

The God of Promise

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[0 : 01] Heavenly Father, thanks so much for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And what you have to say is still very much relevant for us today. And so, Father, please give us ears to hear your word, our minds to understand it, and hearts that would seek to live in light of it.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I wonder what your picture of God might be. How would you describe him?

And do you think he's doing a good job in the world? Perhaps you don't have a picture of God, and you are here today to see what the Christian picture of God is.

Well, some kids were asked to not draw God, but to write letters to God. And for some kids, God is doing a great job. So on the next slide, Ruth says, Dear God, I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.

On the next slide, Jonathan writes, Dear God, if you let the dinosaurs not extinct, we would not have a country. You did the right thing. And Nan writes, Dear God, I bet it was very hard for you to love everyone in the world.

[1 : 11] There are only four people in my family, and I can never do it. Just go back a bit. Just wait. I'll tell you when to slide across, Ash. There are some other kids, though, who are not quite sure that God is getting it right.

And so now we'll go to the next slide. Norma writes, Did you mean for giraffe to look like that, or was it an accident? Larry, on the next slide, thanks, Ash. Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms.

It works with my brother. I have two daughters that can relate. Or more seriously, Jane writes, Dear God, instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you've got now?

Now, when we come to passages like today, we as adults can question whether God got it right as well. I mean, how do you feel when you come to passages like this one today, and you read in chapter 6, verse 21, for example, they destroyed with the sword every living thing in the city, men and women, young and old, I take it kids as well, cattle, sheep, and even the donkeys.

Or if you flip over to chapter 8, verse 24, chapter 8, verse 24, this is what happens in the next city.

[2 : 42] Chapter 8, verse 24, when Israel had finished killing all the men of Ai in the fields and in the wilderness where they had chased them, they didn't stop there, and when every one of them had been put to the sword, all the Israelites returned to Ai and killed those who were in the city.

12,000 men and women fell that day, all the people of Ai. Or turn over to chapter 10, verse 39, chapter 10, verse 39.

It's the bottom of the page, chapter 10, verse 39. We read, They took the city, its king and its villages, and put them to the sword.

Everyone in it they totally destroyed. They left no survivors. They did to Deba and its king, as they had done to Libna and its king, and to Hebron.

Now, when you read things like that, and we've got one today, and we'll see more coming up, what's your view of God like now? How do you feel? Did He get it right?

[3 : 53] How does it fit with our picture of what God should be like? And if it does fit, how would we defend this to others who say, I can't believe in a God who would do that?

I mean, we cannot say, as some people do, that, well, that's the God of the Old Testament. It's different to the God of the New Testament. I mean, how many gods do we think there are?

What's more, we see God acting in a similar way in the New Testament as well. He has judgment in the New Testament, just like He has love in the Old. Nor can we get around this issue by ignoring the horror of these events.

They are horrific. So how do we understand what God was doing here? Well, I think the key is to get a clear picture of who God is in the first place.

And that's precisely what God gives Joshua before the battle of Jericho, which is that introduction, those three verses. So God reminds Joshua that, well, He is God. Point one in your outlines, and chapter five, verse 13 in your Bibles.

[5 : 00] Have a look there. Now, when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up and asked him quite naturally, I think, are you for us or for our enemies?

Neither, he replied. But as commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come. Then Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence or literally worship and asked him, what message does my Lord have for his servant?

Here Joshua meets a man, but it's no ordinary man, is it? This is the commander of God's army. More than that, he seems to represent God himself, as we'll see in a moment in verse 15.

What's more, he has a sword drawn for battle. And so, as I said, understandably, Joshua wants to know whose side he's on. I mean, you'd want to know that too, wouldn't you? And so Joshua asks, but the commander's reply is, what was surprising to me.

I don't know if it was surprising to you. I expected him to say, well, I'm on Israel's side. But he doesn't, does he? He says, neither. Or literally, he just says, no.

[6 : 11] That is, he is not for Joshua, nor is he against Joshua. And the reply, together with his identity as the commander of God's army, makes Joshua rather scared, so much so that he falls flat on his face in reverence or literally worship, as I said.

But the question that comes to our minds is, hang on, isn't God supposed to be for Israel? In fact, later on, we'll read in Joshua that God will fight for Israel.

So why does this commander say that he is neither for Joshua nor against Joshua? And the answer is, God is reminding Joshua that he is God.

That is, he is not in anyone's back pocket. He doesn't belong to anyone to be pulled out at their convenience. You see, Joshua is about to conquer the land.

And as we heard in our reading, it's going to involve the Ark of the Covenant, which was a golden box. So on the next slide, we've got a picture of the Ark of the Covenant. And it was called the Ark of the Covenant because inside the box was the covenant or the commitment, the covenant between God and Israel in the form of the Ten Commandments, written on two stone tablets.

[7 : 24] It spoke about God being their God and them being his people. But this box also represented God's presence. Now, it would be easy for Joshua to become complacent.

And each time he meets a new city with its king, say, all right, let's roll out the Ark of the Covenant, have God do his thing, and then we'll just roll it back in again. As though God is like a genie in a bottle.

But you see, God is not anyone's divine pet or war machine to be rolled out at their convenience. God is giving Joshua a clear picture of who he is. He doesn't belong to anyone or answer to anyone.

Rather, God is above everyone. And everyone must answer to him. So Joshua is not to become complacent with God and think that God belongs to him, to be controlled by him.

I was speaking with someone who was connected with a funeral. I did a little while ago. She was a very nice lady, but she made a comment along the line. She said, I pray when I need to.

[8 : 27] And at that time, she had a bit of a sore arm. And so she said to me, I think I'll start praying for my arm again. And the implication was that if her arm gets better, she'll stop praying.

Because, you know, she won't need to anymore. But you see, that's kind of like rolling God out. You know, pulling me out of your back pocket to do what you want, when you want.

And if he answers, excellent. Job done. Back you go. But you see, God is not anyone's genie. He's not to be controlled by people, nor does he answer to people.

He is above everyone. In other words, he's holy. And that's precisely what the commander then reminds Joshua in verse 15. Instead of giving him a message, that's the question at the end of verse 14.

What message does my Lord have for his servant? Verse 14. Well, the commander doesn't give him a message. He just says, take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy. And Joshua did so.

[9 : 23] You see, God is actually present in this commander. That's why it's holy ground. And that's why in verse 14, when Joshua falls down in reverence, or literally worship, the commander doesn't stop him.

I mean, normally when people fall down and start worshiping an angel, the angel says, don't do that. I'm not God. But the commander doesn't stop Joshua from worshiping him. In fact, when the man finally does give Joshua a message in chapter 6, verse 2, the text changes from the commander said to the Lord said.

You see, God is present by this man. And God is holy. And so Joshua is to take off his sandals as a sign of respect as he enters God's holy presence.

Much like we might take off our shoes as a sign of respect before entering someone's house. But you see, it's another sign that God is above everyone. And not to be controlled by anyone. In fact, that's part of what it means to be holy.

You see, when we think holy, we think to be morally perfect. And that's true. That's one aspect of holiness in the Bible. But there's a second meaning to holiness in the Bible.

[10 : 30] And that is to be set apart as special or distinct. And so take the books that you're looking at here, these things. On the front, it's called the Holy Bible.

But the word Bible just means book. In fact, the Greek word for book is byblos. Sound familiar? Bible. Just means book. Yet it's special or set apart as God's word.

And so he put the word holy in front of it. It is a holy book. It is a set apart book distinct from all other books because in this book is God's word.

You see, holy means to be set apart as special, distinct from all others. And God is the supreme example of this. For he is set apart from all others as the one true God.

So on the next slide in Isaiah chapter 40, verse 25, we read, To whom then will you compare me, says God, that I should be like him, says the Holy One.

[11 : 32] Or, Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other. And so before Joshua attacks Jericho, God reminds Joshua of who God is.

It's as though God says through this commander, take off your sandals and remember who I am. Remember I'm holy. I'm the only God. There is no other. And I do not belong to you to act when you want.

Rather, it's the other way around. Make sure you have a right picture of me as you conquer the land. Now, why am I spending all this time on these three verses? Because these three verses form a vital introduction that we need to get right before we read the following chapters about the conquests of the land.

And we know they're an introduction for two reasons. First, what happens here is what happened to Moses when God spoke to him out of the burning bush to remember. Moses was told to take off your sandals for it was holy ground.

It was like God was preparing Moses for his job to lead the people out of Egypt by reminding him that, well, it's actually going to be God who saves his people. Well, so too here, God is preparing Joshua for his job to lead the people into the promised land by reminding Joshua that God is holy, God is God.

[12 : 51] He will give the land to them as he promised. Joshua is simply to trust and obey. But the second reason that this happens is, sorry, that we know that's an introduction, is because Jericho seems to be a model of what will happen to the rest of the cities.

Not only is Jericho the first city to be taken, destroyed, but there's a phrase that is repeated a few times. And so on the next slide is this phrase.

So Joshua did to such and such city and there's this phrase, as he'd done to Jericho and it's repeated a few times through the book. And so what happens here in Jericho appears to be a model, an example of what will happen to the other cities.

And so this introduction to the battle of Jericho stands really as an introduction to all the battles that will follow. And so it's vital we understand what God is saying here, you see.

If we had to understand what happens in the following chapters, including the killing of thousands of people. And what God is saying in this introduction is that he is God, the Holy One of Israel and there is no other.

[14 : 03] And then he proves it by what happens next. For it's not Joshua or the Israelites who win the battle, it is God. He is the one who is powerful to accomplish his promise.

At point 2, verse 1. Chapter 6, verse 1. Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the Lord said to Joshua, see, I have delivered Jericho into your hands along with its king as it's fighting men.

Now, I don't know if you got the kind of absurdity between verse 1 and 2. Do you kind of get the... Verse 1 highlights the fact that Jericho is shut up tight.

They've bunkered down solid walls. And in verse 2, God says, oh, I've already, past tense, delivered the city. It's yours. It's good as done. It seems to be this contrast really, isn't it?

You've got this fortified city and God saying, well, I've already delivered it. It's good as done. It would kind of be like the 5 p.m. congregation here forming a footy team to play against the Swans in the final this weekend and me saying to you in the locker room, okay, boys, I've already delivered the Swans into your hands.

[15 : 14] The premiership is as good as yours. It'd be absurd, wouldn't it? Unless the person making the promise was powerful enough to accomplish the promise.

And God is. In fact, that's the point of the seemingly absurd instructions that follow in verse 3. Look at verse 3. God says, March around the city once with all the amen.

Amen. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of ram's horns in front of the ark and on the seventh day march around the city seven times with the priests blowing the trumpets.

When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army not fight but give a loud shout. Then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up everyone straight in.

Now, in case you didn't realize it, this is not the normal way you conquer a city. Okay? Now, can you imagine, Joshua, God, you want me to do what?

[16 : 22] You sure you don't want me to use a battering ram, some arrows, a spear or two? And priests, you want me to take them? They don't make the best fighting men. You sure you want to use them?

In fact, I'm technically a priest of an Anglican church and I was helping someone carry wheelbarrows of cement a little while ago and after two loads on the wheelbarrow, my hands got blisters and it hurt.

Okay? Now, can you imagine me on the battlefield? Oh, I've got a splinter from my spear! Priests don't make good fighting men.

But the point is, these absurd military instructions are deliberately given so that everyone will know who really won the battle of Jericho. In fact, that's why the priests are to go and carry the ark as a symbol of God's presence so that everyone know that it is God who wins the battle.

And although these instructions are not repeated for the other cities, they are done here for Jericho, the first city to show that God is the one who will accomplish his promise.

[17 : 28] And not just giving Jericho to his people but giving the whole land to Israel. See, God is powerful to accomplish his promises. But he does work through people, especially those who obey, which is exactly what Joshua does.

He actually does not question God as we might imagine because he has just been reminded that God is God, the Holy One of Israel. And so in verse 6, he obeys. Let me just read quite a big section here to recap what happened.

And as I read, keep an eye out of what number pops up. So pick it up at verse 6 and I'll actually go down to verse 20 so I'll read a big chunk. So Joshua, son of Nun, called the priests and said to them, take up the ark of the covenant of the Lord and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it.

And he ordered the army advance, march around the city with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the Lord. When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the Lord went forward blowing their trumpets and the ark of the Lord's covenant followed them.

The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding but Joshua had commanded the army, do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout, then shout.

[18 : 44] And so he had the ark of the Lord carried around the city circling it once. Then the army returned to the camp and spent the night there. Then Joshua got up the next morning and took the priests up, the priests took the ark of the Lord.

The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward marching before the ark of the Lord blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the Lord while the trumpets kept sounding.

So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days. It's meant to be comical this whole picture. Can you imagine what the people in Jericho would have been thinking?

But on the seventh day they got up at daybreak marched around the city seven times in the same manner except on that day they cried sorry they circled the city seven times and the seventh time around when the priest sounded the trumpet blast Joshua commanded the army shout for the Lord has given you the city the city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared because she hid the spies we sent but keep away from the devoted things so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them and we'll see something that happens next week about that otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it all the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord and must go into the treasury so when the trumpet sounded the army shouted and at the sound of the trumpet when the men gave a loud shout the walls collapsed so everyone charged in and they took the city it's pretty clear that while God works through people it's God who accomplishes his promises isn't it but did you notice what number was repeated quite a bit anyone seven yeah

I wasn't sure if you called out one I'm not sure how I would respond to that yeah seven you got it you got it right well done seven priests seven trumpets and so on the number seven in the Bible is often a God's number so it could just be highlighting that it is God's work but did you notice that they marched around the city once a day for six days and then on the seventh day they marched around seven times shouted the wall collapsed now where else do we have six days followed by a special seventh day yeah creation God creates the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested and as you know there was no end to the seventh day in Genesis there was no morning or evening there was no eighth day and the idea was that God's rest on the seventh was never meant to end rather humanity was supposed to enjoy God's rest with God forever and here we see

[21 : 38] God providing that rest by giving the land to his people where they could live again in God's place as God's people under God's rule where they could enjoy God's rest together as they were created to enjoy in fact the promised land is often called rest the land of rest in the Bible so just turn back to Joshua chapter 1 verse 13 let me show you there so that the promised land is often connected with rest so chapter 1 verse 13 remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you after he said the Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land and so I wonder if the point of the numbers is that God is accomplishing his promises not to just give the land to Israel but to ultimately give his people rest with him just as he created them to have but the big point here is that it is

God who clearly accomplishes his promises it is God who wins the battle and now some people try and explain what we just read with natural occurrences so we read this story at J Kids one year and our Wednesday Kids Club and one girl said to me oh what happened was the vibrations from the marching Israelites and the trumpets blowing would have weakened the walls and caused cracks and then the shouts would have finished off the job and brought the walls down I thought oh that's a bad theory maybe but if God is God he could have just intervened himself couldn't he I mean if he created the world out of nothing then he can bring down a wall of a city but it always need to find a scientific explanation if we believe in a God who is God sometimes he will work through natural laws of creation other times he will intervene directly like raising someone from the dead but then comes our problem in our passage in verse 21 see most of us can handle a

God who creates most of us are very happy with a God who loves but what do we do with a God who kills because this is what we see next point 3 verse 21 they devoted the city to the Lord and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it men and women young and old cattle sheep and even the donkeys what are we to do with this as I said we cannot assume there are two gods one an angry God of the Old Testament and another God of the new which is loving nor can we assume that there is one God who was in a bad mood for thousands of years then had a good night's sleep woke up and decided to give his son for us nor can we pretend that what we read here is not horrific it is I assume it was hard even for the Israelites to do this and when it says young and old it includes children I take it so what are we to do with this well I've got a number of things on your outlines there the first thing is to remember that God is punishing these people of Jericho and the whole land of Canaan for that matter because of sin in fact he promised he would do it 400 years earlier and so on the next slide from Genesis chapter 15 God spoke to Abraham about this land and said that in the fourth generation your descendants will come back here for the sin of the Amorites which is another way of saying the Canaanites has not yet reached its full measure you see God promised 400 years earlier that he would bring

Abraham's descendants back to this land the Israelites and that he would use them to punish the people in the land for their sin that's what we see God doing here and just as God will later use the nations to punish Israel for their sin so he uses Israel here to punish the Canaanites for their sin the second thing we must remember is that even though this judgment is deserved God doesn't like doing it he calls his judgment his alien work not because it's from out of space but in the sense that it's foreign to what he prefers to do it's not what God most what comes most naturally to God if you like rather he much prefers to show mercy and forgiveness in fact on the next slide he says this from Ezekiel chapter 33 he says as surely as I live declares the sovereign Lord I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked but rather that they turn from their ways and live turn he pleads God doesn't delight in his judgment you see the third thing we need to remember is that judgment and salvation are two sides of the same promise you if you do not trust in God for salvation then by default there is only judgment for sin left in Genesis 12 where God first made the promise to Abraham was put in terms of blessing and curse in our

New Testament reading it was put in terms of salvation and judgment two sides of the same promise and all depends on whether we believe or not fourthly though because God prefers people to believe and be saved he always gives warnings turn back just for a moment to chapter 2 verse 8 of Joshua and have a look at how much warning God gives the people here so chapter 2 verse 8 and now before the spies lay down for the night Rahab went up to the roof and said to them I know that the Lord has given you this land and a great fear of you has fallen on us so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you notice verse 10 we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt how many years ago was that 40 you're not sure about that one you got seven well done that one's 40 okay 40 years ago they heard about what God had done that's a fair bit of what advance warning isn't it and they also had what happened to the cities on the other side of the Jordan which continues in verse 10 there and we also heard of what you did to Sion and Og the two kings of the Amorites east of the

[28 : 16] Jordan whom you completely destroyed you see God always gives warning yet it was only Rahab who chose to respond who chose to convert to God's team of course there is still a part of us which still thinks it's still a bit harsh isn't it I mean how can we how can this be just God seems to be going too far I mean men and women and children it doesn't quite seem fair and if we think that then could it be because we have a wrong picture of who God is to start with could it be that we like Joshua need to be reminded of who God is it could it be that we need a clearer picture of God you see in the end we need to remember that God is God that's what Joshua was told he needed to remember that that there is none like him God is not the God of our back pocket whom we can pull out and listen to when it's convenient and act according to what we think when it suits us and nor does he answer to us and to our standard of judgment or to what we think is right and wrong no we answer to him and to his standard of justice and what he says is right and wrong so he has every right to say that the punishment for sin is death he has every right to determine what is just and what is not and then he has every right to carry out that judgment a little while ago I got in trouble from some of my kids because we had told them to go to bed and we had just broken open a block of chocolate and one of our daughters came and said hey that's not fair you have to give us some and I pointed out that no we didn't because there's a fundamental difference

I said between me and you I'm the parent you're the kid you answer to me I don't answer to you I mean it's a bit harsh I suppose didn't help that I started eating it in front of her but it's true it's not a two-way street there is an order here and it's a saying with God there's a fundamental difference between us and God he is God and we are not he does not answer to us we answer to him and I know we don't like that any more than my daughter like what I said to her why because deep down we want to call the shots don't we we want to be God really but you see that's the essence of sin and so the real problem we have with the commands to kill everyone is not God it's actually us the problem is not so much that God you know is not God who is allowed to act this way the real problem is us who wants God to act our way according to what we think as though we are God but as

I said that's sin and so we need to repent of any arrogance in thinking that God should act like this or that as though he answers to us we need to remember that vital introduction where God reminded Joshua of just who he is remember the Isaiah on the next slide you know from that verse from Isaiah to whom then will you compare me that I should be like them says the Holy One turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth for I am God and there is no other indeed that's what Rahab did she heeded the 40-year warning and the warning from the cities on the other side of the Jordan and she turned to God but only she did only she truly believed that God was God so much so that she didn't try to oppose God but hid the spies and sought mercy from God so we read in verse chapter 6 verse 25 back in our passage we read but Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute with her family and all who belong to her because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to

Jericho and she lives among the Israelites to this day in fact she ends up in the genealogy of Jesus the word spared in verse 25 is literally the word saved Rahab is saved because she heard about God and truly believed in God she showed her belief in action by hiding the spies you might remember but God will judge those who refuse to turn to him his judgment is not what comes most naturally to him but because he is just because he is God he must still judge albeit reluctantly we don't have time to look at point three about the witness and the stones but let's move on to what all this means for us I take it the God of promise that we meet here in Joshua is still the same God we meet in Christ for in Christ we see both sides of God's promise so turned with me to page 1172 to our second reading two Thessalonians you know all the T's are together one Timothy two Timothy one

Thessalonians two Thessalonians Titus so find one T you've got the rest except I can't find any of here we go have a look at verse 6 this is what we're reminded about in Jericho God is just and he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and at the same time give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well this will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed which includes you because you believed the gospel we shared with you this is exactly what we saw in Jericho salvation for God's people and those who convert like

[34 : 38] Rahab but judgment for the sins of those who don't and so the first question for us tonight is have we believed in Jesus do we have faith in God that is how we turn to Christ and asked him for forgiveness asked him to save us from the judgment our sins deserve for it's through Christ that God has done everything and just like he did everything for Joshua in Jericho won the battle God has done everything we need to be saved to be given rest and so do you believe in Jesus because if you don't then you won't be saved you'll face judgment that's the default for us who do believe then do we still look in horror at what happened to Jericho not because we think God acted inappropriately he didn't he is God but because his judgment is still horrifying God's judgment is right but we're not to make light of it it is horrifying and if we look at horror at Jericho then why don't we look at horror at the destiny of our non-Christian friends and family for their fate is the same you see we need to keep praying for opportunities to speak to those who don't know Jesus and then take those opportunities or do we think that God will not judge look at Jericho if you think that but not only we're to take God's judgment seriously we're also to rejoice in our own salvation and thank God for it we're to remember that through Christ we have been saved not because of what we have done but because of what God has done for us through him we are to thank God for our life eternal when was the last time you thanked God for forgiveness of sins

I have this saying with my kids I often say don't complain about what you don't have but remember what you do have and it's good advice for us Christians isn't it because we can often forget what God has given us we can often look and pray for the things we don't have and wish we had those things and forget all that he's already given us forget to thank him for forgiveness of sins rejoice in salvation and life eternal I remember at one time being at a house of an older Christian man for dinner and when he said grace he just added and we thank you so much for the forgiveness of sins we have amen and he was an old older man older Christian and yet he was still thankful for his father ■ and his loved one Lord Christian said that I was an navelian ...