

BIBLE STUDIES

"Men From The Past With A Message For The Present"

CALEB: THE MAN WHO WANTED A MOUNTAIN **Numbers 13 and Joshua 14**

The Bible contains more than 2,500 proper names of people. These are men and women who lived in real life situations quite similar to our own. The period of time and the place of their existence makes little difference for the human condition varies but little. The external culture may change but the internal nature is the same.

Somewhere in the Bible we can meet ourselves! Among all the persons mentioned in it, there is to be found a person just like we are - someone with an experience, troubles, strengths, weak-nesses and problems just like ours. There are certain invariable and unchangeable life situations with which we can identify. For the basic situations of life, the Bible offers basic solutions. Therefore, we can learn from men and women of flesh and blood who actually faced life on earth as we do.

Among the 2,500 people named in the Bible, Caleb is one of the outstanding ones. The name "Caleb" is found 40 times in the Bible. We often hear the saying, "Life begins at forty." But for Caleb, life seemed to end at forty. You see, Caleb and Joshua were among the twelve spies who were sent over the Jordan River into Canaan to spy out the land preparatory to the invasion. They were to bring back a report to Moses.

They surveyed the land and reported back to Moses. The report was not unanimous. Ten of the spies said that while the land of Canaan was indeed a fruitful land, it was also a fortified land; while there were big grapes, there were also tall giants who made them feel like grasshoppers! They agreed that they would like to have the land and live there, but they feared that they would not be able to overcome the obstacles.

However, there were two men who did not suffer from the grasshopper complex. They were Joshua and Caleb. They came to an altogether different conclusion. They said, "*We are able to overcome. Let us go up and possess it.*" (Num.13:30) The people, however, listened to the faithless ten, accepted the minority report, and voted down Joshua and Caleb. They turned back into the wilderness and wandered around for 40 years until all that faithless generation died off, except Caleb and Joshua.

Out of this story of national defeat emerges an amazing story of personal victory. It is the story of a man who believed in the midst of unbelief; a forward looking man among backward lookers; a brave man among cowards. This is the story of a man who wanted a mountain – Caleb was his name.

His life can be divided into three different periods:

- In the first, we see Caleb Spying For Moses;
- In the second, we see Caleb Eyeing The Mighty;

- In the third, we have Caleb Claiming His Mountain.

Let us follow this unusual man through these three periods in his life and learn lessons for our lives from his life.

I. CALEB, SPYING FOR MOSES.

"From the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh Then Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like." (Numbers 13:6 & 17)

Caleb was one of the twelve spies sent out by Moses to go ahead and survey the land of Canaan. He was one of the first to set foot in the land that Israel would later occupy.

A. ***The Responsibilities That He Had.***

Canaan was new territory. It was wise to check it out and, as Moses said, *"Go up this way into the South, and go up to the mountains, and see what the land is like: whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many; whether the land they dwell in is good or bad; whether the cities they inhabit are like camps or strongholds; whether the land is rich or poor; and whether there are forests there or not. Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land." Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes."* (Numbers 13:17-20)

Caleb was to be a prospector.

He was to reconnoiter the status of the enemy forces, check out the fortifications, forests and the fruit of the land and when he had done this he reported that it was a land that *"flows with milk and honey."* (Numbers 13:27) That is, it was a land of plenty.

There are few today who can see the great prospects that lie ahead of us in the service of the Lord. Relatively few can visualize the prospects that a new day, a new year can bring. Few can see the opportunities of advancing the cause of Christ or building a great work for God. For every prospector there are ten objectors; for every optimist there are many pessimists; for every believer there are myriads of doubters. Which are you? Caleb could have written the following words:

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities and cries,
"It shall be done!"

Caleb was a pathfinder.

James Fennimore Cooper wrote a book that was one of my favorites when I was in High School titled, "The Pathfinder." Caleb was a pathfinder for God's people as they prepared to occupy their new homeland. He was an explorer blazing new trails for others who were to follow. So have been all great Christian leaders of the past such as Carey, Judson, Livingstone, Hudson Taylor etc. They went out forging new trails that others would walk. That was what Caleb was doing. He, along with all those who are mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11, are witnesses to us that walking by faith encourages others to follow.

Caleb was a pioneer.

Pioneers do not sit in chaise lounges and make discoveries. Pioneers love to explore new frontiers and unearth treasures. It was while Caleb was pioneering for God that he made a discovery that changed his life. One day as he was spying out the land he came to a mountain top with a breath-taking view. He looked out on a fertile place called Hebron and said to himself, "This is for me!"

It was there that Abraham had lived nearly 500 years before and it was here that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were buried. Caleb wanted this choice mountainous area even though it was now inhabited by giant-sized men. He set his heart on it that day and as he started back to report to Moses, he said to himself, "Someday, with God's help, I'll be back!"

We need more pioneers for God today. Not pioneers in the sense that we make new geographical discoveries, but men and women who will dare to be different, who will embark on a faith venture and reclaim lost territory for God in their own lives; who will throw themselves unreservedly into the fight for the faith and extend themselves in order to extend the cause of Christ in the enemy territory of this world.

B. The Risks That He Ran.

The spies came back from exploring Canaan and ten of them "Saw giants affrightingly tall; two saw God and knew they would fall!" This is the scriptural account:

"We went to the land where you sent us. It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large; moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the South; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan." Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." (Numbers 13:27-31)

There are risks to be run when we pioneer for God. This is one reason why there are few prospectors, pathfinders and pioneers blazing new trails in mission and ministry. We like to travel in well worn ruts. The risk of paving new paths is great. There is the risk of:

Aloneness.

Caleb and Joshua stood alone against an entire nation. Not only were they in the minority among the 12 spies, but when they gave the minority report the people refused to believe them and turned back and died in the wilderness.

It is human to stand with the crowd; it is divine to stand alone amidst disbelief! It is man-like to follow the crowd, to go with the flow, to drift with the tide; it is God-like to follow a principle and stem the tide! It is natural to perpetuate fashion; it is spiritual to perpetuate faith. Faith has been out of fashion ever since Adam changed his robe of light for a garment of leaves. Faith must often stand alone. Consider this:

- Noah and his family built and voyaged alone;
- Abraham wandered and worshipped alone;

- Joseph dreamed great dreams and was left alone in the pit and prison;
- Elijah sacrificed on Mt. Carmel alone;
- Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone;
- Daniel prayed and was left with the lions alone;
- Paul said, “no man stood with me, all men forsook me.”
- Jesus was often alone. He has been called “the lonely Galilean.”

God is looking for men and women who will stand for truth and duty at the cost of fame, fortune and friends, if need be.

Misunderstanding.

It is costly to sponsor a cause that the majority opposes. It is easy to maintain a guilty silence. But at the risk of being misunderstood and labeled “fanatic” Caleb hazarded all for God. Caleb had been to the mountain. He saw the vision clear; the others saw mists. Caleb looked through the eyes of faith, the others looked through the eyes of doubt. Mists hang about mountain tops. In spite of the mists, Caleb wanted that mountain. He had ascended above the mists. He had seen the clearer picture. Persons who cannot see through the mists must be content with living in the lowlands.

I believe that Caleb and Noah had this in common: they were the most misunderstood men of their respective days. Noah wanted a boat; Caleb a mountain. The populace of their days did not understand. The majority was living for the present while Noah and Caleb were living for the future. There is more to life than “now.” Caleb said, “Give me that mountain! It will be but a little while and the mists will evaporate and the mountain will stand out in all its grandeur and the view from its summit will be worth the climb!”

Unpopular.

You can be sure that Caleb and Joshua were not popular with the other ten spies. Ten against two. He was a brave man among cowards, an assured man among skeptics. I challenge anyone to name from memory the ten spies who ran were faithless and fearful. They are all named for us but no one remembers faithlessness, cowards and quitters. We remember Caleb because he dared to risk everything for God.

What risks have you ever run for God in this anti-God world? Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I challenge you to forge ahead by faith and believe God for that mountainous matter that looms ahead of you.

C.T. Studd, a great missionary wrote:

“Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”

I want to be a Caleb type Christian – seeing the humanly improbable yet believing God for the impossible; pressing on the upward way, gaining new heights every day. I sign all my e-mail with: “Onward ‘Til Upward!” I believe that Caleb would have like that signature.

II. CALEB EYEING THE MIGHTY.

When the ten spies said, “*We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we*” (Numbers 13:31) that generation turned back and never did go into Canaan. Caleb’s hopes of getting his mountain seemed to have been dashed. This was the most difficult time of his life.

Caleb’s eye of faith saved him during this most difficult period. At this time he is past forty years of age, he is in his middle years of his life, that period of life beyond young adult-hood but before the onset of old age. By this time the average person is well on their way to accomplishing the goals they set for themselves many years before. But not Caleb.

He had been faithful to spy out the land when Moses sent him; he had pioneered and helped blaze the trail that others would eventually follow; he had been ready, even eager, to press ahead and occupy the land of Canaan that God had promised to His people, but through no fault of his own he was prevented from realizing his dream of capturing that mountain up in Hebron because of the unbelief of others. He was ready to go into the Promised Land but he was temporarily held back because of the faithlessness of others.

He seems to be a failure at forty. But the story is not over yet. This is what God said, “*they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.*” (Numbers 14:23-24)

It was to be forty years before Caleb realized his dream. In the meantime he was faced with war, famine and pestilence in the wilderness with the unbelieving generation that rebelled against God by refusing to possess the land of Canaan. He was forced to wait and watch while a whole generation died off.

How did he keep alive his vision of conquering a mountain? How did he retain his spiritual vigor and his sense of purpose? How did he keep the flame of hope burning when everyone and everything around him seemed so hopeless?

The answer is the secret of anyone’s spiritual success. It is called vision or spiritual sight. We are told that Moses, “*By faith forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*” (Heb. 11:27) Moses possessed the eye of faith. Caleb also possessed the eye of faith and that carried him through those middle years, those years between the vision and the reality, between the hope and the realization. Notice two things about Caleb in this regard:

A. He Kept His Eye On God – The Upward Gaze.

Seven times in scripture we are told that Caleb “*wholly followed the Lord.*” Literally, this statement in the Hebrew is, “He was full to fully go after God.” That is, he was consumed with the desire to follow God. He, like Enoch, walked with God.

Caleb had a keen God-awareness. He followed the Lord because he kept his eye of faith upon the Lord. It is just that simple! You cannot follow someone unless you watch as you walk. Likewise, you cannot go after God without possessing the eye of faith that is looking

heavenward. Caleb practiced the Hebrews 12:1-2 principle; “*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*”

It was the Godward gaze that enabled Caleb to make it through all those middle years of his life, waiting in the wilderness. Much happened to others in those intervening years but Caleb did not change. The 10 faithless spies died along with the whole company of doubters. Failure and frustration was everywhere. Moses also died and Joshua became the new leader.

But Caleb never forgot the mountain up in Hebron.

B. He Kept His Eye On The Goal. – The Onward Gaze.

Caleb did not wilt in the wilderness because he not only kept his eye on the Promiser but he kept his eye on the promise as well! Others proposed to return to Egypt, but not Caleb – his goal was the place that he had been promised. God had made him a promise and he kept his eye upon it.

Caleb reminded Joshua, the new leader, of Moses’ promise to him that he could have possession of the mountainous area around Hebron. Moses had said, “*Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children’s forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.*” (Joshua 14:9) He also reminded Joshua that God had given him that land: “*Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day.*” (Joshua 14:6)

God’s promises never become obsolete. They are always of value until they are fulfilled. For over forty years the promise of God had fed the fire of Caleb’s faith. Three times in the course of Caleb’s short conversation with Joshua in Joshua chapter fourteen, he uses the expression: “*the Lord said*” or “*the Lord spoke.*” (Joshua 14:6,10,12) Faith is predicated upon the word of God.

God promised him land and that meant that God intended to keep him alive until he possessed it. Every day that Caleb awoke, was proof that God was keeping His promise. During those lean years during which he was forced to endure the wilderness experience because of the unbelief of his countrymen, Caleb kept his eye upon his God and his goal. He did not lose sight of the future because of the clouds in the present.

If you do not have the opportunity to move forward immediately because of the unbelief of others around you, then pray that God will give you Caleb-like faith to be patient and to watch and wait and be prepared to move forward when the way is cleared. Remember, the future is as bright as the promises of God and whoever builds his/her life upon God’s promises has the guarantee eventual fulfillment.

On his voyage to discover America, as day after day no land appeared, and again and again his crew tried to persuade him to turn back, even threatening mutiny, Columbus refused to heed them. Daily he entered into the ship’s Log Book two words, ”Sailed on.” He never lost sight of his goal. And neither should we!

I stood with my aged parents on their carport at their retirement home in Florida, watching the sky very early one morning. We were waiting to see the space craft that was to be launched.

The television was turned on in the house and we were listening to the countdown and watching the sky. When the rocket was launched the sky lighted up with a brilliant glow that could be seen for hundreds of miles. Dad said, "I've been listening to the countdown and watching for the coming of the Lord for years. When He comes, it will be more glorious than that!" Like Caleb, we believers must keep our eyes upon the goal and press "*toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" (Phil.3:14)

III. CALEB ASKING FOR A MOUNTAIN.

We come to the last chapter in Caleb's life which is the most exciting. When the new generation under Joshua's leadership had conquered much of Canaan, the country was divided between the tribes of Israel. Now, after all these years, Caleb believes it is time to claim the land that he had seen so long ago when he was on the spying mission for Moses.

A. Caleb Claiming His Mountain.

Caleb went to Joshua and claimed the mountain that he had set his heart upon more than forty years before. He said, "*Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said.*" And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite to this day, because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel." (Joshua 14:12-14)

For 45 years since the spying mission where he discovered the mountain that he wanted, the fire had been burning in Caleb's heart. He had kept his eye upon God and the goal and now he was about to realize his vision. He said to Joshua, "*give me this mountain.*"

Someone wrote a chorus about Caleb's claim containing these words:

*I want that mountain
Where the milk and honey flow
And the grapes of Eschol grow;
I want that mountain
That the Lords has given me!*

Caleb made his greatest faith claim at age 85. He said to Joshua, "*And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old.*"¹¹ *As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in.*" (Joshua 14:10-11)

Some people are old at age 40, others are young at age 85. Youth is not only a time of life, it is a state of mind. Genuine faith never grows old. When others were yawning, Caleb was yearning. At the age when others were looking for a landing strip, Caleb was looking for a

launching pad! John Know cried out to God, “Give me Scotland or I die!” Caleb cried, “Give me this mountain!”

Have you ever claimed a mountain by faith? Mountains come in a variety of forms and sizes. To begin with, there is the mountain of the devil - that mountain would like to barricade all of us from God’s best; there is the flesh with its lust, pride and greed that we need to conquer; there is the world to be overcome. These mountains are before all of us. Then there are the mountains of opportunity that loom before us and require the response of faith to ascend. There are mountains in our ministries, our families and our personal lives that are challenges for us. May God give the faith and courage to say of them, “Give me this mountain!” and having claimed it follow through and climb it.

B. Caleb Climbing His Mountain.

“And Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh as an inheritance.” (Josh.14:13)

Claiming is one thing, climbing is quite another. It is my observation that there is more claiming than climbing by many Christians in our day. Claiming is relatively easy to do and pertains to “talk”; climbing pertains to “walk.” When Joshua gave Caleb that which he had claimed by faith, the climb began. The Hebron area was uphill, the territory was rough, infested with giants and the cities were walled. Caleb had his work cut out for him.

Mountains make Calebs! He could not put on soft slippers, sit in an easy chair enjoying ease and self-indulgence and climb to higher ground. The soul grows and matures in faith and power in exact proportion to the size of the mountains one undertakes to climb for God. Caleb made it to the top. That reveals that Caleb’s claim was not just spiritual talk in a church prayer meeting!

In a little churchyard in Switzerland is a tombstone on which is an unusual epitaph. The man buried there had been a famous mountain climber and had been killed by an avalanche. The inscription reads: “He died climbing.” That would be a fitting epitaph for Caleb, however, he did not die climbing. There is more to the story.

C. Caleb Clashing On The Mountain.

“Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak from there: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak.” (Joshua 15:14)

What an amazing story! Caleb appeared to be finished at forty but here he is alive and armed at eighty-five and clashing with giants, taking possession of his mountain that he claimed forty-five years before. What faith! What a man! Can’t you imagine the surprise of those giants when they saw an eighty-five year old man marching into their town? I suspect that their reaction was similar to that of Goliath’s when the boy David approached him. He was indignant to think that such a weakling would dare challenge him.

Caleb and David share something in common, both fought giants. David, when he was considered to be too young and Caleb when he was considered to be too old. Faith is ever

new and fresh, it never grows old. We are never too young or too old to slay the giants that block us from possessing our possessions in Christ.

Caleb said, “*the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out.*” Joshua 14:12) That spirit is not dead yet. It has lived all down through the history of the church. It is the spirit of the true Christian soldier. It is the essence of what Paul said when he wrote, “*we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*” (Rom.8:37)

Caleb was an upward gazing, onward going man who, by faithfully following God and fighting the good fight of faith, became “King of The Hill.” He is a great example for young and old alike that “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Heb. 11:6) and “*with God all things are possible.*” (Matt.19:26)

“Faith, mighty faith the promise sees
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities and cries
“It shall be done!”

CONCLUSION

“*My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.*” (Num.14:24) On six separate occasions the Holy Spirit has recorded the fact that Caleb wholly followed the Lord.(Num.14:24; 32:11-12; Deuteronomy 1:36; Joshua 14:8, 9 and 14) What does it mean to follow the Lord wholeheartedly? What does it imply?

1. Faith.

Caleb said, “*the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out.*” Joshua 14:12) Caleb was first and foremost a man of faith. He and Joshua believed God when all the others doubted.

2. Focus – concentration. “*follows me wholeheartedly.*” It means to be a Christian with a set purpose and that purpose is to follow wholeheartedly, not half-heartedly!

3. Fidelity. To follow the Lord wholeheartedly implies unwavering loyalty. It means absolute allegiance to our Lord and Master.

4. Fight. Paul tells us to “*Fight the good fight for the true faith*” (I Tim.6:12 NLT) and “*I have fought a good fight.*” (2 Tim.4:7) He was talking about advancing the cause of Christ and His church against the devil. This is the spirit of the true Christian soldier of which Caleb is a great example.

Caleb was an upward gazing, onward going man who, by faithfully following God and fighting the good fight of faith, became “King of The Hill.” That was Caleb. That can be you!

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