

A MAN AND HIS MOUNTAIN

by David H. Roper

I am discovering that the Christian life is the most exciting life in the world. I have not always been convinced of this. When I was a young man I thought it was the number one impediment in my life, the thing that was keeping me from enjoying an abundant life. But I am coming to see that God knows how life is supposed to be lived. God wants to fill us and flood us and use us. And to my way of thinking, there is really nothing quite as exciting as knowing God in a personal way and seeing him at work. There is an element of risk and adventure, of victory and of conquest. The apostle Paul said that we have turned from idols to serve the living and the true God.

The Bible has some very strong words about what the Christian life is intended to be. Paul says, "Thanks be to God who *always* leads us in triumph." Now that is an amazing verse. That means that when we walk in the Spirit, even though we may not see results, we can expect God to be triumphing in us. John says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith." Christ says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." John says, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." Paul says, "Sin shall not have dominion over you." There is no habit or sin that can reign in your life. Christ says, "The works that I do you shall do, and greater works than I do shall you do, because I go to the Father." Paul says, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." And again, to Timothy he says, "God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, and of love, and a sound mind."

Now those are words of tremendous encouragement. We can expect certain things in our life. We can expect, for instance, that there can be no habit that will control us, no sin that can have mastery in our lives. There is never a circumstance for which we are not adequate. There is never a temptation that we have to give way to, never a fear, frustration or failure that will rule in our lives, no pressure too great, no person we cannot face, no situation too difficult. That is why I think the Christian life is exciting, because if these things are true, they are the very things that men are looking for in life. This is why Christ said, "I am come that ye might have life, and might have it more abundantly." There ought to be a great overwhelming sense of joy and freedom, release and liberty in our lives.

Now why is it that we do not find this to be true? Why are we not experiencing this kind of life? If we have all of God's resources for life, why is it that we are not availing ourselves of what he has given to us? Why are there so many defeated, frustrated lives? Why do circumstances and people and moods and the weather control our lives? Why are there so few real miracles in our lives? Why is our witness so ineffective and neutral?

I would like to share with you some answers from the life of an Old Testament man, Caleb. Here is an amazing character, and one of many characters in the Scriptures who give us some very basic answers to life. I think we can find in his life an example of the abundant life and how to achieve it. Paul said that these things--these Old Testament events--happened for our admonition. This is sober history. These things actually occurred. Yet the primary import of these events is spiritual. We can learn from them. The life of Caleb will supply some basic

spiritual principles by which we can obtain the abundant life that we are looking for.

First, I would like to give you a little bit of background, because this helps us to understand something of the events that are recorded in this 14th chapter of Joshua, from which comes the incident in Caleb's life which we will be studying. In Numbers 13, we have the first mention of this man, Caleb, who was one of twelve spies sent into the land of Canaan to reconnoiter and to bring back a report to Moses. The children of Israel had left the land of Egypt some months prior to this, had traveled across the Sinai peninsula, and now they were standing on the edge of the promised land. Moses selected twelve men, one representative from each tribe, to explore the land. God had already told the nation what they could expect. He told them this was a land flowing with milk and honey, that there were adequate resources to sustain them as a nation, but there would also be problems. There were hostile nations living in the land--there would be opposition, and it would be with difficulty that they would conquer the land--but the land was theirs; the promise was secure. There could be no doubt in their minds about the final outcome because God had promised that they would have the land. And so Moses commissioned these spies and sent them into the land to bring back a report. Numbers 13 records how they traveled from the extreme southern region of the land all the way to the north. When they were about halfway through their exploration they arrived in the area near what is now Jerusalem, at a mountain called Hebron. It was a mountain that had a great deal of significance to Israel because it was the place where Abraham had received the Covenant securing the land for the nation, and had been given the assurance of a seed for a nation. It was there that Abraham and Sarah lived, along with Isaac and Jacob.

But after Abraham and his descendants had left it, the land had been occupied by a group of people called the Anakim. Here was the place of blessing, but surrounding it, a hostile nation, the Anakim, the sons of Anak. Now it is interesting how the Scriptures very often give us a little sidelight that at the time does not seem very significant, but when we put all the pieces together we see how it fits. The sons of Anak were an infamous tribe, a savage group of people that were known throughout the land of Palestine. In Scripture there are three names that are recorded, names given to them by neighboring tribes. One group of people called them Emim. Emim means "the terrors," "the terrible ones," "the horrible ones." Another group of people called them the Rephaim, "the ghosts," "the shadowy ones." The Hebrew people later called them the Nephilim, "the fallen ones," the ones who were descended from the great giants of Genesis 6. One of the relatives of Anak was a man named Og who was a giant. Scripture tells us he was so big that his bed measured 12 feet by 6 feet. So we get a little bit of information about these people and we see they were a pretty formidable group of foes. They were like the man who crossed a parrot and a lion. The offspring was a pretty odd-looking creature, but when it talked, people listened. That is what these people were, a fearful group of foes surrounding the place of greatest blessing. the mount called Hebron.

When the spies came back they reported on the land and the climate. It was good land, suitable for them. They brought back evidence--a great bunch of grapes they had picked near the mount of Hebron, so great it had to be carried between two men. They reassured the people that it was exactly as God had said--a land flowing with milk and honey. The only problem was that the sons of Anak were here. And the amazing thing is that, despite all of God's promises, they began to describe this group of people in the most fearful terms. The book of Numbers records that a great wave of anxiety swept over the people and, despite God's promises, they would not go in. They would not enter the land. Caleb quieted the people and explained that they were adequate for this. Remember, Caleb was one of the spies. He had seen the Anakim, but he had also seen God. He knew that God had said the land was theirs if they would follow him in obedience. He makes a very interesting statement. He says, literally,

"We are strong with strength." We are strengthened with God's strength, we have every resource to go into the land. God has promised it. The promise is secure. Now let's take it, let's go. Rather than responding to his plea the people picked up stones to stone him. They were so afraid that they wanted to kill the man who exhibited courage.

Now to condense a lot of material, the rest of the account records how God came down in his glory and confronted the people and told them that he would destroy them as a nation. Moses interceded for them and pointed out that God's glory would be at stake. The other nations would despise him if he obliterated the nation and so God pardoned them. But he swore in his wrath, as the book of Hebrews says, they would never enter his rest. The only men among them who would go into the land would be Caleb and Joshua, who was another of the spies and who had supported Caleb. This was literally fulfilled. The ten spies who had brought back the evil report died of a plague. In the forty years of wandering in the wilderness that followed, death came to all the members of the nation of Israel who were twenty years old and upward at the time of this faithlessness. They could not enter the land because of unbelief. Only Caleb and Joshua could enter the land.

We pick up the story in Joshua 14, forty-five years later. The generation that rebelled against God was dead. Only these two men, Joshua and Caleb, remained. The first part of chapter 13 records that the Lord said to Joshua, "You are old and advanced in years and there remains yet very much land to be possessed." In the forty-five years that had passed they had wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Then there had been a campaign of five years in the land of Palestine. They had driven out most of the nations that had occupied the land and now they were ready to partition the land of Palestine among the nation of Israel. And as Joshua began to divide the inheritance we read that Caleb, the son of Jephunnen, broke into this process and made his claim of land. You see, God had promised forty-five years before that Caleb would have the land that he wanted. He would have the mountain of Hebron. Three additional times in the book of Numbers this covenant is confirmed. Caleb would have the land because "he wholly followed Jehovah," because he was obedient, he was willing to walk by faith. And now Caleb again claims his inheritance.

As far as we know, Caleb was not a Jew. He was of the family of Edomites who had been attached to the nation of Israel. He had no national right--no birthright, but, on the authority of God's word, he was willing to claim what was his, by right, because God had promised it to him. This gives us the first clue to the spirit of this man--the first principle that leads us into the abundant life: *he wanted what God wanted for him*. Hebron means fellowship. It is the place of God's blessing, the place of personal experience of God, the place where Abraham met God face to face, where Abraham was called the friend of God. It stands in our own experience for the place, as Paul says, where we come to "know him in the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings." Where there is an intimate, personal experience with Jesus Christ in our life--the place of blessing and service.

This is what God wants for us--the best. This is why it is not so difficult to yield our will to the authority of Jesus Christ. He has 20/20 foresight; we have 20/20 hindsight. Therefore, to yield up our will to him is not a difficult thing if we understand that he really loves us and wants us to enjoy the place of fellowship and enjoyment and the abundant life of which he speaks. Hebron is the place of fellowship.

But the Anakim are the obstacles to fellowship. They are always around. They are the things that keep us from yielding our will to his authority. Caleb wanted the place of fellowship. He wanted the very best, therefore the Anakim were no problem to him. He could have retired to an old soldiers' home. He had fought the good fight.

He had endured this generation of people when they groaned and complained and groused in the wilderness. He had fought to secure the land, he had given his best, he was seeking God's very best for his life. At all costs he wanted to have God's best and so he chose the mountain, the difficult place. rather than a quiet, secluded valley away from the heat of battle. I think this is a starting point in our life. When we are willing to want what God wants for us--no matter what the consequences may be--we begin to live. We begin to enjoy a kind of abandonment and freedom in our lives that we can know in no other way. Many of you have had the privilege of seeing people give their lives to Jesus Christ and to discover the freedom and the liberty of that new life. And perhaps we have all experienced in our own lives the times when we have been arguing with God and refusing to submit to his authority, to give way to him, to allow him his right to reign and rule in our lives, but then finally we have enjoyed the freedom and liberty that results from that submission.

This is what sustained Caleb in the wilderness. For forty years he had borne with these people. Imagine what it must have been like to be the only senior citizen in a group of young people, all of them at least twenty years his junior, as they wandered in the wilderness, complaining about the weather, complaining about their leadership. complaining about circumstances. Yet all the time Caleb was making plans to enter the land. This is why Caleb said he was just as strong today as he was the day he was sent out as a spy--just as buoyant, just as eager. While they complained, he was plotting strategy. He could hardly wait. He was saying, "Let me at those Anakim!" What sustained his life? He wanted God's very best and knew that God was going to give it to him. And I am convinced that the same attitude of expectancy should be ours. When we give up our rights, when we allow Jesus Christ to take his place on the throne, when we want what he wants, we begin to enjoy life. Christ said that if a man would save his life, he must lose it. And if the seed would grow and come to maturity it must first die. It must first be planted. Life comes only through death, a giving up of our own rights to his authority, his rule. That is the first principle, *he wanted what God wanted.*

The second principle is: *he believed what God said.* He had implicit faith in God's word. Verse 9:

Moses swore on that day, saying, "Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God."

If you track back through the Old Testament you find that it was God who said this through Moses. He said that Caleb would enjoy the land. Just as certainly as the rest of the tribe would not enjoy his rest, Caleb and Joshua would. And so, on the strength of that promise Caleb says in verse 12,

So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you have heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities: it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord said.

Caleb believed God. There is a statement in the book of Romans in reference to Abraham. It says that he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able also to do. That is how faith operates. It claims what God says is true and accepts God's analysis of every problem. So Caleb took God at his word and he took the hill. In verses 12-19 of chapter 15 we read:

According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, he gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh a

portion among the people of Judah, Kiriatharba, that is, Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak, Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmi, the descendants of Anak. And he went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher. And Caleb said, "Whoever smites Kiriath-sepher, and takes it to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife." And Othmel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field; and she alighted from her ass, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

The land of the Negeb is a desert in the southern part of Palestine. God not only gave Caleb what he wanted but he used Caleb as an instrument of blessing in the lives of others. It was Caleb who was used to share his inheritance with those in need.

Now this is what faith is all about. Faith is really not that difficult--faith is simply taking God at his word. When Paul was shipwrecked, he said to the men around him, "Sirs, be of good cheer. For I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." God had told him prior to this that he was going to get him to Rome. And although all the circumstances around him indicated that he would never make it to Rome--the storm, the ship breaking up out in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, no help visible--Paul still said, "Sirs, I believe God, that it should be even as it was told unto me." That is what faith is. It's simply accepting what God says, venturing yourself on it. It is a willingness to submit yourself to God's leading, to try it out, to experience in your own life that it really works. That is what honors God. And it is those two principles applied in our own lives that allow us to enjoy the abundant life. First of all, a willingness to want what God wants, to abandon ourselves to God and to what he wants in our lives, And secondly, a willingness to believe what God says--that there is no opposition that can stand in our way. There is no habit, no sin, no circumstance, no person, there is absolutely nothing that can keep the place of blessing from us if we want it and if we trust God for it.

Gracious Father, we thank you that you have called us. It is a great call, and you have told us, "Faithful is he who has called you, and he will do it." What a privilege to know that the victory is secure, that we can have the place of blessing and personal experience of your love and fellowship, that we can enjoy your presence, that we can be your friend, as Abraham was. We know there are obstacles. There are always obstacles to the worthwhile. But we know that obstacles are no problem to you. If we walk by faith the victory is ours. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Make us people of faith, willing to trust you, to launch out no matter what it costs, and believe you for great things. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Catalog No. 0118
Joshua 14:6-14
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