

Deuteronomy 9:1-3

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-9/deuteronomy-91-3/>

Moses reassures the people of Israel of their imminent conquest of Canaan, despite the seemingly invincibility of its inhabitants. He tells Israel that it is Yahweh their God who is crossing over the Jordan before them as a consuming fire.

Moses opened this section with a call to listen, followed by a statement declaring the imminent conquest of Canaan. He said, *Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today.* As in 5:1 and 6:4, the verb “to hear” (shema) describes both the mental activity of hearing as well as its effects. This was therefore another way for Moses to ask Israel to obey or to pay attention to what he would speak to them. Moses told the people that they were *crossing over the Jordan*. This statement served as a motivation (encouragement) for the people of God, who had been wandering in the wilderness for about 40 years. They needed to know that they would *cross the Jordan* river to go in and possess the land the LORD had promised to them.

The *Jordan River* still exists today. Its headwaters begin just north of the Sea of Galilee. It flows into the Sea of Galilee, then terminates when it spills into the Dead Sea. Part of the Jordan River serves as a boundary between the state of Israel and the country of Jordan, or the Palestinian Authority and the country of Jordan. At the time of Deuteronomy, the nation of Israel was camped in Moab, which today is part of the country of Jordan. The nation could have marched south, gone around the Dead Sea and into the Promised Land, and avoided having to cross the river. But they were following God’s lead through his agent Moses.

Moses then spelled out Israel’s purpose of crossing the Jordan: *to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven.* To encourage Israel to trust the LORD their God, the great and invincible warrior, Moses made a sharp distinction between Israel’s weakness and the enemy’s strength. While the Israelites were insignificant in number ([Deuteronomy 7:7](#)), the enemies were *greater and mightier* than Israel. They lived in *great cities* that were *fortified to heaven* with high walls. Israel had just spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. They did not have siege engines and other instruments of war to attack a walled city.

Not only were the *cities fortified to heaven*, but the land contained *a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim*, whose reputation the Israelites had heard of; the might of the Anakim was famous. God is not sugar-coating the immense obstacle before them. There are about to face massive people with walled cities. By any objective measure, the Israelites have no business winning any battles in the Promised Land. They are outnumbered and outmanned, with inferior equipment.

The sons of Anak is an ancestry that can be traced back to *Anak* (the son of Arba). The Anakim were powerful giants ([Deuteronomy 2:10](#); [Joshua 15:13](#)). Because of their impressiveness, people thought those giants were invincible. Forty years earlier, when Moses sent men to spy the land of Canaan, Moses took one man from each tribe, twelve in all. He commissioned them to go into the land to map it out and bring back a report ([Numbers 13](#)). The 12 spies came back with the same basic observation of the land Moses is describing to the people now.

Upon their return from spying in Canaan, the spies brought back some fruits of the land (pomegranates and figs) and gave a mixed report, saying, “We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there” ([Numbers 13:27-28](#)). The specific mention of the descendants of Anak shows that they were of primary concern. God will address this concern head on.

Moses acknowledges to the Israelites that the descendants of Anak are a powerful giant race, of whom there was a common saying, *Who can stand before the sons of Anak?* One of the primary reasons for the first generation’s refusal to enter the Promised Land was the report of the impressive size and strength of the *sons of Anak*. Yet, despite the strength of the *sons of Anak* or the population of Canaan, or the fortifications, Moses continued to encourage the people *to go in to dispossess* these nations, because Yahweh, the head of Israel’s army, is all-powerful. Israel’s God, Yahweh, is invincible, not the descendants of Anak ([Jeremiah 32:27](#); [Luke 1:37](#); [Luke 18:27](#)). Yahweh was the one who would give victory to His people. They will cross *over today*. Deuteronomy is like the locker room speech before the big game. When they “come out of the locker room” *by crossing the Jordan*, they will not be alone. *The LORD* their *God* will be *crossing over* before them. And He will be *crossing over as a consuming fire*.

The phrase *consuming fire* refers to God's holiness and judgment. God has already been described as a *consuming fire* in [Deuteronomy 4:24](#). Fire is used to create, to refine, and to consume. God does all these things. In this context, the adjective translated *consuming* likely emphasizes the Suzerain God's judging power to cleanse the land of corruption. God had already explained that the reason the nations were being cleared out of the land was due to their corrupt practices. God further told Israel to learn from this, for they would get the same treatment if they became corrupt ([Deuteronomy 6:15](#)).

God is just, and He judges unrighteousness ([Romans 1:18](#)). His *consuming fire* will clear away unrighteousness wherever it is found. In [Hebrews 12](#), the author quotes [Deuteronomy 4:24](#) to warn the believing Jews who received his letter to "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking." In the Old Testament, God promised blessing and rewards for obeying His voice, and discipline and judgment for disobedience. God never changes. It is the same in the New Testament. God is a *consuming fire*. God never rejects His people as His own, but His holy presence is a refining fire that will judge unrighteousness.

In the case of enemies, God's holy presence will *consume* them. God will then give the Promised Land to His vassals (Israel), as He had promised Abraham ([Genesis 15:7](#)). Moses declared that God would *destroy them and He will subdue them before you*. Moses gives full recognition to the numerical and physical superiority of the inhabitants, as well as their superior fortifications. But Moses declares Israel will *drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you*. Israel's strength and power lay in the strength of their Suzerain. Israel's assurance of victory and the fact that their Suzerain will cross over the Jordan with them as a *consuming fire*. Their hope lay in their Suzerain's word of promises and faithfulness.

Biblical Text:

Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, ²a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard *it said*, 'Who can stand before the sons of Anak?' ³Know therefore today that it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.