

Caleb and His Loyalty

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Caleb was one of the less prominent men in the Old Testament, yet he presents one of the most striking examples of loyalty to God, and the Scriptures show that his reward was substantial.

From the 14th chapter of Joshua, we learn that Caleb was the son of Jephunneh, a Kenezite who had probably migrated from the mountains of Southern Canaan and had become attached to the tribe of Judah, and consequently was a stranger to the covenants of promise. He was one of the first fruits of the Gentile harvest of which there were many samples in the Old Testament. However his birth barrier did not hinder him from being an Israelite in spirit. The apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian Christians addressed them as formerly aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but now in Christ Jesus they had been made nigh by the blood of Christ, therefore they were no more strangers and sojourners but fellow-citizens with the saints (Eph. 2:12-13, 18).

The name Caleb means “hearty.” Achievement in every path of life depends on willing energy or heartiness, so it is not surprising that Caleb’s history is written as if it were traced out by a sunbeam. He reminded Joshua of their association in spying out the land of Canaan forty-five years before, that they had the temerity to present a minority report about, which was full of encouragement and cheerfulness because they had viewed the land with the eyes of God. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The word “cheerful” is literally “hilarious” which denotes wholeheartedness.

The majority report of the spies was full of discouragement and gloom. Caleb strove to annul the ill effect of that report upon the hearts of the people by stilling their excitement. Blessed indeed is the peacemaker who introduces restful influences. Caleb’s associates had melted the courage of Israel. He strove to reinforce them in the sense of the greatness of God’s power.

The mob vote in the power of majority is seldom right, but the majority in Scripture record was never right. So it is well to sift the moral value of a contention rather than to be guided by desire for mere popularity of the crowd.

At eighty-five years of age Caleb was as strong as he had been in his youth. It is the end which tests the strength of a persuasion. The apostle Paul could say at the end of his course, “I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith.” Many young Christians make a good start in the “Marathon” race of faith but they fail to last the pace. It is good to see a flourishing old age marked by courage and spiritual fervour. The

Christian is not normally going on to spiritual decrepitude but to the brightest and the best moment. Eternal life is a state of perennial youth!

Caleb speaking of the Lord having kept him alive attributes his vigour to the mercy of God. At sixty years of age the apostle Paul spoke of himself as aged but he was very vigorous in soul experience to the end. Caleb's request was for the mountain of Hebron. The mountain in Old Testament type speaks of the faithfulness of God.

"All the promises of God in Christ are Yea and Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Caleb expressed complete confidence in God to enable him to drive out the giants. Martin Luther once said that God and he were more than a match for all the opposition in the world when his friends sought to convince him of the futility of striving against such odds alone. Hebron means fellowship. Its former name Kirjath-Arba means city or stronghold of Arba, one of the Anakim giants. That reference forcibly reminds us that Saul of Tarsus was head and shoulders above his contemporaries in a moral sense, while after his conversion he became Paul, a nobody in the world's assessment, yet an assiduous worker in strengthening the bonds of fellowship.

Caleb had wholly followed the Lord and his reward was the mountain of Hebron. He had rich compensation in this life but required patience in waiting forty-five years for it. So whole-hearted discipleship leads to fellowship.

Caleb received blessing of Joshua who confirmed him in the esteem of the new generation of Israel. A faithful life can stand review in retrospect. So at the judgment seat of Christ the whole panorama of life will be unfolded to our wondering gaze and above all we shall be impressed with the majesty of the mercy and patience of God. To anticipate the judgment seat by subjecting our lives to scrutiny now is good policy.

Twenty years later we find Caleb still going strong in the Lord's work as evinced by the record of Judges 1, he offered the hand of his daughter Achsah to the conqueror of Kirjath-Sepher, which means the "city of books." In these later days the printing press has been used in God's service, but perhaps it has been a more powerful agent in the opposition to God's work. There is not much ground to be gained by arguing with infidels. "Casting down imaginations (lit. reasonings or logic) and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5), is more relevant to the annulling of reasonings which arise in one's own mind, tending to reduce the spiritual fervour. And so the provision of an antidote to the fruits of intellectualism is a very important element in the equipment of every servant of the Lord.

Subsequent to this episode, Achsah sought a blessing or a present from her father who had given her a south land and she desired springs of water and Caleb gave her the upper and nether springs. The Christian has got a rich land of inheritance in Christ on which the sun of God's favour ever shines. It is well watered by the Word of God which shows our spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus as the upper springs and the counterpart of the nether springs in Christ being in us as the sure pledge of future glory made good in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So it is good for an aged Christian to be passing on the blessings and responsibilities of Christianity to the next generation. One of the greatest of 17th century lawyers said that a good lawyer never died in improles (i.e., without issue). He sought to transmit faithfully his ideals to his successors and so it is in Christianity. Such spiritual legacies never add any sorrow, but transmit soul prosperity. Achsah's request was for a blessing or present. These are not necessarily synonymous. Many material legacies or presents result not in blessing but prove curses to the recipients. Let us put increasing stress on the importance of spiritual legacy!

The New Testament counterpart of Caleb is to be found in the short epistle of Jude, whose other name was Lebbeus which means "hearty." In verse 3, he exhorted his readers to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. In verse 20, he addressed them in endearing terms, "Beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." In spite of the success of the great apostasy, he encouraged the people of God to maintain a straight course!