

Living With the Wait

“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (Psalm 130:6, 7).

He saw the best of times and the worst of times. Caleb knew what slavery was like. He had been there when the Lord had led his people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. He had seen the sea open before Israel and swallow the Egyptian chariots and army. He had been with Israel at Mount Sinai and had seen Moses descend from the mountain with God’s law. He was one of the first to see the land of Canaan. And through no fault of his own, he had to spend his best years wandering in the desert with the Israelites. He watched all of his generation die there too. At last, as an old man, he is able to enter into the land of Canaan. Even then he shows courage and faith in God.

Caleb is a leader who seems to work more behind the scenes than in front of the audience. This week we will learn from his gentle leadership style. We will get to know a great leader willing to take risks and to lead by example; someone who is generous and encourages leadership in younger people. But beyond the many positive character traits of Caleb, we will study a story relevant to us, who live at the end of earth’s history as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

“The Facts”

About fifteen months earlier, Israel had left Egypt. Tents dot the desert of Paran, close to the border of Canaan. Everyone is excited to know about the land that is soon to be their home. At God’s direction, 12 explorers are chosen. Caleb is to represent Judah as one of the 12 who will conduct a fact-finding mission to Canaan. The spies spend forty days exploring the land, and finally they return and prepare to give their report.

Read Numbers 13:26–14:2. What lesson can we learn about living by faith and not by sight from this account?

The spies bring along something that they can see, smell, and taste. Although the twelve spies were all exposed to the same facts, they come to very different conclusions.

Ten of them interpret the fertile land and great cities to mean that they are doomed, that there is no way these wandering ex-slaves can take the land. Conveniently, they seem to forget that they would not be standing on the border of the Promised Land if it were not for the miracles of the plagues in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the water from a rock, and the daily manna that they received for more than a year. God did all these things for them, and now, for some reason, they fail to trust Him and His promises, going by what they see instead of what God has promised. How easy for all of us to do the same thing!

What we see, and how we interpret what we see, can have very direct personal consequences. Our interpretations of “facts” form the building blocks of our daily decisions, and these “facts” so often interact with our emotions. The idea that we can believe whatever we like without those beliefs affecting who we are and what we do is a myth.

Facing the “facts” without God’s Word will lead to interpretations that point away from God and toward faithlessness. Facing the facts with God will lead to evidence that will help us to trust God and strengthen our faith in Him.

Standing Tall When It Counts

It is not always easy to stand out and stand tall. Group pressure is a tremendous force. The sheer power of thousands of people cheering in a stadium for the home team carries an energy that is very intimidating to opponents. Not many of us would be foolish enough to shout for the opposing team or wave the other team's colors in the middle of the opposition. This is the reason why supporters of opposing teams, such as in soccer, often are kept apart during games. When they do meet, reason steps aside and violence often results.

For the Israelites, though, this was no game. Their future and their survival seemed to be threatened, and they all wept. To witness thousands of people weeping together must have been very moving. And here Caleb, who normally seems to be in the background, steps forward.

Focus on Numbers 13:30. What can we learn about Caleb and about trusting in God's promises from what he said?

The same information can be conveyed in many ways. How we say something is as important as what we say. Caleb shows a lot of character by not arguing with or insulting the faithless ten spies in public and not remonstrating with the people for their lack of faith. Instead, Caleb talks courageously and calls for trust and action. However, the people do not want to hear this. They have made up their minds and try to stone Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

Read Numbers 14:1–10, 20–24. What do we see here as an end result of rejecting God's Word and thus coming to a faulty interpretation of the "facts"?

Caleb must have been bitterly disappointed. He had seen the good land. He was faithful and ready to enter. But now he must wander in the desert for 40 years because of everyone else's fault. Caleb, however, has a strong sense of community and realizes what it means to be part of a whole. He leads by example and encourages. Caleb does not break away and start a new movement. The spirit of simply leaving when there is trouble or lack of faith may be a current phenomenon, but it is not biblical. In Caleb we see a man who stays on, even during the punishment years, without a spirit of "I told you so."

Claiming God's Promises

Forty years have passed. The Israelites have crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Like hungry people eyeing a table loaded with good food, they gaze toward the Promised Land. Campfire discussions center on what the best sections of land are and who is going to get them. Long before entering the Promised Land, Moses already had recognized the potential for in-fighting and left directions for the division of the land. The division of the land is touched on in Joshua 14.

Read Joshua 14. What request does Caleb make, and why do you think he made it? What does this tell us about him and his faith?

Amid the dividing of the land, Caleb steps forward and, surprisingly, asks for land. This is not to be land for his tribe but rather for him personally. At first glance, this meeting between Joshua and Caleb, the two oldest men in Israel, seems a little out of character. Even though Caleb insists that he is strong and ready for battle, first and foremost he wants to claim a promise given to him by God.

Caleb obviously is unafraid to claim God's promises. Caleb's request is not motivated by selfish ambition. The principle of "getting to give" is deeply entrenched in the old man. Caleb does not make claim to the nicest, most lush areas; rather, he chooses the area inhabited by the sons of Anak—giants. That is, the land he is asking for isn't yet conquered. These very giants had made the Israelites so afraid forty years earlier (Num. 13:33).

Caleb, perhaps, is eager to see that the current generation does not make the mistakes of their forefathers. Now Caleb demonstrates his faith in God by choosing the most challenging, instead of the easiest, territory.

Once again, Caleb is leading by example. In the process, he is living an object lesson. He is in effect saying: "If God can use one of the oldest men to drive out the giants, then the rest of you need not fear. God can and will give the victory." Joshua 15:13, 14 records Caleb's victory over Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak. What had terrified a whole nation was conquered by one old man who trusted in God's power.

Passing on the Legacy

In some cultures, old age is highly respected, and older people are well integrated into society and looked to for advice and wisdom. In other cultures, senior citizens are seen as being no longer productive and are ignored and marginalized. The latter view seems to be growing worldwide. Caleb gives a wonderful example of the positive use of one's old age.

Caleb avoids the extremes normally associated with the senior years. He does not allow himself to be intimidated by others because of his years. He does not simply give up on life and withdraw. He does not use his age as an excuse for not being involved in his community. Neither does he hang on to his position and see all attempts of younger people to lead as personal threats.

What does Psalm 92:12–15 say about old age?

It has been said that God has no grandchildren. As long as God remains the God of my fathers, He has nothing to do with me, personally. Caleb knows that every generation must have its own experience with God. The Israelites, collectively and individually, could not live off the miracles of Egypt, or even the wilderness experience of their parents. Caleb sees it as his duty to create an environment for the younger generation to take their first steps of faith.

What sort of experience is Caleb facilitating in Judges 1:12, 13? How does he do this?

The people of Judah are taking possession of their land. The tribes of Judah and Simeon cooperate and work together in faith in order to make good on God's promises. But on coming up against the fortified city of Kirjathsepher (vs. 12), they face a tremendous challenge. We know from archaeology about the often elaborate design of Late Bronze Age fortification systems in Palestine. However, instead of focusing on the walls, Caleb sees this challenge as an opportunity for growth. Here someone can claim God's promises and have the victory. Although it may sound strange to us, Caleb offers a wonderful incentive. Whoever conquers the city would become his son-in-law. Othniel, Caleb's nephew (Judg. 1:13), takes up the challenge, and God gives him victory. Through Caleb's nurturing, a new hero is born. Caleb's investment would pay rich dividends in later years. God would use this young man as Israel's first judge and deliverer (Judg. 3:7–11).

Giving Freely

Read Judges 1:14, 15. What more does this tell us about the character of Caleb?

Inheritance was very important to the Israelites. Owning land to pass on to your heirs was seen as a way of ensuring that your legacy would not die out. As a matter of fact, this was so important that detailed laws were given to provide for an heir if a man died childless, so that someone would take the deceased's name and continue his legacy (see the Levirate laws in Deut. 25:5–10).

At Caleb's age, he would have been thinking seriously about his own inheritance. The later genealogical records show that Caleb had sons. He would have been eager to leave them as much as possible. Although Acsah was his daughter, any land that was given to her would effectively leave Caleb's immediate family and become part of her husband's property. We do not know exactly what prompted the Acsah's request for land, but we do know that refusing her request would have been acceptable and in line with the social norms of protecting one's own inheritance.

The surprising thing is that Caleb not only gives her the field but then also gives the springs of water, too. And not just one spring of water but both the upper and lower springs.

Generosity works both ways. Proverbs 11:25 states that "a generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed". When we are not ready to give freely, it is perhaps a sign that we have not yet received.

What implications does this story have for our spiritual life in, for example, the area of forgiveness? Read Matthew 6:15 and 18:21–35.

We can give only what we have. If we are unable to forgive, then it is a sure sign that we have not claimed God's forgiveness for ourselves. Caleb had received blessings from God and was happy to share them. He showed a generosity way beyond the social norms of his time.

Conclusion

"Caleb's faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God's promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off. Amid all the hardships, perils, and plagues of the desert wanderings, and during the years of warfare since entering Canaan, the Lord had preserved him; and now at upwards of fourscore his vigor was unabated. He did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. By the help of God he would wrest his stronghold from the very giants whose power had staggered the faith of Israel. It was no desire for honor or aggrandizement that prompted Caleb's request. The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 512, 513.