

A Man to Match the Mountain

By David H. Roper

I like to think about Caleb, the subject of this study. I picture him in my mind as tall and skinny -- a tough old bird. He was eighty-five when the events we will read of in Joshua 14 and 15 took place. He is described in the Old Testament as living to a good old age. That expression always intrigues me. A number of the patriarchs are referred to as having lived to a good old age. You know, there is evil old age, and there is good old age. A good old age is filled with good memories, and with assurances of the faithfulness of God throughout the past. That certainly was Caleb's experience -- eighty-five years of age -- and yet he describes himself as one who is as strong as he was in the day when he spied out the land.

Caleb is an interesting character. He was not a Jew; he was an Edomite. This is interesting to reflect upon. He is described in this passage as "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." The Kenizzites were the sons of Esau, and were related to the Edomites, long-standing enemies of Israel. Throughout most of the history of their relationship, the Edomites carried out border wars and skirmishes against the Israelites. Caleb was born outside the covenant people of God; he was not a Jew.

It is interesting to discover, in tracing his lineage in the book of 1 Chronicles, that sometime in the history of his family, he was adopted into the tribe of Judah. There was no special category in Israel for people who formerly were Gentiles. As you know, the Jews looked at people in one of two ways: either you were a Jew, or you were a Gentile. Caleb, and others who came into God's community, were originally Gentiles. But Israel did not establish a thirteenth tribe for such persons; they were absorbed right into God's people and became members of one of the twelve tribes. In this case, Caleb became a member of the tribe of Judah, and was adopted into one of the families. Whereas apparently he had no family before his adoption - at least none that he could be proud of -- he became a member of the aristocracy, because it was from the tribe of Judah that the kings and great leaders of Israel came.

It struck me that a number of Gentile converts in the Old Testament, such as Rahab the Amorite, Ruth the Moabitess, and Caleb the Kenizzite--these three, at least--were taken into the kingly tribe, the tribe of Judah, the Lord's line. I was reminded of the statement in the book of Hebrews that he is not ashamed to call us brothers. These people came right into the middle of the community. They may have looked different, may have dressed differently, and may have come from a different culture, but as far as God's people were concerned, they belonged. Caleb's name, interestingly enough, means "dog." You cannot help but wonder what kind of parents would saddle a child with that sort of name. Since dogs were outcasts in the Eastern culture, I wonder if he were not somehow cast out of his home -- an unwanted child who eventually found his way into the midst of God's people.

In this passage in Joshua 14 and 15, Caleb comes to claim his inheritance. By this time he is the prince of the tribe of Judah, the leading man in Judah, and he comes to claim an inheritance for the tribe and also for himself. He asks for no small thing; he actually asks for the best piece of real estate in the land of Canaan--Hebron. Hebron is one of the highest locations in Canaan, about 3,000 feet above sea level. At this time it was heavily wooded, and it must have been a beautiful spot. It was a place which was associated in the mind of any Jew with the patriarchs. This is where Abraham lived, and where Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob and their wives, were buried. The name "Hebron" means "fellowship." It was the place where Abraham built his altar, and where much of the Abrahamic covenant was given--the promise of the Land and the Seed. So it evoked very important memories in the minds of God's people. It was the best; there was no other place like it in Canaan.

And Caleb had seen it. Unlike the rest of the people, who had not yet been into the Land, Caleb had seen Hebron. Going back into the book of Numbers, we discover that Caleb and eleven other men were sent as spies into the

land of Canaan. After two years in the wilderness, after they had come out of Egypt, the people of Israel came to Kadesh-barnea. And Moses sent twelve choice young men--a prince from each tribe--into Canaan to spy out the land. Caleb and Joshua were two; and names of the other ten have long since been lost to posterity. At least, no one ever remembers their names. I have a friend who regularly challenges people to name for him any of the other ten spies. He says he will pay a dollar per spy! So far he has no takers. But I have memorized a couple, and I'm going to take him up on it next time I see him! But Caleb and Joshua are remembered, because they were the men of faith. They all went into the land, and evidently they partitioned it, each spy taking a portion and investigating that one section. It appears, from Numbers 13, that Caleb went to Hebron. If you have a New American Standard Bible, (you will notice in verse 22 of that chapter, that in the margin there is a change from "they" to "one came,") they spied out the land, but one came to Hebron, evidently referring to Caleb. When he reached Hebron he discovered that, as they had been promised, it was a land flowing with milk and honey. It was a beautiful spot---everything a person could want. It was a wonderful piece of real estate.

But there was one problem: the sons of Anak were there. The Anakim were giants. They had been there for hundreds of years. They were descended from the Nephilim, the fallen ones, from the time of the flood. They are called by a number of different names in the Old Testament, because the nations surrounding Canaan had a variety of names for them. The Moabites called them the "Emim"-- the "terrors," the "horrible ones." Others called them the "Rephaim,"--the "shades," or ghostly ones, the shadowy ones, the mysterious ones. Some called them the "Zamzummins" -- "those who speak gibberish," for they spoke a language no one could understand. They are described throughout Scripture as terrible giants. One of them, named Og, had a bed that measured six feet by twelve feet. They actually existed. In the London Museum there is the femur (upper leg bone) of one of these giants. They estimate that the individual this bone was taken from was some nine feet tall. A whole civilization has been uncovered in this area of Canaan whose buildings were built of large stones. There were giants in the land in those days. As a matter of fact, their name became proverbial for enemies impossible to conquer. In the Pentateuch they are described as terrible enemies. There is the question, "Who can stand before the Anakim?" So, along with the beauties of Hebron there were the sons of Anak. This is always the case. Whenever you want the highest and best, there are always obstacles. That is what Caleb saw, and that is the report Caleb brought back with him to Kadesh.

When the other ten spies came back, they gave what the book of Numbers calls an evil report. As a matter of fact, they lied. They said all the people in the land were giants. But that was not true. There were only a few giants there. And though they correctly assessed it as a place flowing with milk and honey, the thing which bore most heavily on their minds was the fact that the giants were there. And so they said, "We are unable to take the Land." But Caleb and Joshua stood before the entire multitude--a million and a half people--and these men of faith tried to convince them that they could go into the Land and take it for their own. But the people tried to stone them. So God turned his people back at Kadesh, and for thirty-eight years they wandered in the wilderness. That entire generation, from twenty years of age on up, perished in the wilderness. And Caleb and Joshua watched them die, one by one. I calculated once that in order for a million people to die over that thirty-eight-year span of time, seventy-three people a day had to perish. That is a lot of graves to dig! The people were understandably preoccupied with death. Caleb lived in the midst of death.

Yet, throughout that entire period while his generation died (when he finally entered the Land, everyone else was at least eighteen years his junior; he and Joshua were the only senior citizens who made it into the Land), Caleb and his wife were drawing plans for their "A-frame" on Mount Hebron! They were working out battle plans, and preparing to take the Land. Now the time has come for him to claim his inheritance. He fought alongside the other Israelites during the five year campaign, and drove the Canaanites out of the larger areas and the fortified cities. And now he is ready to take some of the hill country. When the tribes receive their inheritance, and they go to take what is rightfully theirs, Caleb says, "I want Hebron. I want the highest and the best. I won't be content with anything else, even though the Anakim are there. Give me Hebron." That is what God promised him - the best. And this is what God wants us to have--the highest and the very best. He does not want us to be content with mediocrity; he wants us to have the best. He wants us to have the completeness of fellowship with him. This is what maturity is--knowing the Father. God seeks those who will worship him, those who will seek the highest

and the very best.

We have just recently completed a study of the book of Ecclesiastes on Sunday evenings at PBC. And we saw again the great theme which runs through that book: the search for the highest good. Solomon had available to him every resource that would make possible this sort of quest. He had unlimited funds, he had a great deal of time, he had power and influence, he had access to libraries that others were denied. So he read books and talked to people, and he experienced life. He spent a great deal of money and time in trying to discover the highest good. And, having done it all, at the end of his days he says, "This is the highest good: fear God." This is the only thing worth living for--a relationship with God. You see, God seeks men and women who seek him with all their hearts. He will give them the very best. Unfortunately, the Lord will almost always give us what we want. If we are content with mediocrity, that is what he will give us. But if we want the best, he will give us the best. He said, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these other things will be given to you." That was Caleb; he wanted the highest and the best, and would not be content with anything inferior. And, as we will discover, God gave it to him. Let us look at Joshua 14, beginning with verse 6:

Then the sons of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know the word which the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought word back to him as it was in my heart. [There is an interesting play on the word "word" here: "God gave his word through Moses that you would have the Land," and, "I came back and gave him the word as it was in my heart." That is, "I want the Land."] Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully. So Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God fully.' And now behold, the Lord has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this hill country about which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord has spoken."

So Joshua blessed him, and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite until this day, because he followed the Lord God of Israel fully.

This was another of these monuments throughout the land of Canaan which parents would point out to their children as indications that God was at work in their midst. Whenever they would pass Hebron, there would be a sign that said,

"Formerly the land of the Anakim; now the home of Caleb and his children forever." Caleb and his family lived there throughout the history of Israel. And on down through the time of the monarchy this particular site was referred to again and again as the "Negev of Caleb". It was known as the place where Caleb drove out the Anakim. Here is this old soldier, who could have retired to an old soldiers' home by the Mediterranean Sea, and lived out the rest of his years in peace. But he wants the best, and he will not be satisfied with anything but the best.

There are a number of things that strike me about this man, and three that come through very clearly. First is his optimism. In verse 8 he said, "My brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt with fear; but I followed the Lord my God fully." This was the characteristic of his life. He was positive. He was convinced that God would do what he promised to do. He took God seriously. When God said, "You'll have Hebron," Caleb said, "Right, I'll have Hebron, even though the Anakim are there, because God has promised." God was true to his word, and Caleb believed him. His later statement, "Perhaps I will gain the land," is really not well translated. There is no thought in Caleb's mind that he might not receive the land. There was no doubt but that he would have

what God had promised. And this gave him a spirit of expectancy and hope and confidence and optimism.

A negative spirit is always the mark of the flesh. The times when we get negative and critical, and are unwilling to act, grow out of a spirit of distrust. Either we do not trust God, or we do not trust God's ability to work in others. I have a friend in Texas who says that the biggest problem in the church is the "aginnners." I asked him what an "aginner" is, and he said it is someone who is "agin" everything. God's people ought to be positive, not negative. God's promises are "Yea and Amen." Is that not what the Scriptures say? Therefore believers ought to be the most positive, constructive, excited people in the world. Enthusiasm comes in different styles. There are people who are quietly enthusiastic; there are those who are exuberantly enthusiastic. But in any case we ought to be hopeful, constructive, positive people--not negative, not even neutral--but optimistic.

I have another friend who used to live in southern California. While they were building his house up on the side of a hill, he was living right on the beach in a cottage that belonged to a friend of his. My family and I were down spending some time with him that summer, and he was telling me of his concern for the young men and women who were on that beach day after day--hundreds of them, virtually untouched by the gospel, and not too responsive. Nothing seemed to work; he did not know what approach to use. But there was about him a spirit of confidence that God was going to do something with these young people. It occurred to him one day that while they would not come to the light, they might come to the warmth. So one night he went down to the beach in front of his cabin, dug a hole in the sand, put some wood in it, squirted a little fire starter on it, lit the fire, and sat down to wait. He knew nights got cold on the beach. Sure enough, people began to drift over to his fire from all over the beach. And through the summer, many of them found the Lord to be their Lord.

You see, this kind of victory grows out of a spirit of confidence that God can do anything, and will do anything, and do it in a creative and unique and unusual way. This is the first characteristic which marks Caleb, and you can see it throughout his life. When the spies came back and said, "We can't do it," Caleb said, "We can too do it; we are strengthened with strength. There is no problem. It may take awhile, and may involve some struggles, but we can do it." The whole nation turned sour and negative: "We can't do it," and tried to stone him. Caleb said "We can do it. We may have to wait, but we'll do it." And he waited for forty-five years, and he did it.

This underscores the second characteristic of Caleb's life: he was successful. What an anticlimax it would be if, having read that Caleb received this promise and waited for forty-five years, we would read in Joshua that Caleb assaulted Hebron, got trounced, and had to run for his skin and that the Anakim are still living there! But that is not what we are told. In Joshua 15, verses 13 and 14, we are told,

Now he gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh a portion among the sons of Judah, according to the command of the Lord to Joshua, namely, Kiriath-arba, Arba being the father of Anak (that is, Hebron). And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai the children of Anak.

These were three of the tribes of giants who lived in Hebron, and he drove them all out. He built his A-frame, settled down, and lived there. And this ought to be the hallmark of our lives as well. There ought to be consistent success, there ought to be victory. As someone has said, we are not intended to be monuments to God's impotence; we are intended to be monuments to his power. And when God promises, he comes through. Time is always an element; it may take time. For Caleb there were forty years under the lash in Egypt, forty years in the wilderness, and five years of fighting for the Land. But when he was eighty-five years old and it was time for him to settle down, he was the victor--he won! This ought to be the characteristic of your life and mine. If we want the best, that is what God will give us. If we want victory over the bad habits, fears, the past, our sins--whatever may be plaguing us--God will give it to us. It may take time, but there will be success.

The third characteristic I see in Caleb's life is that he influenced others. He had an enormous impact upon his own family and upon the nation. Chapter 15, verse 15:

Then he [Caleb] went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir

formerly was Kiriath-sepher.

"Kiriath-sepher" means "city of the books". This was evidently the repository of the sacred books of the Anakim, the hotbed of wickedness. This is where their priesthood lived, where all their evil emanated from, and it was a strongly fortified city. This is one of the cities in Canaan which has been extensively dug, and archeologists have discovered some remarkable things. For one, they have discovered a layer of destruction dating from this very time when the Israelites invaded. Below this layer is a Canaanite city; and above this layer is an Israelite city, just as you would expect. They also found that these people at Kiriath-sepher had built a very unusual sort of defense. They had an outer wall which was relatively easy to breach, and an inner wall which was much, much stronger. In between there was a maze of blind alleys. So anyone getting over the outer wall would be trapped in these blind alleys. This is extraordinary, and is not found anywhere else in Canaan. But this is what the Israelites were faced with. Beginning in verse 16 we read,

And Caleb said, "The one who attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him Achsah my daughter as a wife." And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, captured it; so he gave him Achsah his daughter as a wife. And it came about that when she came to him, she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. So she alighted from the donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you want?" Then she said, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water." So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

These springs are still there today, with hundreds of gallons of water per minute gushing from them. The area around Debir, the Negev, is dry and barren, so they needed those springs. You can see what occurred. Here is this strong Canaanite city, and Caleb says to his young nephew, "You can take it." His nephew, seeing the results of faith in Caleb, took the city. Then his young bride asked for the springs. She was not afraid to ask for the best, for the highest, either. And Caleb became a source of encouragement and strengthening and blessing to his own family. I could not help but think of Jesus' words in John 7, "He who believes in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." Men and women of faith will be a source of blessing and encouragement to others. You will have impact upon their lives. You cannot miss! You will stir others up to faith, and they will believe, as well.

I have just finished reading the first two chapters of Mr. Stedman's new book, [*Authentic Christianity*](#). In one of those chapters, on the basis of 2 Corinthians 2:14, he says that there are three characteristics of the "New Covenant" type of person: unquenchably optimistic (that is Caleb), and unvaryingly successful (that is Caleb), and having unforgettable impact upon others (again, that is Caleb). This is why I chose these three terms exactly--because the same principles you see in the New Testament, you see in the Old Testament in the life of Caleb. There is nothing new. In fact, the term "The New Covenant" which is used in the New Testament really means, "The Renewed Covenant." There are two Greek terms which can be translated "new". One means new in the sense of "brand-new"; the other means new in the sense of "renewed." It is the latter term, "renewed," which is used. It is a renewed covenant. What God did in the life of Caleb he is doing today in the lives of his people.

The secret of this quality of life is found in another statement which is made of Caleb. Six times in these accounts we read that he "followed the Lord his God fully." The Hebrew phrase actually means that he was "filled to the full with God". He was a man who was filled and flooded with the very presence of God, which, again, Paul describes in 2 Corinthians. He describes the minister of the New Covenant as one who is optimistic and successful and influential. He says, "Who is sufficient for these things? Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant...." That was the key to Caleb's success. He wholly followed his God, the Lord God of Israel. He was filled and flooded with the presence of God himself.

Caleb is always looked upon in the Old Testament as a hero. In fact, there is only one other person in the Old Testament who is described in the same terms--as one who wholly followed the Lord--and that was David, who was the hero par excellence, until Messiah came. The characteristic of Caleb's life which set him apart from everyone else was that he wanted the very best. He wanted nothing less than the best. And in order to accomplish

the best, he let God fill him and flood him, and pervade every area of his life. His strength, his sufficiency, was in God. His dependency was upon God. That was the secret of his life. That is what made him a man of influence. That is what gave him the optimism and the victory that he experienced. Now, that was Caleb, the outcast, the one who, from the standpoint of resources, did not have much to offer. He did not have much of a family background, did not have anything within himself to give. And yet, because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel, he was a hero, both in the eyes of God and in the eyes of God's people.

Father, we are told that you said of Caleb that he "had another spirit within him." And we are thankful this morning that we have not the spirit of the world nor a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of wisdom, of discipline, and of love. We would ask that, as Caleb wholly followed you, that this also would be our attitude of hearts. Lord, along with Caleb, we want the very best. And we thank you that because we want it, and because we are willing to trust you, you will provide it. We thank you in Christ's name, Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR FAMILY STUDY

1. First day: Have someone tell the story of the twelve spies from Numbers 13, 14. What was Caleb's role in that adventure? What portion of the Land did Caleb investigate?
2. Second day: Have some member of the family do research and report on the advantages and disadvantages of Hebron, Caleb's inheritance in the Land. What was Hebron like? Who were the sons of Anak and what were they like? (A Bible dictionary will give this information.)
3. Third day: Read or tell the story of Caleb's conquest of Hebron (Joshua 14:6-15; 15:13-19). What motivated Caleb to want the best, despite the hazards involved in that choice? What effect did Caleb's faith have on his family? What is "Hebron" to you and your family? What are the "giants" that can keep you as a family out of Hebron?

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