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. Why? Well, I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own.

And so you are to pay them in silver for the food you eat and the water you drink. And then he reminds them that God has actually watched over them, the second generation in the wilderness.

He says, the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over you in your journey through the vast wilderness. These 40 years, the Lord your God has been with you, and you have lacked nothing, he says.

And so we went on past our relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. We turned from the Arabah road, which comes up from Elath and Ezeon-Gebur, and travelled along the desert road of Moab.

And so on the next slide, I think, is that the one with the yellow line? Yep, I can't see it from here, sorry.

[ 7 : 22 ] So the yellow line, they're travelling up that way to the north, from Ezeon-Gebur down in the south. And God says, don't try and fight the Edomites, because God has given them the land.

And God says the same thing about Moab as well, the next nation up. Do you see verse 9? Then the Lord said to me, do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land.

I've given R to the descendants of Lot as a possession. And so on the next slide, just to give you an idea of the family tree, you've got Abraham on the right-hand side, and he had Isaac.

And then from Isaac came Jacob and Esau. From Jacob was Israel. From Esau was the Edomites. And so they're cousins, effectively. And God says, don't fight with your cousins, the Edomites, because that's their land.

But also, Abraham's brother was Haran, son Lot, and he had two daughters. We never know their names, so I just called them D1 and D2, not to be confused with B1 and B2.

[ 8 : 32 ] And from them, they had sons called Moab and Ammon. And so they're like the Israelites' second cousins, if you like. But just like the Edomites, the Israelites are not to attack Moab either, because God says that it's not their land.

It's Moab's land. Now, I realise there are lots of names here, and so it can all feel a bit irrelevant to us. But what is relevant is the reason Moses reminds them about this detour up the north.

See, if we go back, we'll go forward, I think it is, to the next slide. We've got the map here. They're travelling up from the bottom there.

Now, it would have been much quicker just to go back to the red dot, to where the first generation went, wouldn't it? But God deliberately, it seems, takes them up the right-hand side, up the north.

And he even risks the Israelites fighting with their cousins. I mean, you know what families are like, they're always fighting. But he risks it. Why does God do this?

[ 9 : 40 ] And why does Moses remind them about this detour up the north? Well, it's so that this generation of Israelites can see with their own eyes that God is able to give land to whomever he wishes.

You see, he has given land to Esau and to Moab. He's even got rid of the giants for them in the land. Have a look there in your Bibles at verse 21.

It says, You see, God is getting rid of nations in order to give land to Israelites' cousins.

You see? And the point is, if God is able to do that for your cousins, then he's able to do it for you. Remember the detour past these other nations and realize that God is able to keep his promise of land.

He has done it for your cousins. He can do it for you. In fact, if they haven't quite got the message, he reminds them a third time. So we've got Edom, Moab, and now Ammon.

[ 11 : 02 ] Do you see verse 19? When we came to the Ammonites, God said, Do not harass them or provoke them to war, for I will not give you possession of any land belonging to the Ammonites. I have given it as a possession to the descendants of Lot.

That was from the other daughter, D2. See, God is the one who gives land. He is the one who drives out nations, even giants like the Anakites.

Remember, that was part of the reason the first generation was scared. The spies came back and said, Oh, there's giants in the land and there's fortified cities. And Moses says, Remember your detour past your cousins.

Remember how God drove out the big people in their land and was able to give it to them. So if he's able to do that for them, he's able to do that for you.

That's why God took them on the detour. That's why Moses reminds them. Earlier this year, we were in Sydney visiting some friends and we went to a park with some big trees in it and I had to go back and get a jumper for one of my children.

[ 12 : 06 ] And when I got back to the park, I noticed that there were some children playing in the branches of this big tree, like monkey, making monkey noises. Oh, it's all sorts of stuff. Who are these kids?

Mine. Oh, mine. And when I got there, one of the girls had actually gotten too high up in the tree. You know, when you look down, you realise it always feels higher up than when you're on the ground.

And so she froze. And I said to her, Look, drop down and I promise I will catch you. She replied, No, you'll drop me. So much for trusting me.

And so to encourage her to trust me, I asked her sister in the tree to drop down and I caught her. And then I said, See, I caught your sister.

So I'm able to catch you too. That's one of the reasons God takes Israel on this detour. For if God is able to move out giants and give land to their cousins, like Esau and Moab and Ammon, then he's able to do it for them too.

[ 13 : 12 ] Of course, when I said to my daughter who was scared, See, I caught your sister. I'm able to catch you too. She replied, But that was her, not me. And Israel could have thought the same thing.

That was Esau and Moab and Ammon, not us. And so next, Moses reminds them what God has already done for them. He has defeated kings and started giving them their own land.

Point to verse 24. The next bit. He said, Set out now and cross the Anon Gorge. See, I have given you into your hand Sion, the Amorite, king of Heshbon and his country.

Begin to take possession of it and engage him in battle. And so, as you can see on the map there, they're moving further and further up north.

And hopefully you can see there that the Ammonites on the right hand side and the Amorites are on the left there, between the yellow line and the Jordan River.

[ 14 : 21 ] They sound the same, but they're two different groups. One came from Lot and they were to leave them alone. But the Amorites, well, God says, take their land. And in the following verses from 25 onwards, Moses asks for permission to pass through the king's country.

But King Sion says no. And because of time, we'll pick it up in verse 32. Have a look at verse 32 over the page there. Now, when Sion and all his army came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz, the Lord our God delivered him over to us.

And we struck him down together with his sons and his whole army. At that time, we took all his towns and completely destroyed them, men, women and children.

We left no survivors. Now, I realize verse 34 presents a problem for us. You know, it seems very extreme, doesn't it? Even children.

So what are we to make of this? I mean, we cannot simply say that that's the God of the Old Testament and we have a different God in the New Testament because we don't have two gods, do we?

[ 15 : 30 ] We have one. Now, I'd love to spend more time on this, but we don't have it. Yet, I don't want to skip over it either. So what I've done is I've produced a handout, which you can grab after the service.

And it offers six points to help us make sense of this, six things to try and remember, to put this into perspective. And so feel free to grab a copy of that and ask me questions later.

I don't have enough for everyone, so if you miss out, just email me. But the big point here is not verse 34 like it is for us. It's actually verse 33. That the Lord our God delivered him over to us together with his sons and his whole army and we took all his towns.

You see, God is able to defeat nations and start giving them the land. And to prove that this was not just a one-off fluke, God does the same thing again.

This time to the king of Bashan, which is on the far north of the map there. So pick it up at chapter 3, verse 1. And next we turn and went up along the road, so further north, to Bashan, which is near the Sea of Galilee.

[ 16 : 43 ] And Og, king of Bashan, with his whole army marched out to meet us in battle at Edri. The Lord said to me, Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land.

Do to him what you did to Sion, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon. So the Lord our God also gave into our hands Og, king of Bashan, and all his army. We struck them down, leaving no survivors.

At that time we took all his cities. There was not one of the 60 cities that we did not take from them, the whole region of Agob, Og's kingdom in Bashan.

All these cities, notice, were fortified with high walls and with gates and bars. And there were also a great many unwall'd villages as well. You see, here are cities that were fortified with high walls, the very thing that the first generation was scared about.

And yet God gave them into Israel's hand. They were also scared of the giants, remember? But look how big King Og was. I mean, look down at verse 11, and we have this odd comment about his bed.

[ 17 : 50 ] Have a look at verse 11. Og, king of Bashan, was the last of the Rephites, the giants. His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits long.

That's about four metres long. And four cubits, 1.8 metres wide. And it's still in that city today. It's an odd comment to make, isn't it?

But it points out that Og was one of the giants. I mean, four metres long. That's, he's a big boy. I mean, even the name Og sounds like a giant's name, doesn't it?

And why does Moses include a detail about his bed? And that he's the last of the Rephites? Well, because it was these giant people that Israel had been scared of before, you see.

That's why the generation did not obey, because of the fortified cities and the giants. And yet here is God, and he has already defeated the giants.

[ 18 : 51 ] He's already defeated the fortified cities. And so Moses is saying, look at what God has already done for you, so that you won't be afraid to keep going into the promised land across the Jordan.

He's saying, look back over the past two years, where you travelled past your cousins and saw that God was able to give them their land. Look back over the past two years and see how God has defeated giants and fortified cities and has already started giving you your land.

Look back and realise that God is not only willing to keep his promises, but he's able to keep his promises. And in fact, in verses 12 to 20, God starts allocating the land of Og and Sion to some of the tribes of Israel.

And so I think on the next slide, is it? There should be some coloured pictures. Don't worry about the print, it's too small, I realise. But on the right-hand side, you've got brown and purple and pinkish.

They're the three tribes on the east side of the Jordan that were allocated the land of Sion and Og. See, God has already started giving out the land. He's already started keeping his promise.

[ 20 : 05 ] And so they're not to fear the nations, but to trust God. That's what verse 21 ends up with. At that time, says Moses, I commanded Joshua, you have seen with your own eyes all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings.

The Lord will do the same to all the kingdoms over there, across the Jordan where you are going. So do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God himself will fight for you, plural.

He's speaking to Joshua in front of the people. You see, they are all to remember that God is not only willing to keep his promise, he's able to keep this big promise of land.

He's done it in the past for their cousins. He's already doing it in their present for some tribes. And so he's able to do it in the future for them all. Even the denial of Moses reminds us that while Moses is not able to bring the people into the land because of his sin, from verse 23 onwards, God is able.

He raises up Joshua and works through him. We don't have time to look at that now. But what does this all mean for us? Well, I take it, it's the same message for us. That God is not only willing, but also able to keep his promise to us.

[ 21 : 20 ] To bring us into our promised land, our inheritance, our new heavens and new earth. God's kingdom physically established here on earth, where there'll be no more crying or suffering or pain.

Where it'll be so glorious that it will more than make up for whatever we've had to endure in this life. And so we had to trust him. We had to keep trusting his promises despite appearances.

Because when we look at the world, quite frankly, it can seem like God is not in control, can't it? And then if he's not in control of this world, how is he going to be able to keep his promise of the world to come?

We have crisis in Syria, especially in the city of Aleppo. The bombs dropping still, the ceasefires out the window. People are dying. We also have a rise in opposition to Christians.

In fact, someone from this congregation gave me a newspaper article last month, this one. And it says, Western media shuts its eyes to persecution of Christians.

[ 22 : 23 ] And Greg Sheridan writes this. He says, There is one minority group that is more persecuted than any other in the world. Persecuted more frequently, more widely, and with more intensity.

There is indeed in one substantial region of the world an explicit campaign of genocide being carried out against this group. Yet you will hardly ever hear about them in the Western media.

This minority group in question is Christians. We look at the world and, you know, it's going pear-shaped and opposition to Christians is growing.

I mean, just take what the Victorian government is trying to do with changes to the anti-discrimination law. And so we can look at the world and think, is God really in control? Is he actually able to keep these promises?

Is he able to pull off the promise of a new world, a new heavens and earth? Will there be no more pain or suffering? And when we wonder these things, whether God is able, we're to look back and remember three things.

[ 23 : 28 ] First, just like Israel, we're to look back and see how God had given land to their cousins. So we are to look at Israel and see how God had given land to them.

He was able to keep his promise in the end. Second, we are to remember also what God has already done for us in Christ. You see, God has already brought us into his heavenly kingdom spiritually.

So on the next slide, we read this from Colossians that we were studying a little while ago. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

You see, the giants that stand against us are not men like Sion or Og. Some great names for your grandchildren, just by the way. Come here, Og.

But our enemies are sin and death. For our sin means we deserve eternal death, hell. But Jesus died for us.

[ 24 : 27 ] He suffered hell in our place so that we who believe can be rescued from it. We who believe in him are forgiven and brought into his kingdom now, spiritually.

You see, just as God had already started to bring Israel into their promised land by giving a few tribes their land now, so God has already started to keep his promise of bringing us into a physical kingdom, because he's already brought us into it spiritually now, you see.

The process has already begun. I shared with Evening Church a couple of weeks ago how my favorite dinner is lamb roast. I don't get it very often, but no complaint against Michelle.

I want to be clear about that. You got it. But when I see Michelle having bought some lamb and then having prepared it and having put it in the oven, if she's been able to do all that for me already, then I know that in a while she'll be able to make my lamb roast dinner a physical reality too.

Well, Christ has paid for our sins to give us new birth in his kingdom now, spiritually. And if God has been able to do all that for us already, then we know he'll be able to make it a physical reality for us too.

[ 25 : 49 ] The process has already begun. And thirdly and finally, we have to remember that Christ has secured our inheritance for us. So it's not a maybe, it's a definite. And here we come to our other reading.

So on our last slide, we have from 1 Peter, You see, Christ's resurrection means our hope is living.

It's not dead. It's not wishful thinking. It's certain. It's guaranteed. How? By the resurrection of Christ. You see, at the moment, our inheritance is kept in heaven for us.

But one day it will become a reality here on earth. And it's not a pipe dream because Christ's resurrection from the dead has secured it. For if God is able to raise Christ, then he is able to raise us too and bring us into our promised land.

In fact, just as God kept the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness, so he will keep us. And Peter says at the end there that we are shielded by God's power. He will keep us from falling until the day he reveals the new heaven and the new earth, until the day he brings us physically into our salvation.

[ 27 : 18 ] So we are to keep trusting God's promises, knowing that God is able to keep them. We are to keep living in light of God's promises, especially our heavenly land here on earth, the new heavens and new earth, where there will be no more pain, no more suffering.

Let me finish with a story about someone from one of my old churches. There's a family there, and they have two severely autistic children.

The boy was in my Bible study group for a couple of years, and he was hard work. A great guy, but hard work. He'd do things like he would take some of the supper, taste it, and then put it back. And one night he decided he didn't want to be at the Bible study anymore.

I wanted to walk home, which was not safe. And so I had to try and stop him from leaving, but he was a bit of a giant. He was six foot one, I think it was, and I thought I was going to get punched.

So he was hard work, and it made me think, imagine what it's like for the parents, as they seek to love them and raise them. He's about 35 now, I think.

[ 28 : 25 ] And I remember having a conversation with a couple of people and these parents. And one of them asked the parent, how do you keep going? How do you keep being patient with him?

How do you keep trusting God who has, you know, let this happen, basically? And she said this. She said that knowing that one day God will bring him fully into his kingdom and give him a perfect autistic free body.

She knew God's promise of a new heavens, new earth. And she added, and I know he will, because Christ has died and risen again.

And so she continued to trust God and live in light of those promises. That's the challenge for us today.

But we've got every reason to, because God is not only willing, but able to keep his promises. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word this morning.

[ 29 : 28 ] It contains a lot of names, and we've had to move quickly through it. And yet, it still teaches us great truths, that we have a God who is not only willing to keep his promises, but able.

Able to keep your promises to us, and able to keep us from falling until those promises are fulfilled. And so, Father, we pray that you would help us to keep trusting in you, despite what we see in the world.

Help us to keep trusting in you and living in light of you.