

FEAR OF THE GIANTS

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Lessons: Numbers 13:1-2, 17-33, True Christian Religion 68

When the Lord delivered the Children of Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians, He promised that He would bring them into the land of Canaan, a land “flowing with milk and honey”. But between Egypt and Canaan lay a vast wilderness, the barren wastes of Sinai. Through this desert country, parched and baked under a burning sun, infested by wild beasts and robber bands, the Lord’s chosen people must pass before they would find rich soil and peaceful homes in the Promised Land. Yet on this journey the Lord was with them, guarding them from every danger, feeding them with manna from heaven, causing water to gush from the rocks for their refreshment, and ever holding out the hope of untold blessing when the trackless wilderness should have been traversed. And so, after a year of wandering, they came at last to Paran, on the southern border of Canaan. A short march to the north would bring them into the green hills and the fertile valleys where the Lord had prepared a place for them to rest, amid peace and plenty, after all the hardships of the journey.

Moses, therefore, by the Lord’s command, sent spies before them saying, “Go up into the mountain, and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwell therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strongholds”. In time the spies returned, saying that they had seen a wonderful country, with great forests and well-watered fields, where grain and fruits grew in all abundance. They brought back luscious pomegranates and figs, and a great cluster of grapes so large that it had to be carried “between two upon a staff”.

Yet they were afraid to enter the land; for it was possessed by strong nations, dwelling in walled cities. And there they had seen great giants, fierce and terrible, before whom they felt like little grasshoppers. Hearing of these powerful enemies, the whole people rose in rebellion, murmuring against Moses and Aaron and refusing to follow them into this land, lest they fall into the hands of giants and suffer a miserable death. Had they believed in the Lord, they might have known that He who had brought them out of Egypt “with a strong hand and a stretched out arm” would deliver these enemies into their hands, according to His promise. But because their faith was weak, they yielded to fear, and the Lord could not lead them to victory. They were compelled, therefore, to wander for forty years in the wilderness, before they could be brought to meet these enemies and overcome them.

You think of this story from the Word as describing things that happened many hundreds of years ago, in a far distant country. So indeed it does. But like all the stories of the Word it has a deeper meaning. When this is understood, we find that it describes something that is always true, something that takes place today in the life of every person. For by means of this inner meaning the Lord would teach us what we must do in order that we may come into heaven after death.

The land of Canaan is a real country. It is inhabited by real people. But it exists also in the other world. There it is called the "Heavenly Canaan", and is the place which the Lord has prepared as the eternal abode of the angels. To that beautiful land of everlasting peace and happiness the Lord wills that everyone should come; it is the Land of Promise, into which He will bring all who learn to love Him, to abide by the teaching of His Word and to keep His Law while they live on earth. Compared to this Heavenly Canaan, the natural world is like the wilderness of Sinai through which we all must pass before we can receive the blessing of that eternal home.

More than this, the Lord has given us a body and a brain by which we may live on earth—may see, and hear, and feel all the wonderful things which He has created for our use. And He has given us a spiritual body, or a mind, by which we may see and hear and enjoy all the beauties of heaven after death. No one can come into heaven when the journey of his earthly life is over, and the body is laid aside, unless he has received the things of heaven into his mind. The heavenly things, which must be received, are love to the Lord, faith in Him, and charity toward others. This last expresses itself in kindness, generosity, and use.

At first, however, our minds do not have these things. They are inhabited by things directly opposite—by the love of self, pride and contempt, which expresses itself in cruelty, greed and the desire to rule over those about us. In these things evil spirits abide. They dwell in our minds, even as the wicked nations dwelt in the land of Canaan. So long as these evil spirits remain in possession of our minds, we cannot be admitted into heaven. To do so would be to bring suffering on the angels and unhappiness to ourselves. For evil spirits hate the Lord. They despise the things of heaven. They seek to destroy everything that the angels love and cherish. They must be conquered and driven out before the Lord and the angels can abide with us.

This, then, is what the Lord would teach us by the story of the spies and the giants they saw. We must have faith in Him. We must not be afraid. We must be willing to face the enemy with courage, and advance against him with confidence, knowing that, however powerful are the giants who inhabit the land, the Lord is stronger than they, and He will drive them out before us.