

## Deut. 1-3 sermon Tregear 1.5.2022 Feeling Small?

Last week Jesus left his disciples with a special message – to tell everyone about his resurrection. As Jesus tells his disciples to march out with nothing but the message of the gospel and change the world, I wonder if you feel maybe a little bit dubious that the gospel can change anything? Or anyone? I mean there are so many other powerful forces in the world.

Maybe, as a Christian, you know exactly what it means to feel like a grasshopper. Small. Insignificant. And foolish.

Which is exactly how the people of Israel feel as we pick up their story in the Old Testament. We're about to take a look at the book of Deuteronomy, book number 5 in the Old Testament, the final instalment of the five books of Moses. And in Deuteronomy, which is a word that literally means second law, we're going to hear a grand speech from Moses. On the doorstep of the promised land.

Remember, what we learnt in Exodus. God had chosen Abraham and promised him that through his family God would bless all the people in the world; he would give Abraham countless descendants with a land of their own, the land of Canaan. And through the Jews, Abraham's descendants, God would bless all the nations of the world. But as we saw in Exodus the Jews ended up in slavery in Egypt and Moses is raised up to lead them out of slavery. And Moses is going to take the people to the promised land. So we saw the incredible story in Exodus; under the mighty hand of God with incredible signs and wonders, Moses leads them out of Egypt and leads them through the Red Sea, and leads them on to Mount Horeb which is sometimes also called Mount Sinai. Where God through Moses gives the people of Israel their laws. Including the famous ten commandments written on stone tablets.

The point is, though, even after God's brought the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt in a most astounding way, even though God's been one piece at a time putting together a nation that

going to be his prized possession of all the nations in the world, when the time comes for them to finally take the promised land... the Israelites chicken out.

The Israelites decide they're just small, insignificant and foolish. And they run away.

You get the details back in the book of Numbers, in Numbers 13. And Moses unpacks it again here in Deuteronomy 1 and 2. Have a look at our map.

They've arrived at Kadesh in the desert of Paran at the end of v.19. Just south of their long promised land. And the people say, let's send up some spies. And the spies come back, and the spies say, it's really nice up there. There's beautiful fruit. There's milk and honey. It's fantastic. Except... for the people. They're kind of big. They're impressive. They're scary. It's full of descendants of that famous big guy, Anak.

Pick up back in verse 28. "But the people who live there are powerful. The cities are fortified, and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there." Anak, the big guy.

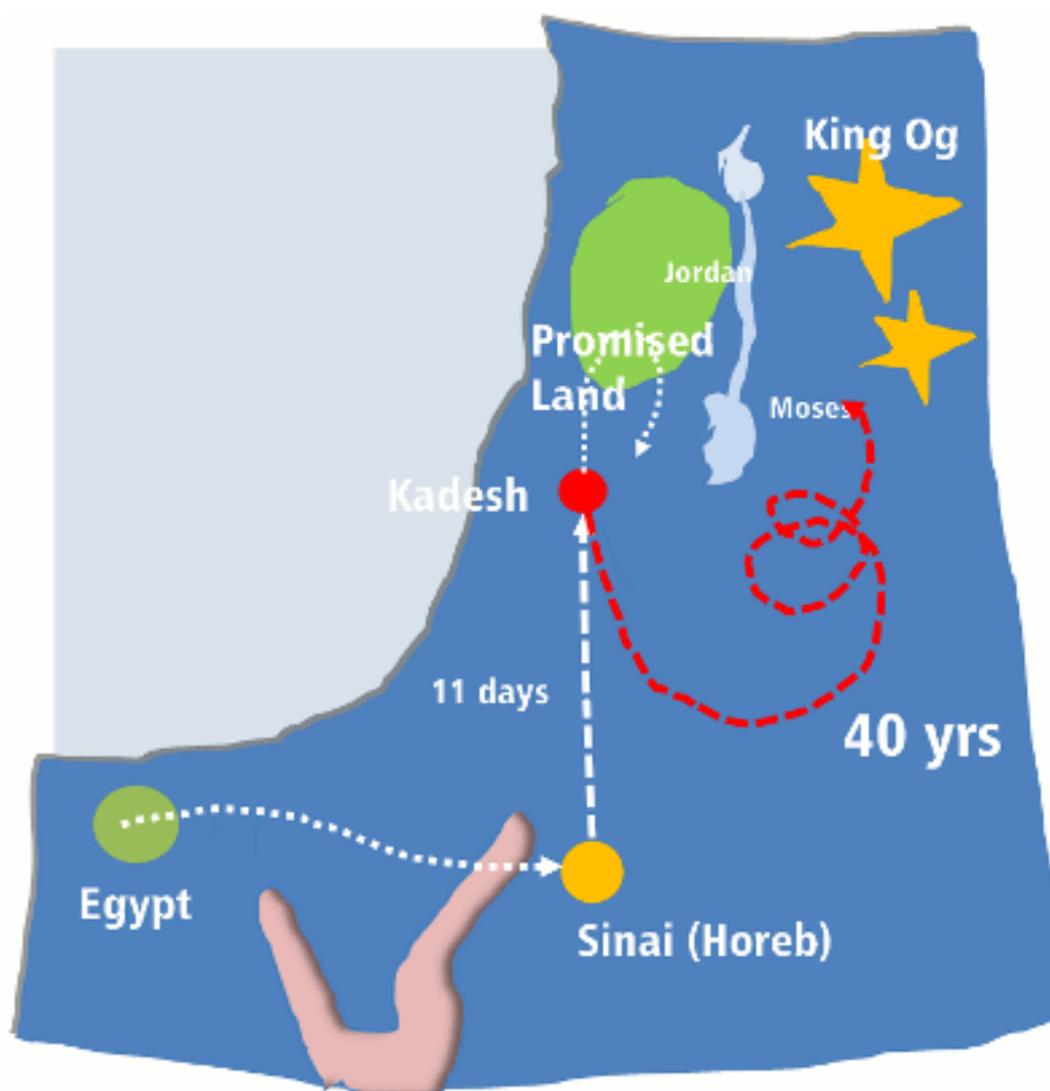
And down to verse 31. These spies, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, these spies keep on saying to everyone who'll listen, we can't do it. We can't attack those people - they are stronger than we are. And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explore. They said, "the land we explored devours those living in it. all the people we saw there are of great size." They're giants! "

It was like you'd been sent out to play basketball against one of the NBA teams. Every person is over 6 foot 6. Well, in the promised land it's the Anakites: . And they're big. And they're scary. To the point where in verse 33, of Numbers 13 the 10 spies say, "we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes. And we looked the same to them."

These Israelite spies, on the edge of the promised land, their knees have gone to water. Because the Anakites... are too big. Which makes them feel small, and insignificant, and foolish.

And so when God says, take the land. The Israelites say no. We can't. And because of that, a whole generation of Israel is going to live out their lives in the desert. Outside the promised land. And out of all of that generation, only two of them will get to enter the promised land. Joshua. And Caleb. The only two of the original spies who weren't scared off by the size of the Anakites.

Now if you'll turn over to the opening words of Deuteronomy, and you keep an eye on the map on the screen, verse 3 tells us we're now in the fortieth year. On the first day of the eleventh month.



Because the Israelites were scared of the giant Anakites, God told them they'd wander the wilderness for forty long years. And as Deuteronomy opens, we're on Day 1 of month 11 of year number 40. Which means time is almost up.

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel, in the desert, east of the Jordan. That is, the Arabah, opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazereth and Dizahab.

which all sound like anti-allergy medications!

Here they are. Looking over the Jordan River. Looking west to the sun as it sets over the promised land.

It's taken them 39 years 11 months and one day to get here.

And verse 2 gives a tongue in cheek reminder if they needed it, that it should have only taken them eleven days.

Horeb to Kadesh Barnea, see, that's the trip they made the first time. That's the trip they made at the start of the forty years. Kadesh Barnea was where they sent out the spies who were scared of the giants; who said the Anakites are too big for us, they make us look like we're grasshoppers.

It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir Road. But that was the first time.

This time, it's taken them forty years. And they've looped around to come in from the side. Across the Jordan River. If, of course, they're feeling up to it.

Which is actually what Moses wants to talk to them about.

Moses is about to proclaim to the Israelites all that the Lord has commanded him. Verse 4 says they've had some big wins on the battle field, which we'll see more of in a moment... and now, in the territory of Moab, East of the Jordan, Moses is going to expound this law. Which he does by first of all reminding them of what's happened.

And so chapters 1 to 3 are very much a flashback. A reminder. A quick history lesson on how they got to where they are.

Verse 8. How the Lord said to them at Horeb, go north. How he said, "See, I have given you this land, Go in and take possession of the land the Lord swore he would give to your fathers... to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And to their descendants after them." That's what God had said. And then, verse 19, Moses says, we set out. Just like God had told us to. Through all that vast and dreadful desert to Kadesh Barnea. And I said to you back then, "we have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us."

"See," verse 21, "the Lord your God has given you the land. Go up, and take possession of it as the Lord, the God of your fathers, told you. do not be afraid. do not be discouraged."

Now do you notice something here? He's said it over and over again. This is the land God is giving you. All you've got to do is go up and take it. It's a promise. It's the covenant promise God made with Abraham right back at the beginning in Genesis chapter 12. And so the choice is... take him at his word and go for it. Or be afraid. Be discouraged. And walk away.

And this brings us back to the story in v.19 – 36 in our reading. The people come to Moses in verse 22, and say let's send the spies out. And so the spies come back with this bad news, the people are too big for us.

v.26- Moses says, "But you were unwilling," "You were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said "The Lord hates us, so he brought us up out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Blah, blah blah. These Anakites, the giants. Who were so big they made us feel like grasshoppers.

Moses says to them, don't be terrified, don't be afraid, verse 29, though I said to you the Lord your God who is going before you will fight for you, just like he did in Egypt, though I said to you, remember how the Lord your God carried you, like a dad carries his little boy... in spite of all that, verse 32... you didn't trust him. Even though he'd gone before

you every step of the way. When the hard times came, when the challenge was there, when the Anakites made you feel like grasshoppers... instead of trusting God you shrank back. And ran away.

Which is why God said, not a single member of that generation would enter the land. Except Caleb. And Joshua. Not even Moses himself. And so here we are. It's now forty years later. We're standing once again on the brink of the promised land. The question is, how's it going to go this time? Is it going to be the same as 40 years ago. The giants are still there.

Which is why in chapter 2 Moses goes on to give them some good reasons not to be scared of the Anakites. Moses recounts the different territories they've just gone through. In each of these territories, since the spies went in 40 years ago, new people groups have defeated these Anakites and are now living there. And God has brought the Israelites through these territories. And God also has given them victory over 2 of these kings, Sihon and Og. Og's an interesting guy, you wouldn't think so with a name like that. He's a giant sized guy like the Anakites. You'll see at the end of verse 11 of chapter 3, he was so big he had an iron bed that was thirteen feet long and six feet wide. A double length Sleepmaker king single. In other words, Og was one of the guys we ran away from in the past. And now we beat him. Well, I mean, God beat him!

Which means as they've come now to the point of taking on the promised land, there's got to be no more of this grasshopper business. Because they should know by now... they CAN trust the Lord. They might seem small, the odds might seem to be stacked against them, but they have the Lord their God. Stand back, trust him and he'll win. Against anyone.

**Taking on these giants, it was never going to be Israel's battle. It was going to be God's battle.**

And in spite of the fact they felt small and foolish and insignificant, in spite of the fact the odds seemed enormous... all they had to do was trust the Lord their God. To win the victory.

That seems to be a trend that goes right through the bible, doesn't it? We've been seeing that this Easter haven't we?

That God chooses weak things, like a crucifixion. To shame the strong.

That God chooses foolish things. Like a dead and defeated messiah. To shame the wise.

Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 1:27,

*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no-one may boast before him.... Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.*

We're not standing before the world preaching how to be impressive.

We're not here to tell the world how to succeed.

We're lining up behind the one who came to serve. And give up his life as a ransom for many.

And it's in that weakness... that God shows his strength. That can even bring down giants.

And in the same way as Paul says we've got nothing to boast about... we've also got nothing to be fearful about. Because it's not our battle. So there's nothing to fear.

It's interesting, A.N. Wilson was a giant in the world of atheists. He's an English Academic who wrote a number of popular anti-Christian books in the 1990's, 30 years ago; but about 20 years ago he started to change his mind and he's now a committed Christian. So what changed his thinking. It wasn't brilliant intellectual arguments or loads of historical facts.

He says the thing he's realised in the end that the wisdom and impressiveness of his Atheist friends was in fact just covering a deep emptiness. He says he realised we weren't just a random collection of chemicals. For him, the strongest argument is the way Christian faith transforms individual lives. He says the most persuasive argument is the lives of the men and women with whom you mingle on a daily basis, the person you're sitting next to you in church on a Sunday morning.

And so, in the life of A. N. Wilson, God through the gospel of Jesus quietly chalks up another victory. An intellectual giant falls, in God's strength. Not our own.

Friends, if you ever have grasshopper days, if you ever have days when you feel small, insignificant and stupid, if you're a Christian who's taken a stand in your office, if you've put a Christian point of view and been laughed down, if you're a Christian who's stood up for Jesus with your family, your workmates or your neighbours... and ended up feeling like a grasshopper... don't be discouraged. Because the Lord our God who can bring down giants... the Lord our God who carried his people Israel in the wilderness like a father carries his son... is the very same Lord who says to you and me, you might be small, you might be insignificant, and the weakness of the Lord Jesus might sound entirely unimpressive. But do not fear. Because ultimately, it's the message that changes the world. One giant at a time.

The question Moses has for Israel, on the verge of the promised land is, are they going to go forward and trust the Lord their God? Or not? And I guess in a lot of ways it's often the same question for us.