

He Followed the Lord Wholeheartedly

“Because 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.”

—*Numbers 14:24,*
New International
Version

THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, there are certain individuals whose lives were summarized in just a few words, by which we can immediately identify the person. For example, when we hear the words, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” we think of John the Baptist. The phrase in which God said he had found “a man after mine own heart” to lead

Israel, quickly brings David to our minds.—Matt. 3:1-3; I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22

In our opening text, God speaks of another faithful person, who he says “follows me wholeheartedly.” What a character this individual must have had for the Lord to have made such a statement! As the verse states, it was Caleb of whom these words were

spoken. He was one of more than 600,000 Israelite men, according to a census which was taken early in the second year after they had come out of Egypt. (Num. 1:1-3,45,46) In our consideration of this subject, we will look at the experiences of Caleb's life, which provide the reasons for the praise bestowed upon him by God. In his experiences, we will also find lessons for our own application, in order that we too might follow the Lord wholeheartedly.

SPYING OUT THE LAND

In the Book of Deuteronomy, we are told that the people of Israel came to Moses, and said, "Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to." (Deut. 1:22, *NIV*) Moses agreed to this request and selected twelve men, one from each tribe of Israel, to spy out Canaan, the land promised to their forefathers. (vs. 23) No doubt, all of the twelve men selected were outstanding individuals who were respected and trusted by their respective tribe.

Caleb was the one selected to represent the tribe of Judah. (Num. 13:1-3,6) He later recalled, "Forty years old was I when Moses . . . sent me from Kadeshbarnea" to spy out the land. (Josh. 14:7) Moses gave instructions to the spies before sending them out, saying, "See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwallled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or

not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land.”—Num. 13:18-20, *NIV*

FORTY DAYS

At the end of forty days the spies returned from exploring the land. (vs. 25) A period of forty days is often used in the Bible as a period of testing. When Goliath came to taunt the army of Israel, he did so every morning and evening for forty days. This was a period of testing for Israel’s army. (I Sam. 17:16) When it rained for forty days and nights while Noah and his family were in the ark, it was a test of their faith.—Gen. 7:12

In the New Testament, we recall that after his baptism in the river Jordan, Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and was tempted by the Devil. (Luke 4:1,2) The forty days following Jesus’ resurrection until his ascension was a testing period for the Apostles and his other disciples. It was designed by God to develop their faith as to why Jesus had willingly given his life, and also to realize that he had been resurrected as a mighty spirit being.—Acts 1:1-3

In our present lesson, when the spies returned after exploring the land for forty days, they reported their findings to Moses and Aaron. They “showed them the fruit of the land,” then gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit.” (Num. 13:26,27, *NIV*) Here we note that all twelve spies reported favorably respecting the land. There was no question that it was a very good in every way.

However, ten of the spies—all except Caleb and Joshua—added, “But the people who live there are

powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.” (Num. 13:28, *NIV*) This negative report by a majority of the men created fear and murmuring among the Israelites. Caleb reassured the people, saying, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (vs. 30, *NIV*) Caleb had faith that since God was with Israel, they could indeed take possession of the land, because he would oversee the matter, just as he had done when they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea.

The ten spies, though, wanting to impress their viewpoint upon the Israelites, said, “We can’t attack those people, . . . because they’re too strong compared to us.” Then they did something they should not have done. The account states that they gave a “false report” to the Israelites, saying, “The land that we’ve explored is one that devours its inhabitants. All the people whom we observed were giants. We also saw the Nephilim, the descendants of Anak. Compared to the Nephilim, as we see things, we’re like grasshoppers, and that’s their opinion of us!”—vss. 31-33, *International Standard Version*

Of the two reports, the people of Israel chose to believe the negative and falsified account given by the ten spies. That night the people all “wept aloud” and “grumbled against Moses and Aaron.” They complained, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! . . . Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” (Num. 14:1-3, *NIV*) Imagine the sound of the entire Israelite population weeping and grumbling. The whole nation had ignored the good report from Caleb and Joshua, and the encouragement that God would be with them.

A SLANDEROUS REPORT

The expression “evil report” as used in the *King James Version* of Numbers 13:32 comes from a Hebrew word which means “to slander.” Slander is a false statement made for the purpose of defaming or damaging that to which the statement refers. In this case, the report from the ten spies was slanderous because they lied concerning the difficulties in possessing the land. One of their false statements went so far as to say, “The cities are large, with walls up to the sky.”—Deut. 1:28, *NIV*

It was likewise a slanderous report when the ten spies said, “We also saw the Nephilim.” This was a false statement, because we are told in Genesis 7:21-23 that “all flesh” and “every living substance” were destroyed in the Flood at Noah’s time. This included the “giants” [Hebrew: *Nephilim*] which had been born of women and lived “in the earth in those days.” (Gen. 6:4) Thus, having been destroyed by the Flood, Nephilim could not have been seen by the spies as they surveyed the land.

It was a slanderous report, too, because it ignored all the promises God had previously given to the Israelites—that he would be their God and would give them the land of Canaan. (Lev. 20:24; 25:38) The ten spies disregarded the reality of God’s constant supervision of Israel’s experiences—the plagues he sent in order that they might leave slavery in Egypt, their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the manna which he provided daily for their sustenance.

The evil report also caused the people to slander against God, as we read in the following words of Moses: “You grumbled in your tents and said, The

LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us.” (Deut. 1:27, *NIV*) To the ten spies and all those who believed their evil report, Moses said, “You did not trust in the LORD your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go.”—vss. 32,33, *NIV*

The people were unfazed by Moses’ words. They spoke to one another, and attempted to devise a plan to choose a leader and go back to Egypt. Hearing of this, Caleb and Joshua fell on their faces and rent their clothes. (Num. 14:4-6) In Old Testament times, the tearing of one’s clothes was a sign of extreme grief and sorrow. One such example was when Reuben tore his clothes as a sign of extreme sorrow over Joseph’s having been taken away as a slave to Egypt. Jacob also rent his clothes, as he grieved over the loss of his son Joseph.—Gen. 37:29,34

As Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes, they appealed to all the children of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us. . . . Only rebel not against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; . . . the LORD is with us: fear them not.”—Num. 14:7-9

GOD’S RESPONSE

When the Israelites began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb, God intervened. “The glory of the LORD appeared,” and he told Moses that none of the Israelites who saw the miraculous signs he performed in Egypt and in the desert, but who now

had flagrantly disobeyed him, would live to see the land promised to their forefathers. (Num. 14:10,20-23) The Lord further declared that, except for Caleb and Joshua, “Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, . . . from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me.” (vss. 28-30) We note that, in addition to Caleb and Joshua, the men from the tribe of Levi were also excluded from this judgment, since they were given to the service of the Tabernacle, and were not numbered.—Num. 1:1-3,47-50; Josh. 14:1; 21:1-3

God then said to the Israelites, “Your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, . . . until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, . . . each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities.” (Num. 14:33,34) Following this, the ten spies who had given the evil report were struck down and “died by the plague before the LORD.” (vs. 37) This clearly showed to the rest of the Israelites God’s displeasure with what had taken place. The Scriptures tell us, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Prov. 14:12) How true that was for the spies who had given a slanderous report, and who had steered the Israelites in the way of unrighteousness.

Moses later recorded God’s words, “Not one of these men of this evil generation [shall] see that good land, . . . Save Caleb; . . . he shall see it,” and “Joshua, . . . he shall go in thither.” (Deut. 1:35-38) For the next forty years, Joshua and Caleb would see all around them the men from their generation dying in the wilderness, with the exception of the Levites. At the time when Israel finally entered the land of

Canaan, we can picture in our minds two elderly servants of God, Joshua and Caleb, surrounded by a largely younger generation of male Israelites.

HOW CALEB FOLLOWED THE LORD

Caleb followed the Lord with all his heart by expressing full confidence that “the LORD is with us.” (Num. 14:9) While nearly all the other Israelites were fearful and doubting, Caleb placed his faith and trust in God, rather than in the human strength of himself or others. Our loving and all-powerful Heavenly Father, through Moses, made a promise to Israel. It was such an important promise, God repeated it to Joshua. “Be strong and of a good courage,” God said. He told them not to be afraid because of Israel’s enemies, because “the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. . . . Fear not, neither be dismayed.” (Deut. 31:6-8; Josh. 1:5-7) God has given this same and most important promise to each of us—spiritual Israelites. “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”—Heb. 13:5,6

After entering the land of Canaan, Caleb recalled God’s promise, treasured up in his heart for more than forty years, that he would enter and possess the portion of the land he had so long desired to dwell in. (Josh. 14:6-11) During his sermon on the mount, Jesus spoke to his disciples about “treasures,” saying, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither

moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”—Matt. 6:19-21

Caleb also wholeheartedly followed the Lord by what he did not do. He did not attack the character of the ten spies when Israel believed their slanderous report. Instead, he simply reminded the people of God’s promise to care for them. Even after more than forty years had passed, when he finally entered the land, Caleb used the words “my brethren” when referring to those who had given an evil report. (Josh. 14:8) He refused to speak maliciously of the ten spies.

ILLUSTRATION OF THE CHURCH CLASS

The name Caleb in Hebrew means “dog.” It does not denote a friendly or domesticated animal, however, such as a family pet. Rather, it has the thought of contempt or abasement, as one who is looked down upon and considered of little value. We suggest that Caleb may be a fitting illustration of the church class. All our endeavors toward righteousness are of little or no value, even contemptible, without the merit of Christ’s ransom sacrifice. “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.”—Isa. 64:6

Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of the name Jesus and means, “God saves or delivers.” Just as Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, so also Christ Jesus, the Savior of the world, will deliver mankind into the promised earthly kingdom. This will not be by the former Jewish Law arrangement, but by a “new covenant,”

which God will make with “the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,” and which all the families of the earth will be invited to come under.—Jer. 31:31-34

As Caleb wholly followed the Lord, those during the present Gospel Age who follow God’s only begotten Son Jesus, and are found faithful unto death, will become part of the glorified church class, to live and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) In this regard, it is noteworthy to recall that Caleb was given a special inheritance by God, through Joshua, because of his faithfulness. The account reads: “Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb . . . Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb . . . unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel.” (Josh. 14:13,14) What a beautiful picture we thus have of the hope of the church, as Peter noted: “An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” —I Pet. 1:4

Caleb received the wrath of the children of Israel for having given a good report, and would have been stoned by the Israelites, had God not intervened. With the prospective church class during the Gospel Age, they too may at times receive wrath from some for having given a good and true report from the Scriptures about God’s plans and purposes. They may be, at times, criticized, persecuted, or even slandered. (Luke 21:16,17; John 15:18-20; I Pet. 3:14-17) Caleb had developed a proper faith and trust in God to endure these experiences, and so also should we.

LESSONS FOR US

Faith was necessary during every step in Caleb's life. He had faith in God while spying out the land. He had faith in giving an honest and good report, while the ten other spies did not. He had faith in God's promises for over forty years, that he would indeed enter and possess a portion of the Promised Land.

God could have miraculously armed Israel, making them invulnerable to the attacks from their enemies. He could have miraculously given the Israelites all the courage they would need, in order to enter the land of Canaan. However, God did not do these things. Instead, he wanted Israel to develop faith and trust in him. The Lord deals the same way with us. He could perform miracles on our behalf to give us powers of mind and body superior to every situation we encounter, but he does not.

The Heavenly Father wants us to develop supreme faith and trust in him. "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Heb. 11:6, *NIV*) We must grow toward a faith which fully trusts in God, "By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report as deceivers, and yet true," knowing that "all things" really do work together for good to those who love God and have been called according to his purpose. (II Cor. 6:8; Rom. 8:28) Thus the trials and difficulties which our Heavenly Father permits in our life will draw us even closer to him, and his promises will be more precious to us.

Caleb gave a good report to the people of Israel. What kind of report do we give to those around us?

We should have a sufficiently developed faith to allow us to give a good report of God's direction in our lives, and which trusts in him at all times and in all circumstances. Let us not do as so many of Israel did, and murmur or complain about the difficulties of life. Such a report not only is detrimental to our spiritual life, but could also discourage those around us.

We should continually remind ourselves of God's wonderful promises contained in the Scriptures. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."—Eph. 6:10; II Tim. 1:7; I Pet. 5:7

CONQUERING OUR ENEMIES

Caleb had faith that with God's help, he would be able to conquer the enemies in the land. We must have such a faith, that we are willing, by God's grace and with his help, to conquer our enemies—the world, our fallen flesh, and the devil. The world is our enemy from the standpoint of the principles by which society in general operates: selfishness, ambition, and pride. The Apostle John warns about this spirit of the world, which we must be aware of and fight against in our thoughts, words and deeds. He says, "Do not love the world [Greek: *kosmos*, meaning orderly arrangement] or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world." John then gives us

the key as to how we can do this, stating, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.” (I John 2:15-17, *NIV*) Later in his epistle, John adds, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—chap. 5:4

Another great enemy we have is the flesh, which includes our own imperfections and sinful human tendencies. Obeying God, rather than our fallen flesh, requires the complete submission of our will to the Heavenly Father, so that all we think, say and do might be pleasing to him. (I Thess. 4:1-4) As we strive to obey God and follow in the footsteps of his son Jesus, we are instructed that we should do “the will of God from the heart,” and in all things “give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”—Eph. 6:6; I Thess. 5:18

Our adversary, the devil, is our enemy in a different sense than the world or our own flesh. Satan is a willful plotter and schemer. The Apostle Peter wrote concerning this enemy: “Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith.” (I Pet. 5:8,9) Paul likewise admonishes us to “put on the whole armour of God” to protect ourselves against all of Satan’s delusions.—Eph. 6:10-18

Let us, then, seek to emulate the example of Caleb and follow the Lord wholeheartedly. Let us also apply to ourselves the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “Thou, O man of God, . . . follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called.”—I Tim. 6:11,12 ■