

Able and Willing

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[0 : 00] Well, please be seated and you may like to turn to Deuteronomy chapters 1 to 3. And I'll pray before we start.

God, our Father, speak to us from your word tonight. Write it on our hearts so that we may believe it and obey it for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, imagine that you are Duncan Fletcher. A fairly unenviable job. And for those who don't know, Duncan Fletcher is the coach of the English cricket team.

They are soundly trounced 4-0. Admittedly, the game at the moment is sort of in the balance, I suppose. Defeat after defeat. No victory, I think, on their whole tour against any opposition.

And they lost a sequence of test matches and one-day games before they came to Australia.

They're undoubtedly playing the best and strongest team in the world, notwithstanding that they're largely geriatric.

[1 : 11] So what do you say to them at 10am yesterday morning before the final test? I mean, in a sense, you could almost say, well, what's the point?

We've lost. We might as well just go home. Let's abandon it. Let's not put ourselves through more misery and shame. What does he say to them? You can do it. Believe in yourselves.

Play for pride. Look back to 2005 and how we trounced the Aussies then. Well, by two runs in one test. Typical of motivational addresses is the issue of self-belief.

Believe in yourself. Believe in your ability. Believe that you can win. Believe that you're good enough, strong enough, great enough, skilled enough, etc.

And whether it's Duncan Fletcher or football coaches or whether it's parents for their children at VCE exam time, whether it's the bosses to the employees at a sales pitch launch or something like that, believe in yourself is a very common heart of motivational address.

[2 : 21] And there are Christian books full of the same sort of stuff. And you can find them at any of those large Christian bookshops that haunt the eastern suburbs. And it's there in famous Christian preaching and speaking as well.

So I have been given a calendar with quotes from Robert Shuler of the Crystal Cathedral fame.

Now, not that I want to put everything down by him, but basically his whole heart of ministry is the power of positive thinking from what I can gather. That is, believe in yourself, dream your dreams, lift your sights and fulfill it all.

If ever there was needed a time for a pep talk or a motivational address, Israel on the banks of the Jordan River, in effect, is it.

Israel faces the promised land over the river. Long awaited. They've spent 40 years in the wilderness since leaving Egypt under the mighty hand of God demonstrated in the plagues and the exodus through the Red Sea in the leadership of Moses.

[3 : 35] They've come now to the north end of the Dead Sea. They're in the land of Moab and they're looking across to what is the town of Jericho and beyond that up in the hills on a clear day today, you can just see Jerusalem.

But the odds are stacked against Israel. They face a couple of big problems. We could call it their worn and their McGrath in a way.

That is, they know that in the land, the towns are walled and the armies are strong indeed, including giants. You can see that in chapter 1, verse 28, in their expression of fear about going into the land. In that verse, they say, Our kindred have made our hearts melt by reporting the people are stronger and taller than we.

The cities are large and fortified up to heaven. We actually saw they're the offspring of the Anakim, a people reputed to be giants. Their third big problem, which is not especially expressed here in

their words of fear, it's sort of their Langer problem, we might say, the third of the three big problems, is that Moses is about to die.

[4 : 55] They know that. Moses knows that. And so their great captain, so to speak, for many years will not be leading them across to the promised land. And whilst Joshua comes with high credentials, he's not Moses.

And so on the edge of the promised land, after such a long period in the wilderness, the change of leadership, change of land is about to occur. There are enemies in the land whom they know who are strong and fortified, what's their pep talk going to be?

What's Moses going to say that will inspire them and motivate them to go into the land? You can do it. Believe in yourselves. Think positively. Dream your dreams. Let's fulfill them. Look back to your past victories, the equivalent of your 2005.

Well, there actually is an element of that. But the rest of it Moses can't say and doesn't say. He doesn't say, you know, look inside you and think positively.

He doesn't say, you can do it, you're good enough, skilled enough, big enough, strong enough, or whatever. None of that. In fact, their track record is abysmal. It's as bad as England's, one might say, more or less, although there are a couple of victories, actually, that we will see.

[6 : 11] But Moses doesn't ignore the defeats either. So he doesn't sort of give a potted history that just picks on their positive things, their victories, and overlook or ignore the defeats.

But actually, he brings their defeats to the fore, which is an odd way of motivating and inspiring a people of God. Israel is on the threshold for the second time.

Not that they've been in this exact geographical place before, but they've been in this strategic or theological place before. That is, they've been on the border of the Promised Land. 38 years before, they came to the town of Kadesh on the southern border, the desert border of ancient Israel.

I'm sorry I don't have a map. It was one of my dreams if I got organized enough tonight, I would have a map, but I didn't, so I haven't. But they had come to that southern border 38 years before.

It's recorded in the Book of Numbers. Moses reminds them about it again here in Chapter 1. But there they failed to conquer the land and ended up then condemned for the rest of 40 years to be in the wilderness.

[7 : 21] And now they've come again to the border, different border, around the corner, up in the east and southern part of the border. And now they're on the threshold again.

Moses doesn't shy away from reminding them of their past failure. I find that personally quite striking. Chapter 1, verses 19 to the end, a significant passage really, and a significant length of passage, deals in all the gory detail really with their failure, and their failure compounded with further failure as well.

Now I'm not going to unpack this passage in detail tonight because I did preach from those verses, 1, 19 to the end, on Sunday night just gone. But let me just recapitulate the key things of that second half of Chapter 1.

Despite God's promise of giving them the land, despite Moses repeating that promise and reassuring them of it, for example, you see that in verses 20 and 21, you've reached the hill country of the Amorites, that is, you've come to the border, which the Lord our God is giving us, see the Lord your God has given the land to you, go up, take possession as the Lord, the God of your ancestors has promised you, do not fear or be dismayed.

Despite the promise, and Moses there reiterating the promise and encouraging them to act upon it, they chicken out. And so they asked for spies in verse 22, let us send men ahead of us to explore the land.

[8 : 58] And as I commented on Sunday night, God is the one who promises to go ahead of his people. And so when they ask for spies, even though at one level we might put a positive spin and say, yes, there could be some godly caution here.

In fact, the reality is, this is a shunning of God's leadership and wanting humans to go ahead of them, to spy out the land. And they chicken out. The spies come back, and in verse 25, they say, it is a good land that the Lord our God is giving us, as if there was any doubt.

And despite the spies' positive report, verse 26 says, but you were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God.

So despite the promise, despite the reiteration of promise by Moses, despite the spies' words of affirmation about the goodness of the land, and the fact that the Lord our God is giving it to us, they

don't go in.

They rebel. They're unwilling. Verse 27, they grumble. As a result of that, they ascribe to God wrong motives. They say God's actually hating us, not loving us.

[10:09] And then later on in verse 31, it says in a sense of their same rejection or rebellion, sorry, verse 32, you have no trust in the Lord your God.

Their lack of trust and their rebellion is expressed in those words of verse 28 that I read just before. That is, there are in the land fortified cities and giants, even like the Anarchy, reputedly big, tall giants.

That is, they're in a sense saying, we're too afraid to go in because of the Warren, McGrath, Langer, and all the rest of the team type stuff that is our opposition. They're strong. They're formidable. They're the best.

How on earth are we going to match up against them? Their mistake on the one hand is disobedience. They haven't obeyed the command, verse 27 said, verse 26 said.

At the same level on the other side of the same coin is, they haven't trusted God. That's what verse 32 said. Trust and obey are the flip sides of the same coin. If you disobey God, then you're not trusting him.

[11:16] If you're not trusting him, then you're disobeying him. And the two go together. They live together. And we see that all through the scriptures. What God wants from us is faithful obedience.

As Paul says at the beginning of Romans, the obedience of faith, trusting and obeying, repenting and believing. It's all part of the same integrated package.

Well, now Israel's back at the border again. Moses is addressing them, and he's reminded them of that past history and past failure. Look back at your failure.

It's hardly going to excite you for conquering the land. That's the context for Deuteronomy, the whole book, in fact. The whole book actually is a sermon that Moses preaches to the people on the edge of the land to exhort them to go in faithfully and obediently to conquer it and live in it.

And the aim of Deuteronomy is that the future will be different from how it had been 38 years before, where they failed to conquer the land and were condemned to the wilderness for 40 years.

[12:25] But Moses' motivation is not a you can do it. It's not a power of positive thinking at all. It's something far more profound and far more truthful than that.

Well, let's go back to the beginning of the book. I've tried to sort of whet your appetite for the issues. The opening paragraph, in effect, tells us all that we need to know about the context of the book.

It tells us who the speaker is. Verse 1, these are the words that Moses spoke. And that's mentioned again in verse 3 and verse 5 as well, that Moses is the speaker of the book.

And if you were to highlight in a color all the words that Moses actually spoke in this book, to the end of chapter 30, there's hardly anything that he didn't. It is almost all quoted speech of Moses, to that point at least.

The audience is all Israel, as verse 1 makes clear, also verse 3 as well. And, yeah, verse 3. The place, it's across the Jordan.

[13:29] Beyond the Jordan, it's described in verse 1. So, even though Moses writes down the words of this book, and he does so on the east side of the Jordan, he does so with the perspective of being in the land, looking back across the land, beyond the Jordan, is how Israel has typically described trans-Jordan, or the kingdom of Jordan even today.

The time is significant. Verse 2 tells us that, by the way of Mount Seir, which is further south in Edom in the desert, it takes 11 days to reach Kadesh Barnea from Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai.

11 days. And they got to Mount Sinai about six weeks after leaving Egypt, and admittedly, they were there for the rest of that first year, more or less. But, verse 3 tells us, in the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses spoke.

The juxtaposition of those two time things, 11 days journey, but it's the 40th year, is again a little sort of discordant note that just makes us alert from the very beginning.

Israel hasn't got there in the time that it should have taken. They're on the border, but it's taken them 40 years, whereas it should have, in a sense, taken them a few days. And, of course, we know why.

[14:52] The previous book, Numbers, tells us why. Because of their failure at Kadesh Barnea, at the border. And then, finally, these opening verses tell us what the purpose of the book is.

Verse 5. Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound this law as follows. That is, he's not just giving them the law so that they know it.

They already know it. It's there in Exodus and Leviticus, in particular. He's expounding the law. And if I can summarize that in a couple of brief expressions, Exodus and Leviticus have the job, in effect, of saying, this is the law.

Deuteronomy is in the context of, do it. That is, Deuteronomy is preaching the law to do it, obey it, whereas the previous two books are more in the sense of, this is what the law is, this is what you have to do.

It's telling us the law. Now it's preaching the law in Deuteronomy. It's preaching it to the next generation who came out from Egypt. It's preaching it, therefore, to those who were children at the time of the Exodus, up to the age of 20, and to those who've been born in the 40 years since the departure from Egypt.

[16:05] So by and large, maybe with the exceptions of Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, they are all under the age of 60 at this time. It's a book of exhortation and encouragement because ahead of them is a new land, a new life, and a new leader.

But it's the same God and the same law. That's a very important theme, which we'll pick up in future weeks. It's the same law. It's not a new law.

It's not a new way of life. The actual name Deuteronomy comes from the Greek, which means the second law, Deuterios Nomos. But that actually came down through a Latin translation.

Wrongly, for repeated law, they use the expression second law. But it's actually repeated law. It's the same law. It's not a second as in the different law that we're being given here. And also, by way of just clarification, the idea of law in the Old Testament is not so much a list of legislation as we might think of law being lots of fine print and conditions do this, don't do this.

Law in the Old Testament and in Jewish concept has got a sort of more lively idea. And so the Jewish word law or Torah probably has a better sense of translation as the way of living or the way of life.

[17:28] And so when the Hebrews or the Old Testament refer to the Torah, they actually refer to narrative stories as well as to legislative passages because they learn the law through both the legislation as well as the narrative.

Deuteronomy itself, the whole book, is part of the Torah, even though much of it is actually narrative, narrative, poetry, and so on. Deuteronomy knows that Israel's failure was a failure of trust and obedience, as I've already pointed out from chapter 1, verses 26 and 32 in particular.

How is it going to correct that? Not by saying you can do it, think positively, think within yourself, have your dreams and fulfill them. Deuteronomy, like the whole Bible, knows that we're sinners, that we're prone to sin, that our fallen nature means that we inevitably sin, and it's not a simple matter of summoning up human reserves and strength in order to become perfect.

For you and I know very well that with all the resolve and the will in the world, we wake up tomorrow morning determined to live a perfect day. But as our head hits the pillow the next night, if we're honest, we know that we've failed to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and our neighbours, ourselves, at least somewhere in that day.

You see, our wills are weak. We don't have it within ourselves. All the positive thinking in the world is not going to make me perfect tomorrow, and it's not going to make ancient Israel perfect here.

[19:03] The Bible knows that what is needed is God's word in the heart, bearing fruit in the life. This earth, still not perfect, but that's how progression towards perfection that we'll enjoy in heaven is to happen.

From within, from God's word within. We'll see ways in which Deuteronomy shows us that expectation in this book, but it's a theme that's consistent through the New Testament as well. Certainly don't polarise Old and New Testaments as though the Old is only on about law that's do this and don't do this, and the New Testament's about the change of the heart. It's all there in the Old Testament by way of expectation, but the heart is not changed until the death and resurrection of Christ and the giving of his spirit.

To those events, Deuteronomy looks very much forward. So when verse 5 of chapter 1 says Moses undertook to expound this law, the sense is to place it within almost, to inculcate the law.

We might even say to engrave it in people's lives. So keep that in mind because what Moses does in these three chapters that we'll look at tonight and beyond is seek to apply God's word into the lives of this new generation of Israelites.

[20 : 26] Well, let's move on a little bit and see how Moses does that. I think it might have been Henry Ford who said that the only thing that you learn from history is that you learn nothing from history.

History's never written simply for our information. History is always written to express a point of view, sometimes to correct, to encourage, to rebuke, to guide in a particular way.

And whether it's a modern biography of a famous person or a modern book of history about some particular aspect of historical life, it's true. It's not simply there to tell us facts and figures.

History expresses points of view. It does that by its selectivity, by its weighing up of the pros and cons of the people or the events and so on. It's the same in the Bible.

I don't mean to imply by that that history is therefore totally biased and unreliable, not at all. But all history, whether modern, ancient, secular or biblical, is written for some particular view to be expressed in effect.

[21 : 38] And so here in Deuteronomy 1 to 3. Much of these chapters is history. It's recording events that have happened in the near past for the generation listening to Moses.

It's not there for their knowledge or their information for they know pretty much all that history already. But rather it's history that is selective. It doesn't tell us everything. It selects key things, including Israel's failure.

It selects it for a particular purpose, to encourage, exhort Israel to cross the Jordan River to conquer the land and to inhabit the land. Given the failure of the past, a failure of trust and obedience, this history seeks to correct that issue.

The issue in particular is an issue of trust because if trust is built, then obedience will flow. And so I want to show you in four sections how Moses uses history to increase his audience's trust in God so that they don't make the same mistake that their parents did at Kadesh Barnea.

So let's look at chapter 1 verses 6 to 18 briefly. In verses 6 to 8, we begin in effect the sermon of the book. Moses reminds the people of what God said when it was time to move from Mount Sinai.

[23 : 02] Numbers chapter 10 is in effect when Israel moved from Sinai. They got there in Exodus 19. They were there for the rest of Exodus, all of Leviticus and numbers up to chapter 10. You have stayed long enough at this mountain, Mount Sinai, or Horeb as it's called in Deuteronomy.

Resume your journey and go into the hill country of the Amorites as well as into the neighboring regions, the Aravar, the hill country, Shephel, Negev, the sea coast, the land of the Canaanites and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.

That's an extensive piece of land. And it's described in geographical terms. The first string of terms refers to the north-south strips of the land of Israel, the Aravar, the low desert, the rift valley that runs down the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth.

And then the high mountains that run north-south next to it and then the Shephelah, the low hills that are beyond that like the Dandenongs and then the flat sea coast where Tel Aviv and up the Mediterranean coast is today.

And then it adds in the desert at the south and the north of the Lebanon up to Euphrates in what is Syria today. See, I've set the land before you. Go in and take possession of the land.

[24 : 11] But notice the last words of verse 8. This is very common in Deuteronomy. Moses doesn't just say go in and take possession of the land. It's a particular land, not just geographically but theologically.

It's a land that I, that is God, swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them.

It is the land of promise and Moses seems to use every opportunity in the book of Deuteronomy to remind his audience that it is the land which God swore to give to you, which God promised to give you, which he promised to give you as an inheritance.

At one level we might get a bit tired of it. At another level we'd say that it's rhetoric, which it is in a positive sense, to remind and remind and remind the audience this is a given land, a promised land, a land in fact sworn on oath which is sort of doubly promised in effect by God to ancient Israel.

So what Moses is doing in those little verses here is to highlight the land is promised sworn indeed by promise by God for Israel. The description of the land in verse 7 is very similar to the description of the land in Genesis 15.

[25 : 41] I'm sure that's deliberate. I'm sure it echoes the reaffirmation of promise to Abram in Genesis 15 when Abram was doubting God fulfilling the promises of descendants and land.

And then Moses goes on in verse 9 at that time I said to you I'm unable by myself to bear you. The Lord your God has multiplied you so that today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven. Now if you know your Bible well you ought to know where that expression comes from. you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Genesis 15. For in the early part of Genesis 15 when Abram is doubting the promise of descendants God takes him out and says look up at the night sky count the stars if you can as numerous as they are will be your descendants.

Moses is saying that Israel today at that point is as numerous as the stars of heaven. You see Moses is implying that part of the promise to Abram we can tick it off.

[26 : 47] God's kept it. The Israelites beyond the Jordan River under the leadership of Moses in the plains of Moab has fulfilled in its number or God has fulfilled by their number that part of the promise to Abraham.

The implication is if God promises a package to Abraham descendants and land blessing as well but let's leave that out of the equation for now if he's done part of it descendants you can be sure that he will fulfill the next part of it as well and so the connection that's here draws us back to Genesis 15 the description of the land in verse 7 the stars in the sky in verse 10 and in that chapter 2 the two parts of the package are brought together as Abraham is doubting the promise so what Moses is preaching here is to encourage his audience to see God has kept one bit of his promise to Abraham we can be sure he's going to keep the promise of land as well and what an encouragement that is for the people of God as they're poised on the land indeed the rest of that paragraph verses 10 to 18 which looks in one sense to change topics and talks about all those people that were appointed to help

Moses judge and lead is really in a sense giving the evidence that they are as numerous as the stars in the sky we can tell that we're so numerous because I've needed all these other people to appoint as officials and judges under me well the second section is the rest of chapter 1 verses 19 to 46 which I'll touch on very briefly I've already discussed the aspect of Israel's failure in these verses and I won't come back to that but the other key part of these verses is at the end of all of Israel's failure at Kadesh Barnea the promise of God still stands their sin in not going into the land 38 years before has not cancelled out or annulled the promise of God for the land God didn't say okay if you don't want the land well that's it the land is off the menu you're in the wilderness and that's it all over not at all they were condemned to 40 years in the wilderness that generation would die out but their children would inherit the land along with

Joshua and Caleb so there is severe punishment for sin but the faithlessness of Israel does not in any way annul or cancel out the promises of God he is still faithful though they are faithless and that's one of the themes of the second half of chapter one sinners though they are the promises still stand God remains faithful though they be faithless what an encouragement that is and even today the same is true of course the promises of God stand despite our sins and faithlessness Paul makes the same point the beginning of Romans 3 and what an encouragement it's not because God ignores sin he deals with it properly as verse 35 says not one of these not one of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors but the promises are not broken punishment's not the final word and of course that pattern of

God punishing yes but still extending mercy so that his promises still stand is all the way through the scriptures rest of the old and through the new yes there is judgment against sin but not judgment to the extent that God's promises are thrown out the window God is so faithful to his promises that all the sins in the world will not overcome that of course God deals with that by sending Jesus judgment and punishment in the end are not the final word God being faithful to his promises is well they're the first two passages that show a focus on the faithfulness of God to his promise in order that Israel as they listen to this have some confidence that God is faithful the third section which is chapter two up to verse 23 underscores again the issue of faithfulness now this is a chapter that's pretty dull to read as I think Eric probably would testify having read some of it for us up the front it's full of place names and people names that are obscure if not completely unknown to us it's a strange history come geography lesson why is it there Israel is told to bypass and not fight three nations Edom

[31 : 53] Moab and Ammon as they go from the south desert around to the east ready poised to enter the land Edom Moab and Ammon are all related by kinship to Israel through through the brother of Jacob Esau that's Edom and Moab and Ammon through the sons of Lot the nephew of

Abraham but why why are these verses here it's not just giving us a an itinerary a geography lesson it's here again for this same reason of instilling confidence in Israel in the faithfulness of God let me just pick out how that's done for each of Edom Moab and Ammon three nations whom Israel is not to fight God through Moses tells the Israelites I have given Edom Moab Ammon their land as a possession verse 5 verse 9 verse 19 so just to read verse 5 the end of that verse since I've given Mount Seir that's a way of describing their land to Esau that's Edom as a possession it's a rare word as a possession in fact it only occurs I think four times or maybe five in the book of

Deuteronomy and hardly anywhere else in the Old Testament if I remember rightly what God says he will do for Edom Moab and Ammon in verses 5, 9 and 19 he does also for Israel as he says in verse 12 of this chapter as well the point is if God has acted like that for those three nations who are not even his own chosen holy people then surely you can be confident of his promise that he will do the same for you the land he will give you will be as a possession as verse 12 says that's doubly important because God is actually protecting Edom Moab and Ammon from Israel you're not allowed to fight against them he's protecting them because he's given them their land as a possession and so again there's this instilled confidence to build in Israel that God is giving them their land as a possession and you can have confidence in God that he will do that but there's more to this it's not just now about the issue of God being faithful imagine I say to you that we will start our Bible study at 8 o'clock and because you know that I'm reliable usually although we mucked up this week you will come in time for 8 o'clock but imagine I promise to you perfect health for the rest of this year you probably wouldn't believe that promise why wouldn't you believe it not because you don't think I'm reliable

I hope but because you think he can't do that I mean I could promise you perfect health and none of you ought to believe that promise because you think it's not within my power to do that it may be within my power to start at 8pm next Wednesday night and so you'll be here on time but if I was to say to you come at 7.30 and I'll give you perfect health you wouldn't come at 7.30 I don't think for perfect health you see there are two issues that both need to be met in order to trust a promise one is the faithfulness or the reliability of the person who makes a promise the other is the power of the person to keep the promise they've made so if I make a promise and you think I'm reliable and able to keep the promise 8 o'clock next Wednesday you'll be here but if I make a promise outside my power all the reliability and faithfulness in the world that I may have will not convince you to trust that promise Moses addresses both those issues in these chapters thus far he's mainly addressed the issue of the faithfulness of God his reliability but now in this section dealing with Edom, Moab and Ammon he also deals with the issue of the power or ability of God to keep his promise and in some senses for Israel that's just as important because their fear was there are giants in the land and the cities are fortified that is how on earth can we have victory over the opposition so this is where we get into the sort of the little detail of chapter 2 that we so quickly gloss over and indeed to be honest I'm not sure that I've read any but one other commentary on the whole of Deuteronomy and I've read most of them that actually I think understands this correctly let me say in verse 10 onwards and verse 20 onwards you'll see it's in brackets for a few verses and it sort of goes back before Edom, Moab and Ammon had those lands who were there and we think why is all this important but it actually is you see before Edom was there verse 12 tells us the Horeb formerly inhabited the land of Edom that is Seir but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them destroying them and settling in their place as Israel had done in the land that the Lord gave them as a possession what about for Moab well the previous two verses deal with that for Moab verses 10 and 11 the Emim a large and numerous people as tall as the Anakim that he who has ears here or she had formerly inhabited it like the Anakim they're usually reckoned as Rephaim though the Moabites called them Emim and I think well that sounds like a lot of gobbledygook what's going on and let's read verse 20 and 21 because this is the third nation Ammon it is also usually reckoned as a land of Rephaim Rephaim formerly inhabited it though the Ammonites called them Zanzamim a strong and numerous people as tall as the Anakim but the Lord destroyed them from before the Ammonites so that they could dispossess them and settle in their place he did the same for the descendants of

[37 : 54] Esau who lived in Seir by destroying the Hoream before them so that they could dispossess them and settle in their place even to this day now I hope you're beginning to get the picture Edom Moab and Ammon were given lands as a possession by God paralleling what God for Israel that's an encouragement of God's faithfulness but more than that God didn't give Edom Moab

and Ammon empty lands he gave them lands that were inhabited previously by other peoples we don't need to worry about the Zanzamim the Hoream the Emim and so on the names the point is that the inhabitants before Edom and Ammon were strong fortified numerous and giants like the Anakim what was the fear of Israel when they sent the spies into the land there are giants they're fortified and numerous what's happened in the past God has defeated giants and fortified cities as he's kept promises to other nations to give them their lands implication God is powerful to do it for you as well you see

Moses is sort of adding in now the dimension God is powerful to keep this promise I mean it's all very well to say God's made a promise 600 years ago and he'll keep on being faithful to the promise if he hasn't got the power to defeat other nations then what's the point of the promise the point is though that he has got the power and so you can trust him because he's both faithful and powerful to keep that promise and that's exactly the point that's being made in chapter 2 verses 1 to 23 it's why all the little detail is there well the fourth section to deal with is the rest of chapter 2 up to chapter 3 verse 11 here now two nations are fought against and defeated Sion and Og so Israel you see in the end is a bit unlike England they have actually a couple of victories on the board before they come now to the border of the Jordan river they've defeated Sion that's chapter 2 verse 24 through to the end of chapter 2 they occupied an area to the northeast of the sea of Galilee the northeast border of the land of the promised land both of them have been defeated by Israel at the end of this section chapter 3 verse 11 is a curious little verse people again sort of just smile about it and gloss over it but again I'm sure that it's full of meaning and significance only King Og of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaim by now hopefully we've become familiar with that term and it's a bit like the Anakim of whom Israel was afraid in fact his bed an iron bed can still be seen in Rabbah of the Ammonites that's the old name for the modern day Amman capital of Jordan I don't think it's still there today when I was there a few years ago I looked and couldn't find it but it was there in Moses day by the common cubit it is nine cubits long and four cubits wide let me tell you that's a big bed that's the point it's 13 feet or 13 and a half feet long and several feet wide for a king why is it so big because he's a giant he's a Rephaim what's the point of saying that God's defeated the last of the giants at least in that part of the land Og is dead again you see it's there to encourage Israel that God is powerful to bring the victory and so the way these victories over Sion and Og are described underscores that as well chapter 2 verse 33 against Sion when Sion came out against us that's verse 32 he and all his people for battle at Jahaz the Lord our God gave him over to us when we turn over to deal with Og King of Bashan chapter 3 verse 3 the Lord our God also handed over to us King Og of Bashan and all his people who's been victorious God actually not Israel you see how easy it might have been for Moses to say you won those battles you can do it again these nations are no different from the two that you've won

God is the one who's brought the victory Moses is not wanting Israel to trust in itself to trust in its ability its military strategy its numbers its power or anything like that it's wanting Israel to trust in God and God alone for God and God alone is the one who brings the victory I remember years ago when I was quite a young teenager I think maybe not even a an able or to that extent that meaning God is saying here he's both willing and able to keep the promises that he's made it's a message of faithfulness and a message of ability and both of them are coming to the fore in the way that [43 : 29] Moses reminds Israel of its history in doing this Moses is actually preaching the various passages from Exodus and Numbers in these sections here there's little really that's not there earlier there are some bits but little that is what Moses is doing is actually preaching the word more or less so that they trust in God's faithfulness and they trust in God's power to keep his promise and so that thereby trusting in those promises they may obey and conquer the land now you and I are not confronted by a land to cross or a river in front of us most of our rivers are drying up anyway but the promises of Abraham still stand God is still fulfilling the promises to Abraham what is it 4,000 years later Jesus came because of the promises to Abraham as Mary's song in Luke 1 makes clear what we are promised through the promises of Abraham however is something even better it's a little bit like the

Old Testament promises to Abraham giving a black and white television but now in Jesus we're promised a colour TV well you might not want a colour TV you might not think that's actually a good promise but I hope you see the contrast I'm making the New Testament promises of Abraham are bigger and better we are promised a heavenly land a heavenly inheritance that will be absolutely

secure from any enemies and any evil and any pain and crying we are promised in a sense to be part of a multitude of descendants of Abraham of all nations descendants through faith and trust in the promises made to Abraham as say Romans 4 makes clear and the promise of blessing is a promise also that of course is more clearly seen in the New Testament through the blessing of the gospel as it goes to all the nations we are also promised that God is faithful though we may be faithless so that our sin has been atoned for in Christ and will not in a sense thwart the promises of God from being fulfilled as Israel was promised victory by God in conquering the land so we are promised victory through the cross and the resurrection of Christ and as the land in a sense was open and there to be unwrapped and taken by God who was giving it to the Israelites under Joshua heaven's gates have been opened wide for us to enter through the work of the new Joshua in the New Testament as Moses sought to correct faithlessness in Israel's hearts by preaching the word to them so that the word would take root and bear faith and obedience so there we learn how we are to treat God's word and how we are to grow in faith and obedience not through positive thinking but through meditating on God's word day and night it's easy for us like ancient Israel to look into our world and see the giants around about to doubt that God is doing anything in this world let alone keeping his promises

God often appears to be powerless and maybe even faithless as other forces in our world seem so strong and terrifying and prevailing but what Moses is reminding Israel is what we need to remind ourselves from God's word that God's word is powerful and faithful God keeps his word he is able to keep his word and so we like ancient Israel are urged to view reality as we see it with the eyes of faith corrected through the lens of God's word to us well let's pray God our father give us eyes of faith and hearts of obedience may your word bear much fruit in our hearts so that we may trust your promises obey your commands and finally arrive in your heavenly kingdom through the powerful death of

Jesus for us Amen