

The God who is Able

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Date: 25 September 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thanks again for your word and we just pray that you would help us to understand what you are telling us this morning. That we might be encouraged to keep living for you, keep trusting in you and your promises.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the problem with promises is that you have to be able to keep them, don't you? So school holidays are upon us at the moment and my kids wanted McDonald's one night for dinner and so they made a deal.

They said they promised they would be good for the whole day if they got McDonald's. And, you know, it's kind of realistic, you know, it's a whole week, a whole two weeks, start off with one day.

They lasted half an hour. There was complaints about someone and so was sitting in their seat in the lounge room and so on. Or something, you know, important like that.

Although, having said that, I do know there are some people at church who have their special seats as well. But the point is, when it comes to trusting promises, you want to know the person is not just willing to keep the promise, but that they are able to keep the promise.

[1 : 1 2] Last week we began a new series in the book of Deuteronomy and if you're visiting us today, that's what we do here. We often work our way through books, which means we come to passages like this, which is a bit hard to work out what to do with.

But it's all God's word to us. And so we started last week the book of Deuteronomy and it's essentially a sermon or really three sermons by Moses to the second generation of Israelites from Egypt.

You see, the first generation that God rescued from Egypt had come to the promised land of Canaan. So on the next slide, you might remember this map from last week. So top north of Egypt in the land of Goshen, that's where the Israelites were slaves.

And they came down. We're not exactly sure where they crossed. That's as good a guess as I think that's the traditional spot, crossing of the Red Sea. And then down to Mount Sinai for the Ten Commandments and so on.

And then from there up to the red dot to a place called Kadesh Barnea. And at that spot, they were supposed to enter the land, but they did not enter the land.

[2 : 1 8] They sent some spies into it, which is and then the spies came back. It's a kind of circle there above the red dot. And this is what they said. So if you've got your Bibles there, just look at the left hand side of the page at the one verse 26.

We heard this last week. So God said, go in and take the land. I'm giving it to you. But verse 26, you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command, the Lord your God.

You grumbled in your tents and said, the Lord hates us. And he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers, the spies, have made our hearts melt with fear.

You know, the report has said that the people are stronger and taller than we are. And the cities are large with walls up to the sky.

We even saw the Anakites who are a race of giants there, they said. And so they did not go into the land. They were scared of the tall people with the cities with tall walls and they rebelled against God.

[3 : 22] And so in judgment, we saw that they wandered the desert until that unbelieving generation died out and a new generation grew up. And so that's hence the wandering around the hill country there.

And now this new generation, this second generation has grown up and they're back at the promised land. But they're actually back up at the green dot, just opposite Jericho there. And it's here at the green dot that Moses delivers the book of Deuteronomy.

And he last week, he began with a history about that first generation, the rebellious generation, the parents. And he reminded the children, you know, that God made promises to these parents.

Do you remember the tennis shot, lob, the three big promises on the next slide from last week? It's a way to remember the three big promises to Abraham. God promised him land, offspring and blessing.

And Moses reminded the people that God has actually kept one of those promises already. The offspring promise. Israel had grown and there was loads of them. So the next slide tick.

[4 : 24] That's right. Promise kept. And Moses said, if God has kept that promise about offspring, then you can trust him to keep the promise about land. He also reminded this second generation about how their parents did not 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. Chapter two, verse one. It kind of ended the history.

I know it's an odd spot in the Bible, but there was no original chapter marks in the Bible. Chapter two, verse one is really the end of the parents history. See that we turn back from the promised land and set out toward the wilderness along the route to the Red Sea as the Lord had directed me.

And for a long time, almost 40 years, we made our way around the hill country of Seir. And now from chapter two, verse two, Moses talks about the second generation's recent history, because he knows it's still going to be hard for them to trust God.

He knows this promise to give them the land is a big promise. I mean, this generation, the second one could still be thinking, well, you know, God keeping his promise about offspring. That's pretty easy.

[5 : 33] I mean, we can we can have babies anywhere. We don't need to fight at giants and fortified cities to have kids. But the land, you know, that's a big promise. That's a bit harder to believe that God will do.

And so the question for today is, can God pull off this promise of land? That is, is God able to keep this particular promise of the land? And today, Moses answers that question and he begins by reminding them about their detour past other nations.

So if you're looking at the outline, we've done the recap and we're up to point one, chapter two, verse two. Then the Lord said to me, look, you've made your way around this hill country long enough, you know, almost 38 years to be exact.

Now turn north. Give the people these orders. You are about to pass through the territory of your relatives, the descendants of Esau, who lived in Seir. 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.

[6 : 41] You are to pay them in silver for the food you eat and the water you drink. And then Moses makes this passing comment about the whole 40 years. He said, the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands.

This is the second generation. He has watched over your journey through the vast wilderness. These 40 years, the Lord your God has been with you and you have not lacked anything. And so we went up past our relatives, the descendants of Esau, who lived in Seir.

We turned from the Arabah Road, which comes up from Ilath and Eziah-Geber, and travelled along the desert road of Moab. And so there's this passing comment that's worth noticing, how God keeps this second generation ready to try and enter the promised land again.

But just to put it into perspective, we'll have a look at the map again, just so you get an idea of what's going on. So the next slide. So, I don't know if it didn't come out very well, but there's a yellow mark, which looked better on my computer.

And they've travelled from Izion-Geber down in the south, and they're travelling up, not back to the red dot, but at the right-hand side of the screen, past Edom, Moab, and further up, Ammon.

[7 : 49] And so they travel up towards Moab as well, and God says, look, just as I said with Edom, don't provoke the Moabites either, because I've not given you their land.

Now, just to put it into perspective, who are all these people? On the next slide is a bit of a family tree. So, Abraham, on the right, had Isaac, and Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau.

Esau was the red-head guy who sold his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew, and from him come the Edomites. Edom means red. But from Jacob came Israel, and on the other side of the family, Abraham's brother was a guy called Haran.

He had a son called Lot, and he had two daughters. We don't know their names, so I just call them D1 and D2, not to be confused with B1 and B2. And from them, they had a son called Moab, and another one had a son called Ammon.

And God is basically saying to the Israelites, as you travel north, don't fight with these people, because I'm not going to give you their land. He says the same thing about Moab. Look at verse 9. He says, then the Lord said to me, do not harass the Moabites either, or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land.

[8 : 57] I have given Ah to the descendants of Lot as possession. And so on it goes. Now, I realize that there are lots of names here, and it can feel a bit irrelevant to us, a bit hard to make sense of.

But here's the thing that is relevant. So you've got to work out, why does God send Israel up the right-hand side? So if we go to the map again, thanks, Aidan, on the next slide, I think.

They're down the bottom. It's much quicker to go to the red dot, isn't it, where the first generation went. Much quicker, much easier. They don't even have to go past all their relatives, you know, Edomites and Moab and the Ammonites.

You know what families are like? People always fight in families, and they're tempted to fight with their relatives as well. It's safer just to go back to the red dot, to Kadesh Barnea. So why does God send them up the right-hand side?

And why does Moses remind them about this? Well, the answer is because as they go up, they will pass their relatives whom God has given land to.

[10 : 02] And the point is, if God is able to give land to their relatives, he's able to give land to you. In fact, God has even driven out the people in those lands, some of whom are giants.

So have a look at verse 21. Verse 21, so these people living in Ammon, They were a people strong and numerous, as tall as the Anakites, the giants.

And the Lord destroyed them from before the Ammonites, Israel's second cousins, who drove them out and settled in their place. The Lord had done the same for the descendants of Esau, who lived in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites from before them.

You see, God is able to move nations around to accomplish his purposes. And he's showing the Israelites that if he can do that for their cousins, he can do that for them.

He is able to give them the land. That's the point. And God also gets rid of the giants as well, those descendants of Anakites.

[11 : 09] And they were the things that the Israelites were scared of, do you remember? Giants, tall people, and fortified cities. And he's saying, remember your detour past the lands of your cousins and realize that God was able to get rid of the giants for them.

He was able to give them their land. And so he's able to do it for you too. 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 to get a jumper for one of the kids. And when I got back to the park, I saw that there were these kids swinging from the branches and the trees, being monkeys, making noises and so on. And I thought, who are these kids?

Mine, it turns out to be. They were my kids. And when I got there, one of the girls had gotten scared and kind of froze in the tree. You know how when you get up there, it always looks higher when you're up there than from on the ground.

And so I said, drop down and I promise I will catch you. She replied, no, you'll drop me. So much for trust. But to encourage her then, I asked her sister, who was also in the tree, to drop down and I caught her.

[12 : 16] And then I said to the scared one, I said, I caught your sister, you see. So I'm able to catch you too. And that's what God was doing here. God takes Israel on this detour past other nations and Moses reminds them about it so that they might realise if God is able to do that for their cousins, God is able to do it for them too.

Of course, when I said to my daughter who was scared, see, I caught your sister, so I'm able to catch you too. She replied, well, that was her, not me. Now, Israel could have thought the same thing, really.

They could have thought, well, that's Esau and Moab and Ammon. That's not us. And so next, Moses reminds them about how God has already defeated countries for them and given them some land.

So at the defeat of the kings, point to verse 24. He says, Now set out and cross the Anon Gorge. See, I have given 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, we're moving further north. So on the right-hand side of the yellow dot, if you can see it, is Ammon.

[13 : 31] That was Lot's relative. Israelites don't touch them. But on the left-hand side, just above the green dot, are the Amorites, where Sion, king of Heshbon, was.

And God says, take that land, because I'm giving it to you. Now, Moses asks permission first to pass through the land, but King Sion says no.

And because of time, we'll pick it up at verse 32 over the page. So just turn over the page in your Bibles to verse 32. We'll pick it up there. Look what happens. 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 that last verse there presents problems for us.

It seems extreme, doesn't it? I mean, even children. So how are we to make sense of this? I mean, we cannot simply say, well, that's the God of the Old Testament. We have a different God now. We have one God.

[14 : 37] And so how are we to deal with this? Now, we don't have time to look at it in depth here, and it does come up later, but 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.

It's on the welcome table. It was next to Cam and Jess's cards. And it offers six points to help us make sense of this. Feel free to grab a copy. If there's none there, or if you've got questions, just email me.

But the big point here is not verse 34. It's actually verse 33. That the Lord our God delivered him over to us. Or again, end of verse 36.

The Lord our God gave us all of them. See the point? God is able to conquer, to feed kings, and give them the land, Israel themselves.

Not just their relatives, but to Israel. And in case they think this is 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, up near the Sea of Galilee there.

[15 : 37] And so he says, chapter 3, verse 1, Next we turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og, king of Bashan, with his whole army, marched out to meet us in battle at Edri. And 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. And 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. And 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 unwalled villages as well.

Notice here, the very things that Israel's first generation was scared of, you know, the cities with the high walls, God has already conquered for them, on the east side of the Jordan.

[16 : 42] In fact, we even have this curious comment about King Og and his bed. Have a look at verse 11. Og, king of Bashan, was the last of the Rephites, who were also giants.

His bed was decorated with iron and was more than nine cubits long. That's more than four metres long and 1.8 metres wide, it says.

Now, this guy was a big boy, more than four metres long. I mean, even his name, Og, sounds like a giant's name, doesn't it? He was big.

But why does Moses include a detail about his bed here? Well, so that we realise that God is able to conquer even big giants like Og. You see, God has already started keeping his promise of the land to Israel.

He's already defeated some kings on the east side of the Jordan. He's already started giving some land to the tribes of Israel. And if he's already started doing that on the east, then you can be sure he's going to keep going on the west when they cross the Jordan into the promised land.

[17 : 53] In fact, in verse 12 to 20, we don't have time to look at it, Moses starts dividing the land to some of the tribes. And on the next slide, it's just a kind of break up. Now, don't look at the writing, it's too small, but look at the colours.

On the right-hand side, east of the Jordan, you've got a half-tribe of Manasseh in the brown, and you've got a couple other tribes. I think Gad and Reubenite. So Gad is purple, and Reuben is the kind of reddish-pinkish one there.

God has already started giving the land to see. And so the point is, you can trust him that he's able to keep going. And that's the point that God makes, and Moses makes in verse 21.

See there? At that time 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, to where you are going.

So do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God himself will fight for you all. The last you is plural. He says this to Joshua in front of all the people. You see, if he's able, not only willing, but able to keep his promises to their cousins, if he's already keeping his promise to some of their tribes, then you can be sure he will keep his promise for them all.

[19 : 13] That's the point that's being made. Even the denial of Moses into the promised land reminds us that while Moses is not able to bring people into the land, God is able. We don't have time to look at that.

I said, what does all this mean for us? Well, it's the same message. That God is not only willing, but also able to keep promises. Even big promises to bring us into our promised land, our inheritance.

That was what the promised land was called in the Old Testament, an inheritance. Our new heavens and new earth, where this earth will be restored, and there'll be no more crying or suffering or pain.

Where it will be so glorious that it will more than make up for whatever we've had to suffer in this life. And so we ought to trust him and to keep this promise. That's how we trust him to keep this promise despite appearances.

Because those promises, you know, a new creation, it seems a bit far-fetched sometimes, doesn't it? You know, a glory that will far outweigh all the suffering we have to endure, it seems a bit too far off.

[20 : 19] I mean, when we look at the world, it seems like God is not even in control of this world. So how will he be able to keep his promise of a new world? There's the crisis in Syria, more bombs in the city of Aleppo, more people dying.

In fact, there is even more opposition, growing opposition, to Christians here in Australia. I, you know, just take the Victorian government, for example, and the changes they're making to the anti-discrimination law.

In fact, someone gave me an article from a newspaper last month, and it says this. It says, Western media shuts its eyes to the persecution of Christians.

And this is what Greg Sheridan writes. He says 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 one substantial region in the world where there's an explicit campaign of genocide being carried out against this group. Yet you will hardly ever hear about it in the Western media.

[21 : 26] This minority group in question is Christians, he says. When we look at the world, it's hard to believe sometimes that God is in control. You know, is it wise for Cam and Jess to go to Sri Lanka?

How's God going to keep his promise of a new creation, as well as his promise to be in control of this creation? Well, when we feel that, and we feel the weight of that, well, we do three things.

First, we're to look back in history to how God was able to keep promises to Israel. Just as Israel was to look at their cousins and how God was able to keep promises to them, so we're to look at Israel and see how God has been able to keep his promise of land to them.

That God is the God of all nations. He can move them around to accomplish his purposes. Second, like Israel, we're also to remember what God has already done for us in Christ.

You see, God has already brought us into his kingdom spiritually now. So on the next slide, we read this from Colossians, which we just finished studying a couple of weeks ago. It says, 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.

[22 : 45] You see, the giants that stand against us are not men like Sion and Og. Some good names for your kids, by the way. Alice, Horne, are you having kids soon? Come here, Og.

It's pretty good. But our enemies are not giants like those guys. Our enemies are worse. It's sin and death. For our sin means we deserve eternal death, hell.

But Jesus died for us. He suffered hell in our place so that we who believe can be rescued from it. We who believe in him are forgiven and we've already been brought into his kingdom, it says, spiritually.

You see, just like God already started to bring Israel into their promised land by giving a few tribes on the east side their land, so God has already started to keep his promise of bringing us into his physical kingdom because we've already got a foot in there.

We're already there spiritually. And so we know he'll complete the process and bring us there physically. I shared with you at Evening Church a couple of weeks ago about my favourite dinner being roast lamb.

[23 : 52] I don't get it very often because price of lamb, not because of Michelle. You heard me say that, it's not because of Michelle. Great. But when I see Michelle having bought some roast lamb and prepared it and then put it in the oven, once I've seen that she's been able to do all that for me already, then I know in a while she'll be able to make my lamb roast dinner a physical reality too.

Yum. There is a link. See, Christ has paid for our sins to give us new birth into his kingdom now, spiritually.

And if God has already been able to do all this for us now, then we know he'll be able to make it a physical reality for us too, later.

The process has begun, you see. And thirdly and finally, we have to remember that Christ has secured our inheritance for us. So that's not a maybe, it's not a perhaps, it's a definite.

Here we come to our second reading and on the last slide, Peter writes, in his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, which is at the moment kept in heaven for you.

[25 : 10] And you, through faith, are shielded by God's power into the coming of that salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last time. See, our hope of inheritance, this new heavens and new earth, where there'll be no more suffering and pain, this hope is a living hope.

It's not a dead hope. It's not wishful thinking. It's certain. It's guaranteed. How? By the resurrection of Jesus. You see, if God is able to raise Christ from the dead, then he's also able to raise us too and bring us into a new creation, new physical heavens and earth.

In fact, just as God kept the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness, so he will keep us. Peter says, we are shielded by God's power. He will keep us from falling until that day he reveals the new heaven and new earth, where there'll be no more crying or suffering or pain.

And so we're to keep trusting his promises, knowing that he's able to keep them, knowing that he's already started to keep them, knowing that Christ has secured them. Let me finish with a story about a family from one of my old churches.

This family has two grown-up, severely autistic children. The boy was in my Bible study group. He was a great guy, hard work though. He'd often like to taste some of the supper and then put it back and he kind of can't do that.

[26 : 32] Sometimes he wanted to leave and walk home, which wasn't safe, and so I had to try and stop him from leaving. He's 6'1", this wide. I was scared sometimes. And it made me think, how do the parents go with this?

Two, two kids like this. How hard must it be for them? And I remember a conversation and someone asked them, how do you keep going? How do you keep loving your kids and trusting in God who has allowed this to happen?

There's a number of answers, but this is what they said. They said, knowing that one day God will bring him fully into his kingdom and give him a perfect, autistic, free body.

The promise of new creation, you see. She was fully persuaded that God is not only willing to keep his promise, but he's able to keep his promise. In fact, she said, and I know this because Christ has died and risen for him.

She continued to trust and live in light of that promise, knowing that God is not just willing, but able. Let's pray we would do this.