

God's Power to Deliver

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[0 : 00] Father, again we thank you that you speak to us through your word and that you even speak to us through chapters like this, which at first glance seem incomprehensible.

Father, we ask that you would help us to comprehend them, but more than that, to see what you are teaching us through your word. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's hard to believe in victory when the odds are stacked against you, isn't it?

Perhaps the classic example is Stephen Bradbury. Do you remember him? No one believed he would win. The odds were stacked against him. He had accidents and so on.

In fact, not even he thought he would win until, well, have a look on the next slide. And now it's only one man across the line for gold. It'll be over in 90 seconds. Matthew Turcotte takes the lead. He was advanced out of the semifinal.

And there's the young Korean skater, sliding on the inside. Sometimes you don't even know where he is. He's so small, he just looks in there. Right now, Ono hanging back in fourth. They're trying to pass on the inside.

[1 : 10] And Ono, here's the bell. One lap for gold. He's reaching back for one more gear. Trying to hold up lead. They bump. They bump.

Stephen Bradbury in Australia across the line. It's still great, even the fifth, tenth time seeing it. No one believed that Stephen Bradbury would ever win, did they? I mean, the commentators don't even mention his name until he actually almost crosses the line.

Because the odds were all stacked against him. And as Christians, we can also find it hard to believe in God's promises of victory for us when the odds are stacked against us.

I mean, when we feel overwhelmed by the pressures and problems of life, whether it's at work or at home or health, it's hard to believe God's promises like these ones on the next slide.

[2 : 14] That we are more than conquerors through all these things through Christ who loves us. It's hard to feel like that, isn't it? Or promises like that we can approach God's throne of grace with confidence and find grace to help us in our time of need.

When the odds of life are stacked against us, it's hard to believe those promises that God will help us and bring us through it, victorious in the faith.

Or we can feel outnumbered by the world with the growing superpower of secularism. It can be hard to believe God's promises then. Secularism is, of course, a movement to remove God from society. God and his truth from society. And it is growing. For example, just last week on the next slide, a New South Wales Green Senator, Lee Rhiannon, moved a motion to scrap the so-called archaic Lord's Prayer from the Senate.

Claiming that we should include all religions. When in reality, it's just an attempt to get rid of Christianity. Or on the next slide, last month, a university student in Queensland were apparently marked down in essays for using words such as mankind instead of humankind and workmanship.

[3 : 32] They're supposed to use gender-inclusive language like they, which ironically means you end up excluding all notion of gender altogether. And in response, the universities claim that they issued not a ban, but guidelines for the students to use.

Either way, it's another example of removing truth, biblical truth, from our society. And in the face of growing, this growing superpower of secularism, which seems to be ruling our Western world at the moment, we can feel outnumbered and overwhelmed as Christians.

And it can be hard to believe God's promises in Christ, like on the next slide, that he will continue to build the church and not even the gates of Hades will overcome it.

And when we look around, we're overwhelmed with secularism. It's hard to believe. Or that the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me

will also sit on thrones, that we will one day rule the world, in other words.

In fact, in the face of secularism, God's promises and his word in general can be so hard to believe that some churches and even some Christians simply don't.

[4 : 49] Instead, they, instead of speaking the truth in love, they have watered down the truth and call that love. For example, some churches, in fact, I heard a retired bishop say this at Easter time, don't talk about sin and death and judgment.

Just talk about God's love. That's half the gospel. Others have abandoned the biblical view of marriage and still others, even the view of gender. Unless we think it's just Christians out there. I had someone from our church tell me just three weeks ago that they didn't believe a part of scripture we read that Sunday because it was out of touch with society.

You see, last week it was about trusting God's promises despite appearances. This week is about trusting God's promises against the odds.

When we feel overwhelmed by life's pressures and problems or outnumbered by the growing superpower of secularism. And today we'll be encouraged to trust God's word and promises for as we'll see, God alone has the power to deliver them.

[6 : 02] But our passage today really begins with the superpower of Abram's world. So point one in the outlines and verse one in your Bibles. At that time when Amraphel was king of Shinar, which is the same as Babylon, Ariok king of Elasar, Kedelioma king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goyim, these kings went out to war against some other kings.

I'll read them later. Maybe. But here I just want you to notice in verse one what's happening. Okay, so there's a collection of kings from the Far East.

So on the next slide, just let me try and put it into perspective for you. I don't want to just brush over this chapter as though it's incomprehensible. I want to show you that we can comprehend it. So on the far right, the far east is Kedelioma in Elam.

And just a bit above him is Amraphel. So in China, which is modern day Iraq. So Kedelioma, Iran, Amraphel, Iraq. We're not sure where the other two kings were, but presumably coast by because they formed a coalition, a group of kings.

And so Kedelioma, though, it seems to be that he is the leader of this coalition because in verse four and five, our author names only him.

[7 : 26] And so it looks like Kedelioma is the superpower of the whole Middle East for at least 12 years until five other kings right on the other side of Canaan down the bottom of the Dead Sea decide to rebel.

So we'll pick it up at verse two. So these kings of the east, verse two, went to war against Berah, king of Sodom, Beresha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admar, Shem-eba, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zohar.

All these latter kings joined forces in the valley of Sidim, that is, the Dead Sea Valley. For 12 years, they had been subject to, notice, Kedelioma.

He's the leader. But in the 13th year, they decided to rebel. And so you see what's happening? The kings of the east are the superpower. And then the kings over here in the bottom of Canaan, they decide to rebel.

And so these kings of the east decide in the 14th year to travel across and do battle with these rebellious kings and set them straight. But before we hear who wins this battle in the Sidim Valley, our author wants us to see just how great a superpower Kedelioma really is.

[8 : 40] Because he tells us about all the people that he conquers along the way from the east to get to these rebellious kings. Do you see verse 5? In the 14th year, so it takes a while for him to get his troops together, Kedelioma and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Raphites in Asheroth, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh, and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran, near the desert.

Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat, that is, Kadesh. And they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites, who were living in that place.

Yeah, I bailed out then. Yep, you can laugh at me now. Now, all these names remind us we're dealing with real history here. And this is not make-believe.

This is bedded in historical names. Though I realise when we read all these names, we kind of switch off, don't we? Or perhaps we listen to see how many names the preacher messes up.

But we do this because we don't know these places. And yet, even if we don't know these places, we can still read these names for ourself, and we can still get an idea that Kid or Leoma must be a pretty big superpower to have conquered all these names.

[10:04] And if we do a bit of research, we'll see this even more clearly. For example, the Rephites and the Emities are mentioned later on in the Bible. We find out that they are literally giants.

So on the next slide, we read later in Deuteronomy chapter 3, that Og, king of Bashan, was the last of the Rephites. His bed, decorated with iron, was more than 9 cubits, 4 metres long, and 4 cubits, 1.8 metres wide.

Gives you an idea of his size. Og was probably the last of the Rephites because Kid or Leoma is just about to kill most of his ancestors back here in Genesis. But the point is, the Rephites were giants.

I mean, even his name, Og, sounds like a giant, doesn't it? And to put it into perspective, on the next slide is a picture of an Og-sized Rephite compared to a normal-sized man.

That's what they reckon. They're giants. And then on the next slide, in Deuteronomy chapter 2, we're told that the Rephites were also called Emities by a different group of people.

[11:07] In other words, in our passage, they're just using different names for the same people who were giants. And Kid or Leoma takes them out, just like that.

That's how big a superpower he is. In fact, you can look at it on a map. So on the back of your outlines, I've given you a map. And this is what Kid or Leoma, this is the route he would have taken. He comes in from Damascus at the top of your map. He takes out the giants known as the Rephites in Asheroth, so just a bit further down. Then the giants known as the Emities in Ham.

So he takes out literally his biggest competition first, smart. And then we're told he went all the way down the bottom of your map to the hill country of Seir, S-E-I-R.

You see that at the bottom of your map? And then he went left or west to El Peran. And then he turned back to go to Kadesh, where he conquered all the Amalekites living in the area.

[12:07] And then finally, he draws up the battle lines in the valley of Sidim to take out the rebellious kings of the Dead Sea. In other words, this Kid or Leoma is a powerful force to have conquered all those people along the way.

And not just a powerful force, but a clever king. Because if you look at your line on your map, do you notice what he's done? He's almost encircled the Dead Sea kings.

He's taken out any possible reinforcements in the east and in the south that might come to the aid of the Dead Sea kings. He's not just a powerful force.

He's a clever king. I wonder if you can tell me on the next slide who this person is. Any ideas? Napoleon Bonaparte.

He was famous for being short. But he was also famous for being a brilliant strategist. And one of the world's greatest military leaders. Well, Ketel Leoma was an ancient Napoleon.

[13:11] Not that he was particularly short. We don't know. But he was a great military leader. And so it's no surprise to hear that when he finally makes it to Sodom and Gomorrah and the Dead Sea kings, he takes them out with ease.

So much ease that our narrator, our author, doesn't even bother mentioning the battle. So have a look at verse 8 where we return to the Sidim Valley and the war with the Dead Sea kings.

So verse 8. Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admar, the king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela, that is, Zoër, marched out and drew up their battle lines in the valley of Sidim against Ketel Leoma, king of Elam, Tidol king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Ariok king of Elsassah.

Four kings against five. Now the valley of Sidim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, the battle's already over, fled, some of the men fell into them, and the rest fled to the hills.

The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food, then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions since he was living in Sodom.

[14:26] Do you see how victorious Ketel Leoma is, and with what ease he conquers them? As I said, the author doesn't even mention the battle, he just says that they fled.

But then our author finally tells us what all this has to do with Abram. That's who we're looking at, isn't it? And it has to do with Abram because Ketel Leoma takes Abram's nephew Lot and all his possessions with him.

And this is a problem because Lot was one of God's people, whom God had blessed through Abram. After all, that's why Lot's possessions increased along with Abram's. Lot was benefiting from the blessing through Abram. That's what God promised back in chapter 12. So on the next slide, chapter 12, God said, I will make your name great, Abram. And notice, you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. God promised to bless others like Lot through Abram. [15 : 33] But here, Lot is taken captive and he's no longer blessed, is he? It looks like God's promise to bless through Abram is now outnumbered by Ketel Leoma.

Until that is verse 13. Do you see there? A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now, Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Ashkol and Agner, all of whom were allied with Abram.

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.

And now the trees of Mamre were near Hebron. That's where we left Abram last week. So on the next slide, presumably Ketel returns the way he came up the right hand side of the Jordan, plundering Sodom and Gomorrah as he went, as we're told he took all their goods and possessions.

While Abram was living at Hebron and he travelled up the left side of the Jordan River. And he catches Ketel Leoma at the city of Dan, about 200 kilometres from home.

[16 : 45] And when he gets there, no doubt his men are exhausted. And yet, verse 15, Now, this is an extraordinary victory.

318 trained men with a few friends, travelling all day and night. And then fighting and defeating this huge superpower that the author has spent so much time telling us about.

And then even chasing this superpower. Can you imagine 318 men chasing thousands of men 100 kilometres north of Damascus? This is an extraordinary victory.

Against seemingly impossible odds. There's another battle in history, actually, of another 300 or so trained men against impossible odds.

It was the 300 Spartans against the Persian superpower. The battle was made famous by the movie 300 on the next slide. With Gerard Butler and his sculpted six pack of abs.

[18 : 04] Much like my one pack. I'm not recommending this movie, by the way. It looks a bit gory. But the point is, here is another ancient battle with 300 men against the superpower of Persian.

And spoiler alert, the Spartans lose. But here is Abram with 318 trained men and a few neighbours against the superpower with impossible odds.

And he wins. He rescues Lot, his possessions. He rescues the women and the other people. How can Abram do this?

Well, because God delivers. Point 3, verse 17. After Abram returned from defeating Kedol-Leoma and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Sheva.

That is the king's valley. Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was also priest of God Most High. And he blessed Abram, saying, Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth.

[19 : 11] And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. And so, on his way home to Hebron, Abram is met by two other kings in the appropriately named King's Valley.

One of these kings, Melchizedek, offers Abram food and wine rather than just water, because it's meant to be a banquet food in celebration of his victory. He even blesses Abram.

Yet, despite the wine and the blessing, Melchizedek attributes the victory to God. He says, God has blessed Abram.

God has delivered his enemies into Abram's hands. In other words, it's God's power that delivers, not Abram's. Abram only defeated them because God delivered them.

And so, the true superpower is, well, God. In this king's valley, the true king is, you guessed it, God.

[20 : 23] For he alone has the power to deliver. And to deliver not just victory over enemies, but also to deliver his promises of blessing to others through Abram.

Because what happens through Abram? Lot is rescued, but so are the women and the other people. You see, God is keeping his chapter 12 promise to bless people through Abram.

And he does it despite the odds of Ketolioma, the big superpower. In other words, we see that God alone has the power to deliver his promises.

Now, Abram knows this too, which is why Abram responds to Melchizedek, not by saying, hang on a second, don't praise God. I'm the one that did the fighting. He doesn't say that, does he?

No, rather he responds to Melchizedek by giving a tenth of all his plunder. See, Abram knows Melchizedek is right about God. That God alone has power to deliver both victory over enemies, and deliver his promised blessing of salvation to others.

[21 : 33] And so Abram won't keep any other plunder for himself, lest the other king of Sodom try and take some credit. See verse 21. The king of Sodom said to Abram, give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, with raised hand, I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God most high, creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, I made Abram rich.

I'll accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who were with me, to Einer, Ashkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.

Abram has rescued all of Sodom's people and possessions. He is the victor. And so he technically has the right to keep them all. As the old saying goes, to the victor go the spoils.

Yet Abram gives Sodom's king all of his own share. Why? Well, so that this king cannot claim any credit. For Abram knows it's God's power alone that delivered the enemies and therefore the riches along with them, not Sodom.

[22 : 55] And so the message of this chapter seems to be that God alone has power to deliver his promises despite the odds. After all, our inspired author spends a lot of time establishing Ketor Leoma as the superpower, doesn't he?

To show us the odds of defeating him seem impossible. And when Abram does defeat him, did you notice there's no mention of Abram's faith?

There's no mention of Abram calling on God for help, which I assume he did, given he had victory. And Abram's victory in verse 15, well, it's described in just three words.

He routed them. That's it. That's his whole victory. God, on the other hand, is given the credit. God is the one who is praised. God is the one who is called the most high three times.

God is also the one who is called the creator of heaven and earth twice. You see, our author wants us to see that God alone has the power as the creator of heaven and earth, as the God most high.

[24 : 00] He alone has the power to deliver the enemies into Abram's hands. And in doing so, the power to deliver his promise to bless others through Abram.

You see, the message is that God has the power to deliver despite the odds. So what does this all mean for us then, point four? Does it mean that God will give us victory over our enemies at work? Or perhaps smite the people who cut us off on the road? Or even the secularists who are pushing society away from God? Well, first we need to see how this theme is fulfilled in Christ.

For that sometimes changes the application for us. And when we look to Christ, we also see God's power to deliver his promised blessing. But it's the blessing of salvation from a very different superpower.

For in Christ, God saves us not from an earthly superpower that ruled the Middle East for 12 years. God saved us from a spiritual superpower that has ruled the world for thousands of years, including Melbourne.

[25 : 13] Now, this superpower is sin. And it has rained ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden. And we know this from our experience too, don't we?

I mean, sin not only means people face the punishment of eternal death later. Sin also means that people are under its power and ignore God now.

And you tell me, do people in society naturally listen to God? Or do they naturally ignore God? They ignore God, don't they? You see, sin is still ruling over many people in our society.

It's a greater superpower than Ketor Leoma ever was. And if people did try to save themselves from sin, the odds of succeeding, well, they're impossible, aren't they? Yet despite the odds, God has the power to save by his gospel.

The gospel message that all nations will be blessed through Abram. And so on the next slide, we read in Galatians 3 verse 8, Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith.

[26 : 21] And he announced, notice, the gospel in advance to Abraham. All nations will be blessed through you. You see, God's promised blessing to all nations comes in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is a descendant of Abram.

And the gospel is God's power to save. Do you see what Paul says at the bottom there? He says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings what? Salvation for everyone who believes. You see, the gospel message about Jesus is God's power to deliver his promise, blessing of salvation.

For the gospel speaks of Jesus, whose blood pays for our sin. It speaks of how all who believe in him are forgiven and set free from sin's punishment of eternal death later and set free from sin's power of ignoring God now.

Instead, we are given the spirit who enables us to listen to God now and guarantees us eternal life later in a new creation. And how do we know that God's power in Christ has worked?

[27 : 31] Well, what are you all doing now? You're listening to someone explain God's word. That's not normal. Well, a couple of people have fallen asleep, but I won't point them out. That's not normal.

Something has happened to you to change you. That's the gospel. The spirit works through the gospel. It has changed us such that we listen to God's word now and we can be certain of life eternal later.

And what's more, we even have the historical resurrection of Jesus to prove there is life after death. And so like Abram, we can know God has the power to deliver his promises, despite the odds.

For in Christ, we see God's power, which has delivered us from the superpower of sin. And if he has done that, then we can trust him to deliver on every other promise. Can't we?

So when we feel overwhelmed by the problems and pressures of life, we need not worry. Instead, we can pause and remember that God has the power to deliver his promises, including ones that will be more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.

[28 : 37] I like the ones that we can approach God's throne of grace and receive help in our time of need. In other words, we can trust God's promises to preserve us and keep us in the faith, despite the overwhelming problems and pressures in life.

I know a number of people who can testify to this, actually. For one, it was an affair that led to a broken marriage. Their spouse had the affair and it broke the marriage.

It turned their life upside down to the point where they were overwhelmed. And yet they clung to Christ and prayed to God. It was by no means easy, yet they can testify to how God kept his promise to preserve them in the faith and bring them through the hardship.

For another, a couple of guys, actually, that I know at our church, it was the loss of a job. For others that I know of, it was the news of cancer. And on it goes.

Despite the overwhelming odds, they all felt they trusted God's promises to preserve them and bring them and provide for them. For God has the power to deliver his promises despite the odds.

[29 : 48] And when we feel like we're outnumbered by the world with its growing superpower of secularism, then we need not worry. Because God's power is greater.

He's already defeated the biggest superpower of sin. And so secularism is a piece of cake. Sure, it doesn't mean life will be easy in this world and in fact, it could well get worse.

In fact, the rise of secularism against Christianity has grown so much that just last month, the issue was raised for the very first time in the European Parliament. And so on the next slide, it's even got a new name now, Christianophobia.

It's a new thing now where people fear Christian beliefs and oppose them. Now, while this Christianophobia is real and shocking, there's no need to worry.

For God has greater power to deliver his promises. Like that he will build his church despite the odds. That he will bring us to the new creation where we will rule the world with Christ.

[30 : 53] And if we need not worry about God's promises despite the odds, then we need not compromise on God's word despite the pressure of secularism as other churches have done.

Indeed, we must not compromise. Instead, we can have confidence in God's word and speak it faithfully in love. For God's power means his word will not return to him empty.

Indeed, the gospel word is his power to save. So we ought to praise God and boast in the gospel word that has saved us. And we ought to have such confidence in it that we'll do everything we can to see it proclaimed.

Let me finish with this true story. I remember being at an old church of mine and there was a husband in the congregation that day who was a self-confessed hardened atheist. He'd just come along that Sunday with his wife to church to support her. But it happened to be the Sunday when the minister gave the most rambling sermon I have ever heard. [31 : 55] Now, I know you're thinking my sermon's going on for a while, but this was ridiculous. Other people thought the same thing. But he did mention the gospel and how Jesus died to pay for our sins.

And at the end of the sermon, this hardened atheist got up in front of everyone while everyone said he just stood up in the middle of the congregation right in the middle, right where about David Vinicum is, right there.

He just got up. You're already a Christian. You don't have to do this, David. He got up in front of everyone and he said, today what you've said has really touched me and I want to commit my life to Christ now. True story.

Do you know what my first thought was? I thought, how did that happen from this sermon? What's going on? Well, what's going on is God's power is not in the minister.

It's in the gospel. And so despite the odds or the overwhelming pressure of secularism, we can and are to trust in God's promises and his gospel word for he is more powerful to deliver.