

AM Deuteronomy 32:28-33:29 The Everlasting God and the Everlasting Arms

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[0 : 00] I'm going to read from the Bible now. I'm going to read from Deuteronomy, beginning at chapter 32, verse, it should say 48, my mistake, 48, and reading right through to the end of chapter 33.

We've been looking at Deuteronomy for quite a long time now when I've been preaching. This is the last but one of those sermons.

So looking at Deuteronomy 32, starting at verse 48. That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession, and die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died in Mount Hor and was gathered to his people.

Because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, and because you did not treat me as holy in the midst of the people of Israel.

For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel.

[1 : 59] This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the people of Israel before his death. He said, The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us.

He shone forth from Mount Paran. He came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand.

Yes, he loved the people. All his holy ones were in his hand. So they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you.

When Moses commanded us a law as a possession for the assembly of Jacob, thus the Lord became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.

Let Reuben live and not die, but let his men be few. Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him into his people.

[3 : 19] With your hands contend for him, and be a help against his adversaries. And of Levi he said, Give to Levi your Thummim and your Urim to your godly one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you quarrelled at the waters of Meribah, who said of his father and mother, I regard them not.

He disowned his brothers and ignored his children, for they observed your word and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law.

They shall put incense before you and hold burnt offerings on your altar. Bless, O Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands.

Crush the loins of his adversaries, and those who hate him, that they rise not again. Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord dwells in safety.

The high God surrounds him all day long, and dwells between his shoulders. And of Joseph he said, Blessed by the Lord be his land, with the choicest gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that crouches beneath, with the choicest fruits of the sun, and the rich yield of the months, with the finest produce of the ancient mountains, and the abundance of the everlasting hills, with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness, and the favour of him who dwells in the bush.

[5 : 14] May these rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers. A firstborn bull, he has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox.

With them he shall gore the peoples, all of them to the ends of the earth. They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh. And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents. They shall call peoples to their mountain.

There they offer right sacrifices, for they draw from the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand. And of Gad he said, Blessed be he who enlarges Gad.

Gad crouches like a lion. He tears off arm and scalp. He chose the best of the land for himself, for there a commander's portion was reserved.

[6 : 30] And he came with the heads of the people. With Israel he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments for Israel.

And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's cub, that leaps from Bashan. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, sate it with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord.

Possess the lake and the south. And of Asher he said, Most blessed of sons be Asher. Let him be the favorite of his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil.

Your bars shall be iron and bronze, and as your days, so shall your strength be. There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And he thrust out the enemy before you, and said, Destroy.

[7 : 52] So Israel lived in safety. Jacob lived alone, in a land of grain and wine, whose heavens drop down dew. Happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph.

Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. Amen. Well, let me ask you to turn, please, to Deuteronomy, chapter 33, and verse 27.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. It's always interesting to hear the dying words of great men and women.

Some are reluctant to go. Queen Elizabeth I said, All my possessions for a moment in time.

Some are defiant. King Edward I said, Carry my bones before you, as the rebels will not be able to endure the sight of me, dead or alive.

[9 : 44] The rebels, incidentally, were the Scots. Some are tragic. Julius Caesar allegedly said, Et tu, Brute?

When he saw his friend Brutus among those who were stabbing him. Some are intriguing. Marco Polo, the great Venetian traveler, said, I have not told half of what I saw.

We'll never know what else he saw, will we? Some are surprisingly humble. Leonardo da Vinci, one of the greatest artists of all time, said on his deathbed, My work was not as good as it should have been.

And Michelangelo said, I'm still learning. Some have bitter regrets. Cardinal Wolsey said, If only I had served God, as well as I served my king.

Some are just matter-of-fact about it. Oliver Cromwell said, I design to make what haste I can to be gone. And some are thought-provoking.

[11 : 11] The great 17th century theologian, John Owen, had just dictated a letter in which he said, I am still in the land of the living.

Then he told his secretary to change it. I am still in the land of the dying. But I hope soon to be in the land of the living.

The last words of martyrs are often inspiring. Stephen, In Acts 7, said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

Tyndale prayed, Lord, open the king of England's eyes. Latimer said, as he was burned at the stake with Ridley, Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man.

We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as shall never be put out. I read recently of one of the covenanters here in Dumfriesshire, John Gibson, when he was about to be shot in 1685, he said, It is the most joyful day of my life.

[12 : 33] Many people, of course, say nothing at all. Either they're too ill or they may even be unconscious. Some people will just express their love for their family.

The greatest last words of all, of course, are the words of our Lord Jesus on the cross. That great shout of triumph, It is finished.

Mission accomplished. Followed by the quiet word of faith. Into your hand, I commit my spirit. Well, here in Deuteronomy 33, you have the last recorded words of Moses.

He's been told at the end of chapter 32 that the time has come. He is to go up into the mountain and die. God will allow him to see the promised land, but not enter it.

Because of that moment of anger when he struck the rock rather than speaking to it as God had commanded him. He goes up into the mountain and he dies in chapter 34.

[13:55] But before he does, he blesses the 12 tribes of Israel. And he praises the God of Israel.

It's a magnificent scene. It's a great moment in history. There is incidentally a painting of it by Signorelli in the Sistine Chapel.

Moses is following here the tradition in Israel of gathering the family together for a blessing. Except that this is not his family. Moses did have two sons, Gershon and Eliezer, and perhaps he blessed them privately.

But the main blessing is not for his family, but for the nation. The nation has become his family.

[14:59] Now there are many good things in this chapter. But I want us to focus just on verse 27 with these two very simple headings.

The everlasting God and the everlasting arms. These words were spoken to Israel, but they're still true for us.

Wonderfully true. And they can be a real inspiration for us. First though, let's just take a quick overview of the chapter as a whole.

It's always good to see any text in its context. Moses begins and ends with God.

He begins in verses 2 to 5 with that magnificent, mysterious reminder of how God had appeared to them at Mount Sinai.

[16:02] The Lord God came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us He shone forth from Mount Paran. He came from the 10,000 of Holy Ones with flaming fire at His right hand.

That extraordinary occasion is described in Exodus chapter 19. How the mountain quaked and burned with fire must have been an unforgettable experience.

God had, as it were, come down from heaven to meet with Israel. That was the measure of His love for them.

They were His people. He had made a covenant with them. And He had given them His law. The law itself was a mark of His love.

He was their king. Not Moses, but God was king in Israel. As He says in verse 5, the Lord became king in Jeshurun.

[17:12] Jeshurun means the righteous one and it is another name for Israel. Now in a greater sense, God has come down to us, hasn't He?

In the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Came to bring not the law, but the gospel.

Salvation through the grace of God. He is our king and we are counted righteous by faith in Him.

Next we have the blessings themselves in verses 7 to 25.

There is a separate blessing for each tribe and we need not look at them individually today. But we may just note that there is a blessing for every tribe except Simeon.

No explanation is given for that, but possibly it may be because when Jacob blessed his children in Genesis 49, he said that Levi and Simeon would be scattered among their brethren because of their past cruelty.

[18:42] Now Levi was Moses' tribe and they had distinguished themselves for loyalty and they became the priests. Simeon later received land in the midst of Judah.

But apart from that, these blessings are all very positive blessings. Moses desires prosperity for them all in the promised land.

Now that is remarkable considering the trouble that Israel had caused him. They had rebelled against Moses. They had rebelled against God.

And yet here he is blessing them. Truly, Moses loved his people. And Christ also loves his people today, doesn't he?

Despite all our many faults, he blesses us with individual blessings tailored to our own particular needs. Moses now ends with God in verses 26 to 29, commending God to them as the one in whom they should trust.

[19:58] And he begins this final song of praise with a remarkable picture of God coming to their rescue in verse 26. There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.

Earthly kings might come riding to the rescue of their people on horses and chariots, but God goes one further. He rides on the heavens.

There are echoes of this in the Psalms. Psalm 18 verse 10, he rode on a cherub and flew, he came swiftly on the wings of the wind.

Psalm 68 in verse 4 in the authorised version reads, Sing unto God, sing praises to his name, extol him that rideth upon the heavens. Later in that Psalm verse 33, O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God, sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens.

There's a sense of urgency in this, isn't there? a sense of eagerness. God doesn't just look down and notice our troubles.

[21 : 20] He rushes to our help because he loves us. Again, we can see Christ in this, can't we?

Christ who literally came down from heaven to save us and who one day will come down again.

Revelation 1 and verse 7 says, quoting from Daniel, behold, he is coming with clouds, riding on the heavens.

He's coming to judge the world, but he's also coming to rescue and reward and reign over his people. Then we have our text in verse 27, followed by a promise that God will give them the victory and give them the land.

And he concludes, happy are you, O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord. Who is like God in verse 26?

Who is like you in verse 29? This is the ultimate blessing of God, a blessing upon all the tribes, and a blessing upon us.

[22 : 42] If you have trusted in the Lord, then you are a people saved by the Lord. But let's now come to our text, verse 27, the eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

I have to admit to a very special interest in this verse. I was born in the Salvation Army Hospital in Hackney in London, 6pm on a Sunday evening, just in time for the evening service, and I'm told that this verse was inscribed over the door.

So these words, among the last that Moses spoke before his death, were the first that I saw after my birth. I've always taken them to be a kind of motto text for my life, and this is, I suppose, my favourite verse in the whole Bible.

We'll look at it today under two headings, the everlasting God and the everlasting arms. first the everlasting God, the eternal God is your dwelling place, or in the authorised version, your refuge.

For Moses also, these words had a very personal significance. They were shaped by his experience in Exodus chapter 3, when God appeared to him in the burning bush, and commanded him to go back to Egypt and say to Pharaoh, let my people go.

[24 : 34] He describes God, notice in verse 16, as him who dwells in the bush, still dwells in the bush, after all those years, because he is the eternal God.

Moses had asked him his name there, you remember, and God had replied mysteriously, I am, that I am.

Hebrew word is Haya, and the name Yahweh or Jehovah is based upon that, meaning the one who is.

God had no beginning, and he had no end. He simply is, forever, the eternal, unchanging God.

This God, he says, is your dwelling place, or in the AV, your refuge. Taking the ESV translation, this is the same thought as in Psalm 90, which we sang.

[25 : 41] That's described as a prayer of Moses, the man of God. He's described here, notice, back in verse 1, as the man of God.

And he says in Psalm 90, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Man, in contrast, lives on earth only a short while. He goes on in that Psalm, the years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength 80, yet their span is but toil and trouble, they are soon gone and we fly away.

Moses lived to 120, but even he must die, and he is speaking these words, with death approaching. But God will never die.

God is eternal. This eternal God is your dwelling place. Israel might think of the promised land as their dwelling place, and Moses says in verse 28 that they will live there in safety, and they might

hope to live there for a long time.

[27 : 07] But really, their dwelling place is in God. Not just a temporary dwelling place for a short while, but their dwelling place forever.

Even if one day they are exiled and spread through the earth as they have been, still they can find their rest in the eternal God. He will still be with them.

refuge. Or if we take the alternative AV translation, your refuge, that again is a frequent thought in the Old Testament, isn't it?

Psalm 46 says, for example, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. people. It's the same thought really as the rock which we saw repeatedly in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32.

Psalm 18 combines the two. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge. in him we are secure forever because God is eternal.

[28 : 25] And we find these same thoughts in the New Testament too. Revelation 1 verse 8, God says, I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come.

The eternal God. Christ says in Revelation 1 17, Fear not, I am the first and the last, the living one, I died, and behold I am alive forever more.

It's no accident that we call him the rock of ages. What better dwelling place, what better refuge could we possibly have than that?

You know the very best dwelling place on earth will decay away eventually. the strongest castles will crumble away. All those stately homes that rich people have built for themselves, all those fortresses that they built hundreds of years ago to defend themselves, they cost a fortune to maintain and eventually they will collapse.

God will be there forever. This same God is our God today, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses, the God of David, the God of the apostles, the God of the reformers, the God of the covenanters, the God of our fathers.

[30 : 00] God of the God of the God of the God of the God of the God of the God of the God of the perfect dwelling place and perfect refuge, safe from all the storms of life, safe even in the day of death, safe even on the day of judgment, safe for eternity if we will hide ourselves in him.

But the verse doesn't end there. Let's look now at those everlasting arms. Underneath are the everlasting arms. The eternal God has of course eternal arms, metaphorically speaking. Moses knows perfectly well that God is a spirit. He is not suggesting a literal body. Simply the idea that he will carry us and support us and uphold us forever like a father carrying his child.

That idea actually appears at the beginning of Deuteronomy chapter 1 verse 31. You have seen how the Lord your God carried you as a man carries his son all the way that you went until you came to this place.

They had known those everlasting arms all the way through those 40 years in the wilderness. It appears again in Psalm 68 in verse 19.

[31 : 33] Blessed be the Lord who daily bears us up. God is our salvation. Very beautifully in Isaiah 46 verses 3 and 4.

Listen to me O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been born by me from before your birth, carried from the womb, even to your old age, I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you.

I have made, and I will bear, and I will save. What a lovely cradle to the grave promise that is. Indeed, beyond the cradle to the womb.

There are babies in the womb here in this congregation. The everlasting arms are already under those babies. It's similar to that lovely thought in Exodus 19, again going back to Sinai.

I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. That was echoed, wasn't it, in Deuteronomy 32, which we looked up last time, where the Lord likens himself to an eagle carrying its young.

[32 : 49] elsewhere, the Bible speaks of covering us with his wings. Speaks of leading us as a shepherd.

Speaks of protecting us from attacks from the rear. Speaks, in fact, of guarding us from every possible direction. There's a famous prayer known as St. Patrick's breastplate, which beautifully sums up this all-round protection.

I have it as a bookmark in my Bible. Christ be with me. Christ within me. Christ behind me. Christ before me.

Christ beside me. Christ to win me. Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me. Christ above me. Christ in quiet. Christ in danger.

Christ in hearts of all that love me. Christ in mouth of friend and stranger. But here it's the arms of God underneath us that Moses speaks of.

[33 : 58] Those everlasting arms that will never fail, never grow weak, never drop us, never cast us away. God says in Deuteronomy 31, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

We read in Isaiah last week, the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not grow faint or grow weary. He upholds us forever.

And could we not stretch that thought a little bit further and speak of those everlasting arms literally spread doubt on the cross where Christ bore our sins for us.

God is spirit but in his love he took flesh and became man. And as a man he literally had arms and hands that were pierced for our transgressions.

Peter says he himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And those same arms were lifted up in blessing when Christ ascended to heaven in Luke 24.

[35 : 24] Just as Moses blessed the tribes of Israel before he died. So Christ blessed his people before he ascended back to his father.

father. This is our God and this is the love that he bears toward us. With such a God we can face anything in life.

With such a God we're safe. Safe from the world, the flesh and the devil. We're safe even from our own sins dragging us down.

Jude says he is able to keep you from falling. with such a God we can look confidently beyond death.

Was Moses afraid of death? Of course not. Perhaps he was a little disappointed not to go into the promised land but something better awaited him.

[36 : 25] The eternal God is able to give us eternal life in Christ. Christ. The question as we close is are you trusting in him?

Trusting in him for salvation? Trusting in him for guidance? Trusting in him for support through life? Trusting in him for eternity?

If you're going through some struggle at the moment are you looking to those everlasting arms? Or are you looking outside to the world?

Or looking to your own strength? You know it's astonishing to find that within two or three generations the Israelites had turned away from God.

And turned to other gods instead. It's astonishing to find in this land of Scotland today that so many have turned their backs on the eternal God and prefer to live their lives without those everlasting arms.

[37 : 38] So many people have chosen as it were to walk the tightrope of life without the divine safety net. And they're proud of it. And it's no surprise if sooner or later they come crashing down.

Where do you stand in this? If you're not yet his, come to him and he will welcome you with those everlasting arms.

If you have turned away, come back and he will welcome you still. if you are trusting in him, keep on doing so.

God who saves you forever also expects you to be faithful forever. May all of us be able to echo what Moses says, happy are you O Israel, who is like you, a people saved by the Lord.

May we be able to appropriate that to ourselves, happy are we, a people saved by the Lord. And even more personally, happy am I to have been saved by the Lord.

[39 : 01] We're expressing gratitude, we're expressing amazement when we say that. Who am I that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

but he did and we give thanks and praise that he saves his people and upholds them forever. May the Lord grant us all to know that happiness of salvation.

Amen.