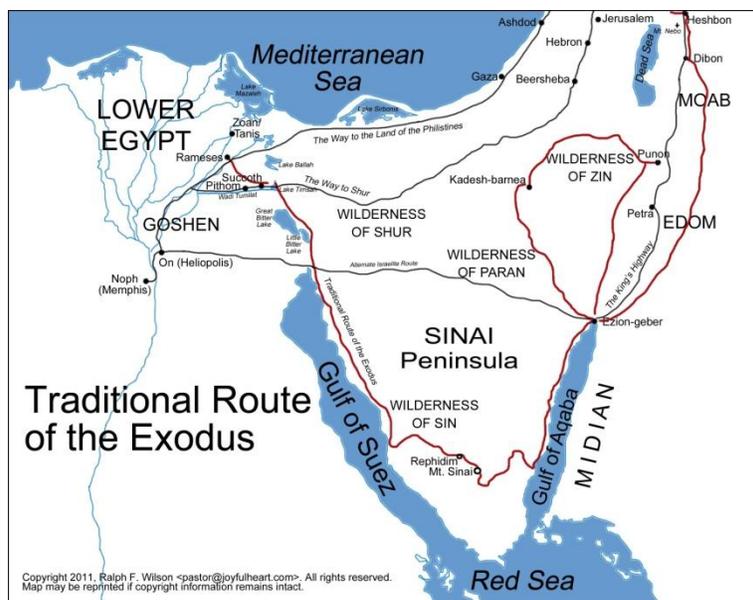


Promises, Promises: The Journey Home *Giants in the Land – Numbers 13-14*

Two years ago, we spent 28 weeks studying the Old Testament book of Exodus. We journeyed with Israel out of Egypt to the mountain where God met with Moses and gave him the instructions for the governance of this nation formed out of the covenant God had made with Abraham. Our study left Israel at Mount Sinai, yet to realize the promises to Abraham.

We're going to spend the next twelve weeks following their journey home, including the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

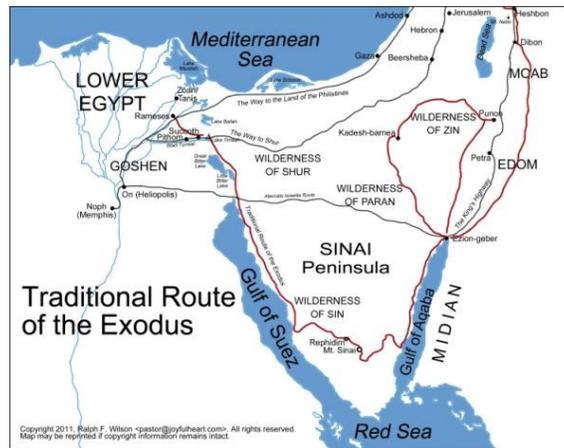
Let's get oriented as we begin where the nation is when we finish the book of Exodus. The traditional location of Sinai is at the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula.



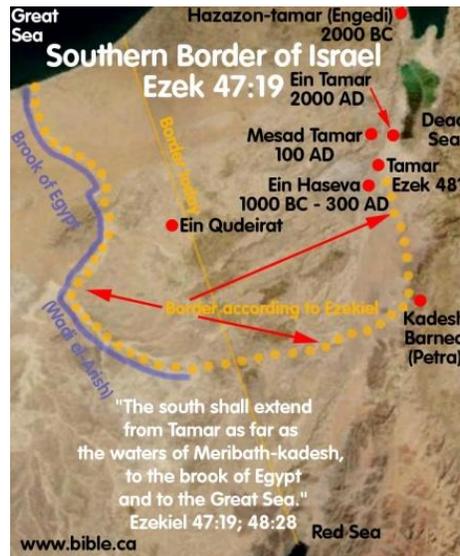
In the early 300's A.D., Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, set about to identify locations of various biblical events in Christianity.

In a dream, she says it was revealed to her that Mount Horeb (Sinai) was located at Mount Musa at the end of what would later be called the Sinai Peninsula. But, this area was actually part of the Egyptian empire where the army had a presence and there were numerous mining operations. So, being in this area, would have meant to still be within Egyptian territory.

your Bible maps has this location as Kadesh-Barnea on the south side of Canaan. Look at our map again:



But we have a problem with this location. This site lies within the boundaries of ancient Canaan. It doesn't make much sense that the people are already within the Promised Land when spies are sent in to spy it out.



Then you have the situation of the nation hanging around a site within the Promised Land for forty years before they enter the Promised Land, within which they already dwell!

The other alternative, which seems more likely to me, is the site of ancient city of Petra.



It is from this location that Moses sends spies into the land. Today, we are going to talk about giants. Every one of us faces giants in our lives. They come in every size, shape and color. Some are more obvious than others; some look larger than others. Some lurk in the shadows of our conscious mind; others confront us openly, boldly, defiantly, every day.

Here are some of the common, garden-variety giants prevalent today. See if you can relate to any of them:

- Fear – of all types
- Pressure to perform
- Peer pressure to conform to someone else’s expectations
- Failure
- A weighty decision you are struggling to make
- Rearing children in a decadent culture
- Overpowering temptation
- Financial difficulties
- Interpersonal conflict with a co-worker or family member
- Health problems
- A deep hurt or disappointment in life – personal or professional
- Uncertain future

Are any of these giants on your radar this morning? I want us to address this by looking at the experience of the Israelites at Kadesh. From their story – faced with giants, perhaps we can find some help in our story as we deal with giants.

Let's begin with the *Mission* in Numbers, chapter 13.

The Mission – Numbers 13:1-3

There are three reasons God instructs Moses to send spies into the land:

- 1) To search out the land – **Numbers 13:17-18a, 19a**
- 2) To gauge the strength of the enemy – **Numbers 13:18b, 19b**
- 3) To show the people by way of eyewitness accounts that the land was just what God had told them it was: fruitful, productive and bountiful. – **Numbers 13:20**

But, wasn't this contrary to the principle of faith? I mean, God said, "Go." He had already told them about the land. Why didn't he just expect them to obey and go?

Two thoughts about that question and application for us today as well:

1) Know the enemy. God wanted them to know about the enemy. Examine the giants in your life. Who or what are they? What are their motives? How will they succeed in defeating you? Where are your weaknesses they will seek to exploit? What are their weaknesses?

Are they real or imagined? Just a word here: an imagined giant can be as formidable as a real one. A non-existent giant, believed real, looms as large as the real thing. There is a need to isolate the giant from the entangled mess of emotional mass in order to identify it. Know the enemy; identify the enemy.

2) Realize you can't face it alone. I believe God not only wanted the Israelites to know there were giants in the land, but that there were big giants. God had a purpose for them knowing that they could not face these giants alone, without him.

The Report – Numbers 13:25-33

Two reports come out of the Israelite intelligence operation: a majority report and a minority report. You know what? As we face giants in our lives, the mind usually issues two reports.

1) First of all, note the agreement of the two reports. The “they” in verse 27, I think, refers to all twelve spies. The mission had been to find out about the land and its inhabitants. “It is a fruitful land; living there are a strong people, and some giants live there.” They were just reporting the factual truth about what they had seen. There is no problem with this part of the report.

2) Where do the two reports differ? In their conclusions.

- Caleb presents the *minority report*. His recommendation: “By all means, let’s go!”
- The *majority report*? “Are you kidding? You gotta be nuts!” Look at **Verse 32** – They brought a bad report.

Consider the reasoning of the majority report:

- There are giants in the land. That was fact.
- We became like grasshoppers in our own sight – conclusions drawn.
- We, therefore, were grasshoppers in their sight – speculations; in reality, wrong.

Now, let’s look at what lies behind each report:

First, Caleb’s report. Three things:

1) Realism – he saw giants too. **Verse 28**. His head was not buried in the sand or up in the clouds. Sometimes we have this silly notion that, as Christians, we are to deny reality, pretend the giants aren’t there. It is unspiritual to admit we are up against giants. Listen – the giants were there! That was reality! But, it didn’t end there.

2) Caleb knew the promise of God. This is the truth that forged his conviction. While still at Mount Sinai, God had promised to drive out their enemies before them (see Exodus 23:21-33). Caleb’s response wasn’t mere “positive thinking” or

“possibility thinking.” Nor was it some forced bravado. Behind his confidence and boldness stood God’s promises.

3) Finally, Caleb knew the power of God. “We shall surely overcome it,” he says. Caleb believed that God’s power accompanies God’s promise.

Now, the majority report:

1) Their conclusions were based on wrong comparisons. Who did they compare the giants with? – Themselves. Can you ever win with that equation? Of course not.

2) They drew two conclusions: one was true, the other false.

- “We became like grasshoppers in our own sight.” That was true. In inverse proportion – the greater the enemy grew in their sight, the smaller they became. Have you ever experienced that? The greater the perception you have of the problem, the punier you feel – less adequate, less able to cope, less able to function boldly to confront the problem.
- The second conclusion they drew was this: “We were like grasshoppers in their sight.” That was patently false. Look what Israel discovers later, in fact, a generation later: **Joshua 2:8-11**

The Response

Three things happen as the people accept and embrace the majority report:

1) Fear – Numbers 14:1-3

Boy, had they lost perspective. “Would that we had died back in Egypt.” Really! Really! Did they really believe that? When you lose perspective, the first thing you usually gain is fear. And with fear comes a diminished capacity for reason. When fear gets a foothold in our minds, panic often sets in.

2) Casting blame – Numbers 14:4

First, God is at fault. Now, Moses is at fault. It’s “blame Moses” time. He’s the problem. And now instead of fighting the enemy, they fight each other. Blame;

blame; blame. I always remember the bumper sticker I once saw on the back of a car: “Humpty Dumpty was pushed!”

3) Rebellion – Numbers 14:5-10

But God always has the “last say.” – **Numbers 14:11-12**

The Judgment – Numbers 14:13-38

The giants won. The sad thing is: they didn’t have to.

May I draw some conclusions from this experience of Israel by way of application for us? Five principles:

1) **Recognize that life is filled with challenges and difficulties.** Giants exist! Dr. Scott Peck, in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, begins with these words: “Life is difficult.”

Sounds so simplistic, doesn’t it? I grew up in, what I consider now, a pretty sheltered environment. A stable, two-parent home, rural life, small-town Iowa, all of my needs provided for, extended family relationships: grandparents, cousins. I’m sure there were problems; I had problems, but they just didn’t seem emotionally debilitating.

Now, as I am older, and face my own giants, I often find myself thinking, “Wait a minute. This isn’t fair! How come this is happening to me? I shouldn’t have to face this or deal with that. I thought life was to be easy, particularly as a Christian. What happened to this abundant life thing?”

One of my friends used to say, “Amazing that we somehow believe we have escaped the effects of the Fall.”

“Life is difficult.” Peck goes on to say, “What makes life difficult is that the process of confronting and solving problems is a painful one.”

The proper understanding of life from a biblical point of view is this: God never promised exemption from problems. Enablement – yes; exemption – no.

2) **Admit you cannot face/deal with them alone.** When we can admit our inadequacy, we are ready to embrace God’s adequacy. There are two levels of

help here. The first is God. He is our ultimate source of help and assistance – for perspective, courage, solution, perseverance, joy in the midst of the storm, and so on.

The second level is the church – God’s people. When we are confronted by a giant, our tendency is to move towards isolation. “I need to face this alone.” “I don’t want anyone to know I am struggling.” “I’m embarrassed to admit I don’t know what to do.” “People will think I am unspiritual.” “Nobody will understand.”

In reality, instead of isolation, it is precisely at these times we need community! Let others help; let others pray. Let others comfort and encourage and counsel. Sometimes professional as well as lay help is needed. Don’t face the giants alone.

3) Believe God can and will use you situation for your character and his glory. Paul Powell wrote a book titled, *Why Me Lord?* In it he says:

The purpose of Christianity is not to exempt us from difficulty, but to produce in us a character adequate to meet life as it comes.

God doesn’t always deliver us from situations where we face “giants.” Sometimes he delivers us through those situations. The Bible is filled with examples of God delivering through, not from. God didn’t deliver Joseph from the prison experience; he delivered him through that experience.

God didn’t deliver Daniel from the lions’ den; he delivered him through the lions’ den. He didn’t deliver the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace; he delivered them through.... You get the point.

4) Be willing to trust, even if you don’t understand. It would seem so much easier if we could only understand, if we could only see clearly the purpose. Unfortunately, so often, I don’t understand. I look, but only see darkness. It is at those times, we need to apply the principle of “suspended judgment.”

Os Guinness, in his book *The Dilemma of Doubt*, suggests that we need to suspend judgment and trust in the God who understands the “why” – even when we don’t. Here’s the critical question: “Do you know enough about God to trust him with the ‘why,’ believing that he knows it.”

Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century English pastor, put it this way: “When we cannot trace God’s hand, we can trust God’s heart.”

5) **Don’t give up.** I honestly don’t know if you’re facing any giants today or what they might be like. But they’re probably there. Please – don’t give up. It takes little courage to quit, to give up, to run away.

Patsy Clairmont’s first book, titled *God Uses Cracked Pots*, has a wonderful story in it. I want to conclude with that. This particular chapter is called “Bus Stop.”

Bus Stop

Jason, our youngest, has two goals in life. One is to have fun, and the other is to rest. He does both quite well. So I shouldn’t have been surprised by what happened when I sent him to school one fall day.

As Jason headed off for the bus, I immediately busied myself, preparing for a full day. The knock on the door was a surprise and disruptive to my morning rhythm, which is not something I have a lot of. I flew to the door, jerked it open, only to find myself looking at Jason.

“What are you doing here?” I demanded. “I’ve quit school,” he boldly announced. “Quit school?” I repeated in disbelief and at a decibel too high for human ears.

Swallowing once, I tried to remember some motherly psychology. But all that came to mind was “A stitch in time saves nine” and “Starve a fever, feed a cold,” or something like that. Somehow they didn’t seem to apply to a six-year-old drop-out dilemma.

So I questioned, “Why have you quit school?” Without hesitation he proclaimed, “It’s too long, it’s too hard, and it’s too boring!”

“Jason,” I instantly retorted, “you have just described life. Get on the bus!”

Well, I cannot tell you how many times the Lord has had to echo that counsel back to me – times when I have questioned, “Lord, You say You’ll never give us more that we can bear. You must not be looking. This is hard, very hard!”

“By the way, Lord, it’s been lasting a l-o-n-g time. And truthfully, it’s getting bo-ring!”

About that time, in the recesses of my mind, I hear the refrain, “It’s life; get on the bus!”

Facing giants: “It’s life. Get on the bus!” But listen, don’t go alone.