

The Cloud of Witnesses

Caleb The man of steel

Lesson 1: Caleb spied out the Promised Land

Reading Numbers 13:1-20

Just imagine being Caleb. To live in that moment of history when the promise God gave four hundred years earlier was about to be fulfilled. Not only that, but you were going to be playing an active and significant part in it.

The Hebrews had lived in Egypt for centuries and, latterly, their lives had become increasingly unbearable under the hand of their violent task-masters. There was nothing they could do, since they were slaves to the Egyptians. However, they also knew that they were God's people. His special chosen race. What was God doing causing them to suffer so?

They cried out to God day in and day out. Then, one day, Moses arrived from out of nowhere. He claimed God had called him to come and release the people from Pharaoh's control. However, everything became worse before it got better.

Eventually, they were told to celebrate the Feast of Passover. On the following day they left Egypt on their way to The Promised Land. Later they were confronted by the Red Sea in front of them and the Egyptian army behind them. Were they scared? Too right.

Moses cried out to God once more and, miraculously, God opened up the sea so they could all walk through on dry ground. Nevertheless, once they had all arrived safely on the other side and when the Egyptian army had entered the Red Sea, Moses let his hand fall and the sea returned to its erstwhile state, drowning and destroying the whole enemy army.

Since then they had continued their wilderness experiences, with the miraculous provision of both water and meat together with a nourishing substance called Manna. Every day, it seemed, presented a new set of miracles.

At last, the time came to leave the desert and enter the Promised Land. Wisely, God told Moses to have some men go and explore the land they were going to occupy. He was quite specific. Not just twelve volunteers, but one of the leaders from each of the ancestral tribes.

Their names were recorded for us by Moses. Interestingly enough, we tend only to remember two out of the twelve. However, they were all separated out for the most exciting adventure of their lives. They had been designated the scouts – to go and spy out the land and to return and give an accurate report on the sort of land God was leading them to enter and occupy.

Their expedition was open ended. However, they had to stay and carry out a full exploration in order to provide a full report. They had to examine the plains and the hill country, the pasture and the woods, the towns and the villages. They were to report on the crops, the trees and, specifically, any fruit they discovered, particularly as it was the ripening season of the first grapes.

You can just imagine the excitement and adrenaline rush of those intrepid travellers. Making notes

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whilst trying to avoid contact with the 'enemy'. What a wonderful opportunity for each of those leaders.

Caleb would say to us today...

Make the most of every opportunity God gives you.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You have a plan for my life. Please help me to live it out each day, one day at a time. However, please give me the courage to move out, even when You offer me opportunities that overwhelm me. For Jesus' sake. Amen

Additional readings

- Psalm 139:13-16
- Jeremiah 29:4-13
- Ephesians 2:4-10

Questions

1. What opportunities have you experienced in the past that you have ignored and let slip away?
2. How did you feel when it was too late for you to accept it?
3. What opportunities have you grasped and what were the results?

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Lesson 2: Caleb saw the evidence of the Promised Land

Reading Number 13:21-25

What a mandate – Go and search and don't come back until you have fully surveyed the area! There was no time limit, just a requirement for a full and frank report.

They were to travel from their temporary resting place in the desert, across the plains and into the hill country. They would have crossed the barren desert of Zin, proceeded north towards En Gedi on the shore of the Dead Sea, and up to where the river Jordan enters the Dead Sea. Then they would have had to make their way across to the east, rising up into the crags, valleys and caves near Qumran, and into Hebron before descending towards Beersheba and turning south once more to go back 'home'.

Hebron was the land of the descendants of Anak. That very ruthless and strong tribe who appeared to have been head and shoulder taller than everyone else around.

The spies had to look at the soil and see whether or not it was fertile. They had to examine the towns and villages and report back on any and what sort of fortifications they found.

They had to report on the people they came across. Whether they were battle hardened or passive easy-beats. What their weapons were, how many and what they were made of. Moses, the leader of the vast people of Israel, wanted to know what he would be facing so he could justify the resources he would ask for and prepare.

He knew God would give them the victory; however, he was also aware that he needed to do his homework. How often God invites us to be a part of what He is doing on earth! Nevertheless, He usually wants us to prepare ourselves prior to action, be it assembling the resources or sitting down and preparing our hearts.

Moses also wanted to know what food was being grown there already. Again, maybe he knew that when God led them into the Promised Land, the miraculous provision would dry up so they had to know what would replace it. (The Bible records just that – forty years later – when they ate the produce of the Promised Land the Manna and quails ceased). So they had to look for crops, trees and fruit.

They found that the land was very fertile and everything they would need was there.

What an amazing discovery it must have been to find the valley of Eshcol. Not only the pomegranates and figs but those amazing clusters of grapes! Beyond description and, literally, too heavy to handle. It took two of them to carry just a bunch of grapes suspended between them on a pole. (That symbol was still being used by the Department of Tourism when I visited Israel some years ago).

After forty days, the leaders returned with their enormous trophy – physical evidence in support of their report. Wow, what a privilege it must have been for each of those men.

It is quite obvious that Caleb never forgot that experience – it just galvanised him into focus and gave him the determination that, one day, he would return. Joshua never forgot either. They had both been overwhelmed by the extent of the blessings that were available to them and wanted to grasp the moment.

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Caleb would say to us today...

I shall never forget that first visit. We had never seen anything like it before in our lives, and I wanted everything I could get of it. Never ever lose the wonder of your salvation, either.

Prayer

Father, please forgive me for becoming complacent about all the blessings and benefits You shower upon me. Please help me remember to live a life of gratitude and thanksgiving. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Additional readings

- Psalm 34:1-10
- 2 Chronicles 9:1-12
- Galatians 5:22-23

Questions

1. What are the benefits you have enjoyed since you became a Christian?
2. Which fruit of the Spirit do you experience most?
3. What gifts of the Spirit have you been able to use?

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Lesson 3: Caleb encouraged others to enter the Promised Land

Reading: Numbers 13:26 – 14:10

Sometimes I am totally bewildered by what I read in the Bible. Here, we read the account of the twelve spies returning from their epic voyage of discovery, with prima face evidence of the prolific fruitfulness of the Promised Land, on the one hand, and a total lack of faith, on the other.

Is it any wonder that we cannot remember the names of the ten leaders who were faithless, whereas the two that opposed them – Joshua and Caleb – became our heroes? I guess it highlights the problem that it is so easy to read different conclusions from the same set of facts and that whatever we see, hear or read is still subject to the filters we have or put in place in our minds. We hear what we want to hear instead of being open minded.

The evidence that Jesus lived, died and rose again from the dead is overwhelming but still people decline to believe it. Preferring to believe he was just a good man, which is impossible, since he claimed to be God, and if He wasn't God, he was a liar or a deceiver or worse.

We remember Joshua and Caleb as they were excited about the Promised Land and encouraged everyone to enter in. However, the majority held sway.

Have you noticed how powerful the little word BUT is? It seems able to nullify everything that precedes it. It doesn't matter how accurate, how exciting, how beneficial a statement may be, if it is followed by the word "BUT" it becomes totally inconsequential.

What I find particularly interesting is that the positive report preceding the "BUT" does not appear to have been given by Joshua or Caleb. It seems to have been made by one or more of the ten doubters. They began their report with the confirmatory introduction that the land "does flow with milk and honey". They followed that by showing the huge cluster of grapes as proof.

Unfortunately, they continued immediately with the word "BUT". A word a lot smaller than the cluster of grapes! What followed was a list of negatives... powerful enemies, fortified cities and a list of the tribes who lived there. You can almost hear the volume and treble rising in their voices, reaching a climax as they described the peoples living in the hill country and along the shores of the Dead Sea and Jordan river. They had also earlier slipped in the fact that the descendants of Anak were there, alive and well, thank you.

Caleb could contain himself no longer and tried to persuade the people to rise up in faith and commence their Promised Land campaign at once. However, the doubters came back with more ammunition and spread their bad report, adding in the name of the dreaded Nephilim to the long list of inhuman obstacles.

They concluded with a very interesting statement – "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." Whilst they had undoubtedly convinced themselves that they were grasshoppers, there is no evidence that their enemies thought the same. Nevertheless, it is astounding how powerful a 'grasshopper' mentality is and how very difficult it is to overcome.

All that night the people mourned and moaned, and looked for someone to lead them back to Egypt. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces while Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and besought the people to change their minds. They reminded the people that God would keep His promises,

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and go before them and give them the victory. However, that just resulted in the people wanting to stone them.

Caleb would say to us today...

Never forget we have been blessed to be a blessing. We must not keep the Good News of Jesus to ourselves. What other people do is up to them – our job is to proclaim the Good News.

Prayer

Father, please give me the courage to share my faith story with others so that they can get to know You better. Amen.

Additional readings

- Matthew 7:15-27
- Hebrews 6:1-8
- Acts 8:6-24

Questions

1. What is the best way you have found of sharing your faith with others?
2. Why do we find it hard to share our faith?
3. Who are the people you want to share your faith with this year?

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Lesson 4: Caleb's response to disappointment

Reading Numbers 14:20-38

Caleb had to carry on walking around in the wilderness for 40 years through no fault of his own.

The Bible makes it quite clear that we are responsible for our own poor choices and our sins. We are accountable for our thoughts, actions and words, whether we like it or not. And that is a heavy responsibility.

However, what we are considering here is something else. Joshua and Caleb had been into the Promised Land, made a thorough survey of the area, detailing its benefits and challenges, and returned excited, motivated and fired up ready to go in and claim their inheritance. They stood before the people of Israel and encouraged them to rise up and follow them, showing them some of the produce of the land, including that massive cluster of grapes that was so large it required two people to carry suspended on a pole.

The other spies gave a bad report negating all that Caleb and Joshua had said, and the little word BUT prevailed. The people were overwhelmed by the possibility of meeting giants and having to work for their inheritance and so chose to disobey God and reject the good report given by Caleb.

When Caleb and Joshua tried to make them see sense, the people were so enraged they decided to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua.

At that point God intervened. The people had not so much rejected Caleb and Joshua as they had rejected God and the promise He had given to them that He would rescue them from Egypt and lead them into the Promised Land. The people had deliberately chosen to refuse to enter – they chose to disobey God.

God is not mocked. He sees everything we do and He saw what the people had chosen to do. He decided to act, not merely to rescue Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb but to re-establish His authority and majesty.

The Lord appeared at the Tent of Meeting and declared that He would destroy the rebellious people by sending a fatal plague. He would also, however, make a greater nation out of Moses and the righteous leaders.

Moses interceded for the people, reminding God that they belonged to Him, and if He destroyed them now, all the surrounding nations would see and say that God was unable to bring the people into the Promised Land. God would thus lose face before all the pagan nations.

God listened to Moses' pleading and decided that He would not destroy all the people at once. However, He declared and promised that none of those 20 years old or older who had witnessed the deliverance from Egypt would enter the Promised Land, except, of course, for Caleb and Joshua.

The sentence passed down was that all the people would have to wander around in the wilderness for 40 years, one year for every day of the spies' reconnoitre. However, the 10 wicked spies died immediately.

Please note that Caleb and Joshua also had to walk around in the wilderness for those 40 years,

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watching until all that generation died and was buried in the desert. How would you feel? Though innocent, punished as if you were guilty, and by a righteous God?

Yes, they would out live the others and enter the Promised Land, but at this moment in time they were sentenced to wander in the desert, just like everyone else, for forty years. Not a very inviting prospect! Yet, we don't read of any bitterness or resentment eating them up or their determination to get even. Just a resigned compliance and an inexhaustible resolve to enter the land currently denied them.

Caleb would say to us today...

No matter how hard your life's journey is, never forget that each day, each step leads you one step closer to reaching your destiny and one step closer to seeing Jesus face to face.

Prayer

Father, please help me keep my focus on the goal. Not the goal of heaven on earth but to be with Jesus and You in Heaven. Amen.

Additional readings

- 1 John 3:1-3
- 2 Peter 3:8-13
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Questions

1. When life gets tough how do we keep focused on Heaven?
2. Why is it important not to lose that focus?
3. What are you looking forward to?

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Lesson 5: Caleb went into the Promised Land

Reading Joshua 3:9 - 4:18

I am so glad we can read to the end of this event, aren't you? We left it forty years earlier in the wilderness. Because the people were disobedient, when they refused to trust God and enter the Promised Land, God immediately destroyed the 10 leaders who had propagated the bad report.

Then God passed the sentence that the rest of the people would walk around in the wilderness for the next 40 years, until everyone 20 years or older who had been rescued from Egypt had all died.

Understandably, there were many exploits, highs and lows during those years, and yet, Caleb set his face like a flint, determined to not only enter the land but also gain his inheritance.

The young man of 40 years became the mature patriarch of 80. He had seen the wonders of the Promised Land, experienced the humiliation of having his testimony and integrity maligned. On top of that, he had been subjected to the ignominy of enduring the hardship, monotony and depression of fruitless meandering in the desert that was neither his fault nor his destiny.

I'm sure I would have given up in frustration and despair. Not Caleb. He was made of sterner stuff. Nothing was going to deprive him of entering his destiny or claiming his birthright of faith. He had seen the Promised Land, he had spied out the Promised Land and, through God's grace, nothing was going to prevent him from entering the Promised Land.

I wonder if he had become the undertaker towards the end of those 40 years. "One more, one less," as he placed another body in yet another desert grave. Did he have a list and cross them off as the last one hundred became evident?

Did Moses' death signal that all the people had died and thus a new era had begun? Certainly, Joshua suggests that was the significant event. We have a glimpse into how Joshua reacted and how God came and lifted him out of his reverie.

But what of Caleb? We aren't told. However, I guess it was a huge emotional challenge for him as well. Caleb would have supported Moses from his youth. He would have been thrilled when Moses commissioned him to go and spy out the Promised Land. He would have been amazed at how Moses reacted to the rebellion of the people and to his subsequent interceding before God.

Every moment that they endured the wilderness journey, I think, Caleb would have been marking off the days. Then Moses, the great pioneer leader, died and Joshua was appointed leader in his place. Joshua chose some more spies to go and have another look. He chose two this time, no doubt hoping they would both turn out to be good spies. They returned from their visit and confirmed that the people should definitely begin The Promised Land Campaign.

The people were assembled and told to consecrate themselves in readiness for action. The priests were despatched to enter the Jordan even though it was in full flood. As soon as their feet touched the water, the river stopped flowing and the people were able to cross over on dry land. Caleb went too, and no doubt his heart started beating just a little bit faster!

The tribal leaders brought out rocks from the riverbed, and used them to construct a rudimentary altar as an everlasting symbol of their miraculous crossing.

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The stage was set for the fulfilment of all that God had promised so long ago – Caleb was right there experiencing it all for himself. One of only two of the many thousands who should have been there. What a phenomenal privilege was his!

Caleb would say to us today...

I made it, it was worth it; so can you.

Prayer

Father, thank You for the testimony of those who have gone before us. Particularly those who did not have an easy ride, but who held in there until the glorious end. Amen.

Additional readings

- Hebrews 11:32-40
- Revelation 3:7-13
- Joshua 18:1-7

Questions

1. Why do we expect the Christian life to be easy?
2. Why do we want everything now – it's called instant gratification?
3. What have you decided is worth waiting for?

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Lesson 6: Caleb conquered the Promised Land

Reading Joshua 14:6-15

Our story continues. Yes, Caleb crossed the Jordan but there was still a lot of fighting to do before he could claim the prize.

Jericho stood strong, impregnable and imposing. It also stood in the way. What would the Israelites do this time? Panic and try to return to Egypt, like last time? Blame Joshua for presenting them with the biggest challenge to date? Or rise in faith to realise their destiny?

Jericho fell, Ai didn't. Achan's sin was exposed and the battle for Ai won. Yes, there were more battles to face and to win, more land to conquer and enemies to subdue. It was not easy. It was hard work and it must have seemed almost never-ending at times. Not only did they have to face the Amorites who attacked the Gibeonites, they also had to deal with the Canaanite kings, thirty-one in all.

Once Joshua got to the point of dividing the land out among the tribes, he eventually came to the portion for Judah, and the issue of Hebron. Hebron was situated in the hill country and occupied by the giant-sized Anakites. It was specifically this land, and these people who had put the fear of death into the original ten spies.

Caleb approached Joshua and requested that he should be allocated this land and promised that he would subdue the enemies. He claimed that the land was his inheritance. I love his response to Joshua, *"Now then, just as the Lord promised He has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time He said this to Moses... So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as He said."* Joshua 14:10-12 (NIV).

Wow! Wouldn't you like to have him on your team? I know I would. Age hadn't dimmed his vision, reduced his determination or stunted his faith. He was going for gold. No, he was going for all that God had promised him. He was determined to conquer and settle in his promised land. He was going to prove all the promises of God were true. If God said it, that settled it. No turning back and no giving up or giving in. The promises were there for the taking but he knew he had to appropriate them for himself.

Heaven is not The Promised Land. Heaven is a place of spiritual rest. Not inactivity but the fulfilment of the will and plans of God, without conflict or oppression. There are no enemies to fight or lands to subdue, for Christ has already won the victory.

The Promised Land is for us to enter now. For Jesus has already won the victory for us. As Paul tells us, *"For no matter how many promises God has made they are "Yes" in Christ and the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."* 2 Corinthians 1:20.

All the promises of God are there for us to appropriate to and for ourselves. When God calls Himself Jehovah Jireh, He is telling us that He is our Provider. When God claims to be I am the God who heals you, that promise is for us today.

It's what Paul was referring to, in Ephesians 1, when he mentioned that we have been blessed

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with every spiritual blessing in Christ. These blessings are all there for us. We don't have to fight for them; we need to appropriate them. Jesus died to bring us life in all its fullness now. Yes, we won't experience the fullness of heaven on earth until we see Jesus face to face in our resurrected bodies; however, we can enjoy the Kingdom of God now through the Holy Spirit living in us and demonstrating His power through us.

We may face challenges; however, the blessings are beyond our wildest dreams.

Caleb would say to us today...

There are certain things in life that are worth every ounce of your energy, every breath in your body and every beat of your heart. You need to find what it is and give your all to attain it.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for winning the victory on the Cross at Calvary. Please help me remember that the battle is won, my role and privilege is to live in the victory that You have already secured. Amen.

Additional readings

- 2 Corinthians 1: 18 – 22
- 1 Peter 2:9-11
- Hebrews 11:4-10

Questions

1. What are you prepared to give up in order to reach your eternal goal?
2. What are the distractions most attractive to you?
3. How will you overcome them?

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Lesson 7: Caleb's daughter was a 'chip off the old block'!

Reading Joshua 15:13-19

I just love this passage of Scripture! It reveals how significant a parent's faith can be in enabling a child to come into the same blessing.

The Bible clearly shows how Caleb was a man of tremendous faith. He was a leader in the tribe of Judah and, as such, was commissioned by Moses to go and spy out the Promised Land. He, along with eleven others (including Joshua), scouted out the land over a period of forty days. They examined the land, the peoples, their cities and fortifications, and made a note of the trees and how the people used their land. They also returned with some of the fruit, including the bunch of grapes which was so large it needed two people to carry it.

Then we read the other ten leaders put fear into the people so that the people rebelled against God's specific plan to go in and occupy the Promised Land. There followed the judgement of God on the people that saw the ten spies killed and the rest of the people condemned to walk aimlessly in the desert for forty years, until all those over twenty at the time of leaving Egypt died off in the wilderness.

Because of Caleb's faith and the fact that he followed the Lord whole-heartedly, God preserved his life so that, even though he was 85 years old at the time, he was able to go in and claim one of the most difficult areas – Hebron – and also defeat the giant-sized Anakites who lived there in their fortified cities.

Caleb's daughter would have watched all these adventures and realised that her father was an amazing and valiant warrior. However, she would have also recognised his faith in Jehovah and seen the miraculous results that followed. She probably heard her father ask for Hebron or at least knew what was in his heart and, undoubtedly, celebrated his victory with him.

Later in the campaign, we read that Caleb was heading to destroy Kiriath Sepher. However, rather than taking it himself, he used the potential victory to seek out a suitably valiant man to be his son-in-law. So he offered his daughter's hand in marriage to the man who would conquer the city. That man turned out to be Othniel.

After the marriage Acsah, Caleb's daughter, told her husband Othniel to ask Caleb for some land, which he appeared to have secured. However, when Acsah arrived and was greeted by her father, we find her asking for more. Having secured the land she asked her father, Caleb, for springs of water to irrigate the land. So her generous Dad gave her the upper and lower springs.

I love that. Yes, we could read into this series of events and conclude that Caleb's daughter was scheming and selfish. However, to me the context suggests otherwise.

Here is a very proud and caring father wanting the best for his daughter. So he arranges a contest to find a suitable husband. Acsah is an intelligent woman and knows her Dad well. She knows he loves her, she knows that he wants what is best for her and her future life with Othniel.

She also displays faith. How? By being totally absorbed by and obedient to the promise of God. Rather than there being any hint of returning to Egypt or reluctance to remain in this rugged and dangerous land, Acsah agrees to be married to a man who would fight for their survival and run with the vision.

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However, she doesn't stop there. She asks her father for land, her inheritance, as a deposit guaranteeing her determination to stay and settle in the Promised Land. Even that is not enough. She asks her Dad for the water to sustain that inheritance.

Yes, she was determined to go for all that was due to her, as promised by God to her father. She was not afraid to live in her destiny. Oh that we had the same faith, determination, courage and spirit Acsah showed.

Caleb would say to us today...

Go for gold. Let your faith in God and your passion for Jesus rub off onto your kids so they become bold in God as well.

Prayer

Father, please help me not only set a good example to my children but also encourage them in their faith in You too. Amen.

Additional readings

- 2 Kings 13:10-19
- Joshua 17:1-4
- Ephesians 3:14-21

Questions

1. Why do we so often settle for second best?
2. What are you doing to model your faith in God to your children?
3. What have your children done to show they are following your footsteps in living out a bold faith in God?