**OF GIANTS AND GRASSHOPPERS**

**BY MARK FERRELL Illustration by Kim Justinen**

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The Bible, especially the Old Testament, is filled with stories. And while the stories themselves are interesting, we know that within each narrative are rich lessons hidden beneath the surface. Some details are more memorable than others.

For example, most people would probably not recognize the names of these Bible characters: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, and Geuel. However, when the names of Caleb and Joshua are added to the list, it suddenly becomes apparent that these are the 12 Israelite spies who spent 40 days in the Promised Land. Why is it that millennia later the names of Caleb and Joshua are instantly recognizable while the other 10 are lost in obscurity?

We are familiar with the story of God leading the Israelites through the wilderness, taking them from Egypt to Canaan. As they journeyed along, God gave them clear, tangible manifestations of His guidance and care.

After more than two years they finally reached the borders of the Promised Land. “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them’ ” (Num. 13:1, 2, NKJV).\*

Notice these were not just 12 daring adventure seekers, but 12 leaders. These were men of experience, men of wisdom, men whom the people held in high regard. The tribes chose these leaders to experience the Promised Land and bring back a trustworthy report.

**The Report**

Imagine the excitement of the people when word spread that the spies had returned safely. Crowding together, the people became more and more excited as they heard about the lush land they hoped would soon be theirs. Eyes opened wide as they examined a single cluster of grapes so large that it required two men to carry it.

But then the bad news: “The land . . . is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants . . . and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (Num. 13:32, 33, NKJV).

As the people’s faces clouded over with worry and fear, one of the 12 spies noticed. About 40 years old, this faithful man had a name that meant simply “dog.” When you read about him in the Bible you will find that Caleb is a man who stays focused on God and speaks his convictions. Choosing to focus on faith rather than fear, he interrupts the negative report by exclaiming: “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30, NKJV). The 10, however, are emphatic: it cannot be done— the giants are too big; we are too small.

Another faithful spy, Joshua, sides with Caleb, and together they plead with the people to trust God and move forward. “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them” (Num. 14:7-9). The other 10 spies had talked about the land swallowing up the people, but Caleb and Joshua brought God into the equation and promised that with the Lord, “we will devour them.”

But instead of catching the faith of Caleb and Joshua, the people picked up rocks to stone them. Why is it, even today, somehow easier to believe (and pass on) a negative report rather than a positive one?

Sadly, because of their unbelief, no one over the age of 20, except for Caleb and Joshua, entered the Promised Land. God told Moses that He had heard the people’s prayer to die in the wilderness, and that He would answer their prayer (see Num. 14:28-30).

The Israelites were on the border of the Promised Land, but they couldn’t go in; not because of giants or because they *felt* like grasshoppers, but because of their unbelief. They left God out of the equation. The 10 spies focused on what they saw and what they felt; Caleb and Joshua remembered God’s faithfulness and were ready to take action on His word.

**The Giants**

Giants, of course, are not just eight-foot-three-inch men. The giants we have to face come in many different forms— illnesses, work challenges, financial difficulties, interpersonal relationships, losses, and other heartaches. Giants can also take the form of smaller yet irritating issues that we struggle with each day.

These enemies, or our perception of them, produce fear, block our view, set us back, and can be a real challenge. Many of us want to live life without giants. We pray, “God, please remove this giant! Take away this thorn in my flesh!” This is what the Israelites wanted. They wanted the spies to come back and report they had seen rolling hills of healthy vineyards protected by stone fences and strong gates. They wanted to hear about houses with the beds all made, the kitchens well stocked, with no one in sight. Everything would be ready, waiting for them to just walk up and move in.

Many of us want the same. We want God to remove all of our giants and make our lives smooth, with no difficulties or problems. We don’t like giants.

**The Grasshoppers**

Most of the spies felt like grasshoppers—insects that are small, weak, and easily squashed. As they looked at the challenges that stood between them and their conquest of the land, they felt helpless and were ready to give up and turn back to Egypt. And many of us feel the same when we encounter the giants that come our way. When we encounter a problem in our lives we are quick to conclude that the challenges we face are insurmountable, that we can’t possibly go forward. We feel weak and want to give up. We feel like little grasshoppers.

**God**

Then there’s God. It’s easy to trust God when everything’s going well, when we seem to be making progress. But what happens when the road gets rocky, or worse, when we feel as though God has led us to a situation that is insurmountable? It’s easy to become frustrated with God as well. We don’t like the way He is invisible and so quiet most of the time. “I pray and pray, and He doesn’t do anything!” we moan. “What happened to the days when He responded?” we wonder. It’s easy to become frustrated by His hiddenness.

Others become discouraged by the fact that we don’t know the future. “Is this the best school?” “Will I ever get married?” “If I only knew what the future holds!”

**A New View**

It’s easy to be like the 10 spies, looking at everything in a negative light, but perhaps we should view the giants, grasshoppers, and God from another angle. Is there anything good about giants? Is there anything to be thankful for in the problems we encounter? Here’s one: it’s the challenges that make faith grow (see Heb. 12:11). Whatever the giant is, it can be used as an opportunity to let your faith grow stronger. Many have a stronger relationship with Christ today because of a loss, an illness, or a broken heart that helped us realize our need of Him.

Another positive about giants is that they make our life less boring. I love to mountain-bike, and if I were to go on a 25- mile ride on a paved road in the middle of a flat desert I probably would not rate that ride as one of my favorites. But one of my top rides is on a small trail perched on the side of a mountain around Lake Tahoe, where the trail winds around a cliff wall and many times I have to get off the bike and carry it over streams, logs, and boulders. The memories I have of the challenges, the views, and the experience of that trail are some of my favorites. Life would be pretty boring without challenges.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “If a man has not found something worth dying for, he is not fit to live.” As we experience life with Jesus Christ we’re going to encounter problems and come upon giants. But those giants can increase our faith and make our lives full.

**Little Strengths**

Sometimes, especially when facing giants, it is easy to feel like a small, insignificant grasshopper. But there is a positive side. Grasshoppers are lively; they’re jumpers! They can move! Have you ever heard of an elephant jumping its height, or even jumping its length? But grasshoppers can jump many times their height.

This is a call to use what we have. Ten spies came back and said mournfully, “We’re just grasshoppers.” Caleb and Joshua replied, “Let’s use what we have. Let’s go!”

The Bible is full of stories of people who used what they had, and God blessed them in doing great things. Gideon and his 300 soldiers, David and his five smooth stones, not to mention Jesus and His original 12 disciples—they all changed their situations by moving forward in faith. They saw possibilities where others saw defeat.

We should not wait for God to make everything easy and work out all the details before we put forth any effort. If we use what we have, we will see God multiply our efforts the way He did the loaves and fishes in the hands of the disciples.

**God With Us**

As we read the Bible, and reflect on our own experience, we have to admit that even though God sometimes seems to be distant, He is actually nearby, working on our behalf. We may not be able to sense His presence, but He is near nevertheless. I like God to be just the way He is. As He changes and sanctifies us, someday we will be able to stand in His presence.

God has revealed enough through His prophets so that we know the general direction of how things will turn out. But we don’t have to know all of the details. For example, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy my wife’s company if I knew that we had only a few more weeks together before she died. I’m glad God mercifully veils the future.

According to Ellen White: “Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 481). God has a *thousand* ways to care for us; we should make sure that we are doing the *one* thing He asks us to do—making the service of God supreme in our day-to-day lives.

**Keeping Promises**

When God sent the children of Israel back into the wilderness it must’ve been a huge disappointment for Caleb and Joshua. But they patiently waited, living in the wilderness with the multitudes who focused only on giants and grasshoppers. But those two faithful leaders knew that God had promised that one day they would again be able to go into the Land of Promise.

Forty years later Caleb and Joshua, along with a new generation of Israelites, crossed over the Jordan and finally set foot in Canaan. God worked miracles and walls came down. Then, as the land was being divided among the tribes, Caleb approached Joshua, reminiscing about the past, and making an unusual request: “You know what the Lord said to Moses . . . about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses . . . sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought . . . back a report according to my convictions, but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.’

“Now then, just as the Lord promised, He has kept me alive for forty-five years since [that] time. . . . So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said” (Joshua 14:6-12).

Although Caleb was 85 years old, he didn’t ask for a nice little cottage down near the Jordan River; he had other goals in mind. He wanted for his inheritance the big stone fortresses up in the steep hills where giants still lived! Regardless of his age, Caleb knew that as long as he kept his focus on God and used the strength that He gave him, the Lord would bless him and fulfill His promises.

In each of our lives there will be giants—irritations, trials, seeming impossibilities. We will be tempted to look to ourselves and give up, realizing in our own weakness that we have no power. But let’s keep our eyes focused on Jesus, and use the resources He freely gives us, and each one of us can live a life—a full life—like Caleb’s and Joshua’s.

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*Mark Ferrell is a registered nurse who works on medical helicopter flights. He is also the lay pastor of the San Francisco Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in California. This article was published March 22, 2012.*

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