

'A New Generation'

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[0 : 00] As you know, our nation, like many nations, is made up of different generations. And I'm not sure if you know which generation you belong to, according to all the gurus, but it's a bit hard to tell, so let me read it up before you.

So those born before 1964 will either be part of the builders or the boomers. And they are characterised by those who still read newspapers.

Is that true for the boomers? Yes, yes, there you go. In fact, at 7.45 last week, I heard two of them discussing when the newspapers arrived, and one was not happy that it took all Sunday to arrive. And they tend to own their own home as well. Gen Xers are born between 65 and 79. That's me. And we are characterised as the forgotten generation.

Because apparently, there's nothing interesting about my generation. But that's what it is. Gen Y are those born 1980 to 1994.

[1 : 08] And they're also known as millennials, because it was just before the millennium. That's what they grew up in. And apparently, they are characterised as those who think they're cool. Apparently, they thought they were the cool generation.

And then there's Gen Z, born from 95 to 2009. And they are addicted to social media. They're the ones that walk around like this with their phones. Okay?

The point is, each generation has its own characteristics. And as time progresses, a nation transitions from one generation being dominant to the next.

And that's what we start to see in our chapter today. You see, the last 20 chapters of Numbers, the focus has been on the first generation of Israel, rather than directly north into the promised land, like last time.

Perhaps to try and give some time for God to change his mind about not letting him into the land. Or perhaps because they hadn't fully completed their 40 years of wandering.

[2 : 09] With only up to 38 years. Either way, Moses didn't seem to consult God and was denied entry into Edom. But God did tell him to stop at Mount Hor.

Which on your maps is towards what? It's the bottom left-hand corner of the screen in the wilderness of Zin. And you might remember that Aaron died there. And that's where we left Israel last week.

But it seems as they started travelling from Kadesh to Mount Hor, or perhaps a bit further on, news reached the Canaanite king in Arad. Which on the screen is right at the top, almost in the middle. Who heard about them, comes and attacks them, and captured some of them this week. And this is a bit like *deja vu*, because when Gen D, the first generation D for disbelief, when they disbelieved God and refused to enter the land 40 years ago, they remember they disobeyed God and tried to enter without God.

And so we read back in chapter 14, that the Canaanite, how genuine the prayer was. Like Hannah, who prayed fervently for a son, Samuel, and gave a vow that if God answered her prayer, she would give her son to God's work at the temple.

[3 : 30] And so here, this is not Israel bargaining with God to try and twist his arm, but vowing to God in genuine prayer. And such prayer shows a new dependence on God.

And for the first time in the whole book, they win. In fact, God gives them victory over the Canaanites, the very same people at the very same place of former, did you notice?

Here is something new. In fact, our writer starts and ends this chapter with victories, to highlight that this is really something new in Israel's history.

And it marks a new generation, Gen B, who believe. For faith depends on God for victory to bring them to their promised land.

And in terms of application for us, then we too are to depend on God in prayer, whenever we face obstacles in life. It's like that kid's wristband.

[4 : 33] I don't know if you've seen this on kids. It's been around for a while now, all over again. But actually, no, it's not. There's something new and different with this new generation, B.

So pick it up in verse 2 and 3. Then Israel, rather than fleeing, made this vow to the Lord. If you would deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities. The Lord listened to Israel's plea and gave the Canaanites over to them.

They completely destroyed them and their towns, so the place was named Horma. Horma. Now, verse 2, it might sound like they're trying to make a bargain with God.

If you do this, we'll do that. But for that to work, they would have to hold up their end of the bargain by destroying all the towns completely first before God would hold up his end and give them victory. But how does that work? It can't work. You need to have victory first before you totally destroy, right? And so this is actually not a bargain. Rather, verse 2 calls it a vow, which is often accompanied with a prayer.

[5 : 40] And verse 3 talks about God hearing their plea or prayer. And so in the Old Testament, a vow would show how genuine the prayer was. Like Hannah, who prayed fervently for a son, Samuel, and gave a vow that if God answered her prayer, she would give her son to God's work at the temple.

And so here, this is not Israel bargaining with God to try and twist his arm, but vowing to God in genuine prayer. And such prayer shows a new dependence on God.

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[6 : 55] And in terms of application for us, then, we too are to depend on God in prayer whenever we face obstacles in life. It's like that kid's wristband.

I don't know if you've seen this on kids. It's been around for a while now. There's a wristband, and it has FROG on it. And FROG stands for Fully Rely on God.

But God doesn't want us, actually, to be self-sufficient. He wants us to be God-sufficient, to keep coming to him and depending on him in prayer for victory, not always to remove our obstacles, but to persevere through our obstacles.

After all, Israel still had to fight the Canaanites, didn't they? But there's another type of application here, and not so much in terms of what we are to do, but what we are to remember when it comes to reading about Israel totally destroying them because it sounds rather harsh to us, doesn't it? Even our world points to it and says, see, how can God be loving if he commends this kind of destruction? But we need to remember three things.

[8 : 08] First, this destruction was not normal. Rather, it was limited to a particular time and place, to those living in the Promised Land at the time, like the Canaanites and Amorites.

For other nations, we read in Deuteronomy 10, when you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. So they were always to try and seek peace for those nations far away, but for those nearby in the land, it was a different story.

Why? Well, the second thing we need to remember is it was God's just judgment on those nations living in the land. You see, they had been doing great evil, like sacrificing their own children, which is evil, right?

I mean, think of the outrage that's happened up in the Northern Territory. And yet, God had given them hundreds of years to stop. Back in Genesis chapter 15, he told Abraham that his descendants of Israel would end up in Egypt for 400 years, where they'd grow in number, yes, but end up as slaves oppressed.

Then in the fourth generation, 400 years later, they would come back to this land that he promised him. And the reason? Because the sin of the Amorites, Amorites, he was shorthand for all the other ites in the land, has not reached its full measure.

[9 : 34] You see, God gave these people in the land 400 years to repent, but they didn't. And now their evil has reached its full measure. It's time for a just equivalent judgment.

And third, God had to wipe them out completely so that their evil would not continue to infect other people, including God's own people. But the point here is that we see a new dependence on God, which marks a new generation, Gen B, who believe.

For faith depends on God in prayer to give us victory and bring us through life's obstacles to our promised land. Next, though, we see a new repentance towards God.

So point to verse 4 and 5. They travelled to go around Edom, and then they spoke, verse 5, against God and against Moses, grumbling about why they've brought them out of Egypt and there's no bread, no water, and they detest this miserable food.

I love how Joy read it. Well done, Joy. Now remember, they can't pass through Edom. Edom's in the green there, and so they take the very long way around.

[10:49] And at some point on that journey, they start to grumble against God. It seems that this new generation still had some traits of the old generation.

In fact, there's some of the older, the first generation still around at this point. And so, verse 6, God sends snakes as a judgment. But in verse 7, there is a new repentance.

The people came to Moses and said, we have sinned. And when we spoke against the Lord and against you, pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. And Moses does.

Now this is a new repentance because it actually is accompanied by a confession. You see, Moses had prayed for the people before, but almost always without the people confessing their sin.

In fact, the only time that people say they sinned was back in chapter 14 when they sinned about not going into the land, and they immediately disobey.

[11:55] And so, do you really think that confession of sin was heartfelt if they immediately disobeyed? Of course not. Whereas here, with Generation B, they really do repent.

They say we sinned, and then rather than disobeying, they asked Moses to start praying. And he does. And so, verse 8 to 9, the Lord said to Moses, make a snake, put it on a pole.

Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. And so, Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Then when anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at this bronze snake, they live.

And here God makes a way for people to be forgiven and live if they believe God's means of forgiveness by looking to that bronze snake here.

And verse 9 assumes some people did, for we're told they lived. And so, they must have believed in God's means of forgiveness by looking to that pole and snake.

[12:56] And so, this marks a new generation, Gen B, who believe, you see. For faith really repents with a heartfelt confession and trusting in God's means for forgiveness.

But what's with snakes? I mean, I don't really like snakes. Do you? In fact, I prefer spiders to snakes, I think. So, was God just thinking, oh, what punishment haven't I given them yet?

Oh, no, snakes. Or was it because there was plenty in the desert? And why put a snake on a pole too? What is it with snakes? Well, snakes, you see, were a symbol of Egyptian power that opposed God back in Egypt.

It's why pharaohs often have a snake on their headdress. And as slaves to that power back in Egypt, Israel were oppressed and given over to death.

And so, when this new generation complained about leaving Egypt, in Egypt, God chose a punishment to remind them of what it was like living under that oppressive power of Egypt.

[14:04] It caused their death. But God also chose to put a snake on a pole, not just for a practical reason that people could look at it and live from far away. I mean, after all, Moses had the antidote, the venom antidote, in his tent on the other side of the camp and someone was bitten over here, they might not make it across in time, mightn't they?

But this way, they can just look at the pole in the distance and live. But it also showed them that God had defeated Egypt's power. You know, put the snake, a symbol of Egypt's power, on a pole, and actually, it can now bring life because of God.

And it's no accident that the power that, the power that oppresses God in the world, you know, the devil, Satan, is also referred to as a snake, a serpent.

And Satan's two big powers are to lie to us in order to tempt us or accuse us of deserving eternal death in hell as punishment for our sins.

And on that second one, he's right. We do deserve that. But God gives us the means of forgiveness so that we can live and have eternal life with him instead. And of course, God's means of forgiveness is the death of his son, not on a pole, but on a cross.

[15:21] For the cross, Jesus defeated Satan's power to accuse us by taking the punishment for us so that we can be forgiven and counted free from accusation for life eternal with him.

Satan can no longer say, Andrew, you have to pay for your sins because Jesus has already paid them for me. and so he can no longer accuse me.

And all who look or trust to God's means of forgiveness, not a snake on a pole, but Jesus on the cross, can also be forgiven and given life eternal with him.

It's what we heard in our second reading, isn't it? Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up on the cross that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Excuse me. And so can I ask at this point then, do you believe in Jesus? Are you part of Gen B who believe? Those who really repent with a heartfelt confession and then trusting in God's means of forgiveness, Jesus.

[16:29] And for us who already do, then, well, like Gen B, we still sin, don't we? We still grumble, actually. And so we too are to keep repenting with a heartfelt confession.

continuing to look to Jesus for our forgiveness. And so when we say a confession later on in the service, why not reflect on the words as you're saying them and make sure you're saying them with a heartfelt confession rather than just going through the motion?

Well, this new repentance is another mark of a new generation, Gen B, who believe. But the next mark is their confidence or conviction in God's guidance and provision.

So point three, verse 10 and following. Now, I'm not going to read through all these names. I'm going to mispronounce them. I thought I'd take pity on joy and stop the reading just before I got to all these names.

But all these names listed in quick succession, it gives us the impression that there's some real forward momentum towards the promised land. Unlike the earlier generation with its 40 years of meandering and wandering, something new is happening, you see.

[17:49] In fact, in verse 20, they've pretty much arrived. Verse 20 mentions that they arrived at the valley of Moab, which is a stone's throw from the plains of Moab from where they enter the promised land.

They've arrived. And the writer summarizes this journey here to give us the impression that it's a foregone conclusion. God really, really will bring them into the land.

But here's the thing. All these place names don't mean much to us, do they? I mean, it's usually at this point we switch off, don't we? We know where some places are, but no one knows exactly where they all are.

And that's the point. Neither did Israel. I mean, they'd spent the last 400 years in Egypt. How do they know where all these places are? They don't know where Oboth is or Zahab Safar in verse 14. I have no idea if that's how you pronounce it. And yet, they followed God's guiding from one place to the next, to the next, to the next, without knowing exactly where they were going.

[18:53] You see, here is a new conviction in God's guiding and in God's providing. because the writer does pause briefly on two place names to highlight this conviction of God's provision, I think.

At first, in verse 13, the writer pauses on Anon, which is actually the river Anon. I've got an arrow pointing to it. It's just the above, it makes the border north of Moab in the blue and then the Amorites in yellow, along with the Canaanites that's all the promised land in yellow.

Now, Amorites are not to be confused with Amonites, just in the top right-hand corner. I hope I haven't just confused you, actually. But by pausing here on the river Anon, it leads the writer to reference a book in verse 14.

That is why the book of the wars of the Lord says about the Anon River. In other words, this book is a record of all the wars God won for his people.

But why talk about it here on their journey? Why not mention it at the end of the wars? Especially since the battles that follow in verse 21 to 35 actually happened at this point in history, at verse 13 and 14, where they crossed the border from Moab into the Amorite territory.

[20:17] Now, it's a bit hard to work out, but it seems like he inserts this reference here to the book of God's victory to drop a hint about all the wars that God has and will win.

And he seems to do that to show Israel's confidence in God providing victory. It's as though he drops it in along their journey to suggest that, you know, God will win all these battles for them.

After all, you don't drop a hint about all the wars that God has won if you think he's going to then lose all the wars that follow, do you? Rather, you talk about the wars he's won to indicate your confidence he'll keep winning.

Either way, they certainly show their conviction in God's provision in terms of water in verse 16, where the writer pauses on another place name. Now, I know it's spelt beer and perhaps some people would love a well of beer, but it's pronounced beer and means well.

And in verse 17 to 18, the Israelites sing in celebration. Now, again, it's hard to know exactly what the song is about, but it seems to be about a well that had been dug by princes and nobles in the past, but has since dried up.

[21 : 39] And so God tells them to gather around where he'll provide water for them by making the well well up. Again. They're so convinced that he will do this that instead of grumbling about no water like last week and earlier this week, they start singing.

And it's not so much singing praises to God for his provision, but it's singing to the well, confident it will spring up because they're convinced that God will provide you.

See, to verse 7, they sing, spring up, oh well, because they're confident that God will make it spring up. And so here is a new conviction in God, another mark of this new generation, Gen B, who believe.

For faith is confident in God's guidance and provision for our journey. And I wonder if we have the same sort of conviction. As I said last week, we are on a journey through the wilderness of this world to our promised land, which is heaven and then the world to come.

And so do we have this kind of confidence confidence in God's guidance and provision for our journey? Firstly, in terms of guidance because sometimes it can feel like life is just going around in circles, can't it?

[22 : 57] You know, one day is the same as the next or our life hasn't gone in the direction that we hoped it would or the direction God wants for us in his word is so different to the direction of the world around us.

All of it can lead us to doubt God's guidance. But faith means being convinced God will guide us rightly by his word, even if it goes against our culture or is hard to understand sometimes.

And faith means being convinced God has a plan for us and will work good in us to make us more like Jesus, even when we don't understand why this or that is happening to us.

In fact, it's often not until we look back after a number of years and see a bit bigger picture that we can see God working and guiding us for our good.

Isn't that the way it works? But faith means being convinced firstly of God's guidance on our journey and secondly of God's provision for the journey such that we don't let worry consume us.

[24 : 04] As Jesus himself said in Matthew chapter 6, you know, do not worry about what to eat or drink. God knows what the things that we need but rather verse 33, seek first his kingdom and all these things will be given to you as well.

I remember talking to a guy from St. John's with a young family and he was made redundant just before Christmas last year. Merry Christmas. And while it wasn't always easy, he didn't actually let worry consume him.

He kept trusting in God, God's provision as he kept looking for a new job. In fact, he even rejoiced that it gave him a bit more time with his family and to serve at church.

And just before they ran out of money, God did provide a job for him recently in a completely different field but one he's actually really loving. The point is this new conviction in God is another mark of a new generation, Gen B, who believe.

For faith is convinced in God's guidance and provision for the journey to our promised land. And this conviction continues in terms of God then giving victory.

[25 : 14] Point four. The outline is slightly wrong at point four. It should be a new conviction continued. But we're running out of time, so let me very briefly summarize. I'll go pretty quickly.

Verse 21, Israel asks permission to pass through the Amorite territory, but King Sion says no. So verse 23, he gets his whole army to attack like Edom did last week.

Only this week, Israel does not flee, but fights. Here is a new conviction in God's provision for victory, isn't it? They don't flee, but they fight.

And God does give them victory, because in verse 24, we're told Israel put them to the sword and took possession and captured all their cities, including the great city of Heshbon, where King Sion

ruled.

It was a huge win. It made the papers, or in their equivalent, the poets, in verse 27 to 30. But God not only gives them victory, he begins to give them the land, which we see in verse 31.

[26 : 15] So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites. You see, the promised land included that bit above Moab, which is given to the tribe of Reuben in pink.

And it actually included even more further north, where you can see the purple beginning. And so in verse 33, they turn north and go up the road towards Bashan.

And Og, King of Bashan, Og, you're going to love that name. Sounds like such a fighting man's name. Anyway, Og of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them.

And then we read God saying to Moses, 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 Israel does. They do not fear, but they trust. Here is their new conviction in God, continued, a new conviction that God will provide victory.

[27 : 18] And again, not just victory, but part of the promised land. Because they end up taking possession of this land and beginning to enjoy life in part of their promised land.

Which shows us not just the faith of this new generation, but God's faithfulness to them. He's keeping their promise, isn't he? It's already begun. And that would only increase their conviction that God will continue to provide victory for them because they're going to have a lot more battles to come later.

And it's the same for us. We're to continue to have conviction that God will give us victory over the things that might stop us from getting to our promised land. Indeed, God has even begun to keep his promise to us.

that we might have an increased conviction. For through Jesus, God has already begun to keep his promise of eternal life. For whoever believes in Jesus has begun spiritual eternal life.

Remember John 3.16? For God so loved that he gave his one and only, so that whoever believes in him will not but have. You know it.

[28 : 25] You do. And so we who believe have actually begun our eternal life spiritually. Our souls will not perish but live on even through death, you see.

And we can begin to enjoy that spiritual eternal life with God as his children now. And so this should only increase our conviction that God will give us victory over the things that might cause us to stop believing and so stop us getting to our promised land.

Let me end with Romans 8.31 where Paul expresses this. He says, What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, he's already done the hard thing, then how will he not also along with Jesus graciously give us all things, that is all things we need to make it to our promised land.

And so who shall separate us from the love of Christ, shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword or the Canaanites or the Amorites? No. In all these things we are more than conquerors, not through ourselves, but through him who loves us.

[29 : 34] This is a new generation today and we see their faith, faith that depends on God for victory in prayer, faith that repents towards God with a heartfelt confession, trusting in Jesus, and faith that is convinced in God's guidance and provision for the journey to our promised land.

Indeed, it's convinced God will bring us home. And so whether we're boomers, builders, Gen Y, Gen X, Gen Z, let's make sure we're part of Gen B who believe and express our faith like that. who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the who have the