

Caleb the faithful brother

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IT MAY BE a surprise to find that Caleb the son of Jephunneh is among a select list of only ten men in the Hebrew Scriptures whom Yahweh calls “My servant” (Num. 14:24). Furthermore, some six times it is recorded that Caleb “wholly followed the LORD [Yahweh]” (or similar), a phrase which is more literally rendered, “wholly filled after Yahweh”, and this is the reason given for the fact that only he and Joshua of the generation which came out of Egypt entered the land of promise. Joshua was, of course, a wonderful type of Jesus Christ, but Caleb is a wonderful type of faithful Gentiles, who have become adopted into Israel because they are filled with the promises to Abraham, and thereby are sustained to endure patiently a wilderness journey in the sure hope of inheriting with faithful Abraham (Gal. 3:28,29).

Caleb the forceful

The name Caleb means ‘to yelp’ and, by extension, ‘a dog’, an appellation given to the unclean Gentiles; and Jesus himself so terms the Canaanite woman who sought healing for her daughter, in order to draw out from her a confession of the Gentiles’ need to acknowledge that salvation is of the Jews (Mt. 15:26,27). Caleb himself, being a Kenezite (Num. 32:12), was of Gentile extraction, perhaps from the same family as Shua, the Canaanite wife of Judah (1 Chron. 2:3; 4:11-15), but he or his family was adopted into Judah, and specifically into the family of Hezron (2:9).

Although a Gentile, Caleb quickly rose to be a prince in Judah, and Moses selected him as one of the spies to view the land (Num. 13:6). This was at the time when Moses changed Oshea’s name to Jehoshua, meaning ‘Yah saves’, as he would become the instrument of Yahweh’s salvation (v. 16). Joshua, a man regularly needing to be exhorted to be strong and of a good courage (Josh. 1:9), would have been helped by Caleb (*Strong’s Concordance* links Caleb’s name with the idea of ‘forceful’), a man who had the strength of faith and character to still single-handedly the rebelling people before Moses (Num. 13:30).

Caleb and Jabez

Strong, faithful character though he was, Caleb had developed the mind of Christ in adverse

circumstances. It could be said of him that through many tribulations he entered the promised land (Acts 14:22). For example, when his comparatively young wife Azubah died, in order to bear fruit to inherit the land he married Ephrath, whose name means ‘fruitfulness’ (1 Chron. 2:19). It would appear that he was thereby comforted and blessed, as the family town became known as Caleb-ephratah (v. 24).*

Furthermore, it is possible that Caleb and the Jabez of 1 Chronicles 4:9-10 are one and the same person. Both were of the tribe of Judah, and both were more honourable than their brethren. Jabez “called on the God of Israel”, and Caleb “wholly followed the LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel” (Josh. 14:14), though of Gentile origin. Both desired the Abrahamic blessing and inheritance in the land. Jabez desired to be kept from evil, while Caleb said, at the age of eighty-five, that God had kept him alive during the wilderness journey and conquest of the land (Josh. 14:10). Both were granted what they requested. After the reference to Jabez, 1 Chronicles 4 continues with the genealogy of Caleb,¹ and in 1 Chronicles 2, a chapter which deals in large measure with the descendents of Caleb, some of these, referred to as “scribes”, settled at a place they called Jabez (v. 55).²

* There are difficulties with the idea that the Caleb of Numbers 14 is the Caleb of 1 Chronicles 2:18. The latter was the great-grandfather of Bezaleel (v. 20), who constructed the tabernacle (Ex. 35:30) and who was therefore a contemporary of the Caleb of Numbers 14. Perhaps the son of Jephunneh was given, or chose to take, the name of one of the patriarchs of the tribe of Judah in order that he might be identified with the tribe of Judah.—T.B.

1. The name Caleb sometimes appears as ‘Chelub’ or ‘Chelubai’. It is useful to chart a family tree for the family of Caleb from 1 Chronicles 2 and 4. There is also an interesting article by Brother H. A. Whittaker entitled “Caleb” in *The Christadelphian* (1951, p. 175), which argues that Caleb and Chelubai are the same person.
2. If Caleb and Jabez are one and the same person, the use of two different names may relate to the fact that as Caleb he is a type of a faithful Gentile believer who is associated with the wilderness trials of Jesus of Nazareth, whilst as Jabez (which means ‘sorrowful’) he is a type of Christ, “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), who was “heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

Caleb's character

It is when Caleb speaks to Joshua, as recorded in Joshua 14 (a type of the judgement seat of Jesus?), that his character is evident. Paul is inspired to exhort the Ephesians (and ourselves), "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you" (4:31), and he goes on in the next chapter to urge them to be thankful (5:4).

As we shall see, in his speech Caleb shows such characteristics—an example for ourselves. He says: "Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD [Yahweh] sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart. Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the LORD [Yahweh] my God" (Josh. 14:7,8). Here was a repetition of the facts; no boasting, no disparaging of his brethren, but also no covering up of what had gone wrong some forty-five years before.

Caleb continues: "And Moses sware on that day, saying, Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden shall be thine inheritance, and thy children's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the LORD [Yahweh] my God" (v. 9). The promise to Caleb had not grown dim over the forty-five years since it had been made. Nor did Caleb murmur about how unfair it was that he had been obliged to wait all these years. Instead his next few words reveal a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation of God's graciousness: "And now, behold, the LORD [Yahweh] hath kept me alive, as He said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD [Yahweh] spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old. As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in" (vv. 10,11).

Caleb and Joshua would have been considerably older than everybody else in Israel, but Caleb shows his subjection to Yahweh's special servant Joshua in that he asks Joshua for the inheritance: "Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD [Yahweh] spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD [Yahweh] will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD [Yahweh] said" (v. 12).

Such humble, unpretentious words reveal a spiritual mind, and it is not surprising that we then read: "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance. Hebron therefore became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenazite unto this day, because that he wholly followed the LORD [Yahweh] God of Israel" (vv. 13,14). Truly the lesser is blessed of the greater.

Although he was a prince of Judah, yet in view of his Gentile origins perhaps some at a later date might have challenged Caleb's children's right to inherit in Judah; but Joshua had spoken, even as it has been said to those of us who are today Gentile believers: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

Three giants

When, after the death of Joshua, Yahweh sent Judah first against the Canaanites, it was Caleb who drove out the three giants who had so terrified his brethren (Judg. 1:1,2,20). We are thereby encouraged to war against three giants to obtain our inheritance: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, *the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jno. 2:15,16). The previous verse reads: "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one". This feature of "the word of God abideth in you" is the motivating force for ourselves, as it was for Caleb, and this brings us to a major exhortation from the life of Caleb.

Caleb and Hebron

As the Gentile Caleb's feet trod the land, his mind was being directed to the faithful lives of the patriarchs. Likewise, as we daily read the Scriptures, our minds are being directed to the covenants concerning the seed, the land and the promise of inheritance by faith. What was in Caleb's mind is evident from the record of the spies arriving at Hebron.

Numbers 13:22 reads: "And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were". The ten spies saw insurmountable difficulties there: "Nevertheless the people be strong that

dwelt in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there . . . And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (vv. 28,33).

Caleb, however, saw the events of Abraham’s life that took place at Hebron, including the covenant to be effected through the Eternal Spirit, as recorded in Genesis 15:17-21: “And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD [Yahweh] made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites”. Caleb was a Kenizzite (Kenezite in later Scripture), one of the nations to be dispossessed before Israel, but Caleb the Kenizzite would be able to inherit by faith, for verse 6 of the same chapter says of Abraham, “And he believed in the LORD [Yahweh]; and He counted it to him for righteousness”.

The field of Machpelah

Caleb also saw there in Hebron the cave in the field of Machpelah in which was enfolded (for so the name ‘Machpelah’ means) the burying place of six men and women: Isaac, Sarah, Rebekah, Abraham and Leah, the first letters of whose names in Hebrew spell ‘Israel’, with the sixth person being Jacob, whose name is Israel

(Gen. 49:29-31). As we have been buried with Christ in baptism, that we might be raised with him “through the faith of the operation of God” (Col. 2:12), so Caleb the Gentile wished to be associated (as the name ‘Hebron’ means) with the burial place of Isaac, so that at the resurrection he might inherit with Abraham.

It is interesting that, although Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb, subsequently Hebron the city was given to the sons of Aaron; but “the fields of the city, and the villages thereof, gave they to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for his possession” (Josh. 21:10-12). These fields would have included the cave of the field of Machpelah. Caleb retained that which he always wanted from the time that he first walked the land and came to Hebron.

Caleb the example

What then can we learn from the life of Caleb? Most of us are Gentiles by birth, yet by our faith in the gospel preached to Abraham, and by being baptized into the death of the Son, we have the sure hope of inheriting the land at the resurrection. With these things before us we can be sustained in our wilderness journey, and, despite the sometimes serious problems which may assail us, can still have a spirit of thankfulness, without bitterness or murmuring about our circumstances or about our brethren. Like Caleb, we are no longer aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, but are Jews—not outwardly, but inwardly, seeking the Kingdom of God before all else. Thereby we are enfolded in the hope of Israel.

Brother Jim Wood

With great sadness, yet with hope in our hearts, we report the falling asleep of the editor of the Exhortation section, Brother Jim Wood. About a year ago he was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, for which treatment was ineffective, and he died on 21 September soon after his sixty-second birthday. Jim was introduced to the work of *The Testimony* by a previous editor of the section, Brother Norman Holt, who, himself ill, groomed him as his successor. He became the editor in January 1977, and though in 1983 other pressures caused him to relinquish his editorship, we were all delighted when in 1991 he agreed to take it on again.

As publishing editor I always appreciated Jim’s prompt submission of articles for his section and his careful editing of them. Despite deteriorating health, he managed to provide articles until the end of 2003. The Exhortation section under his editorship will perhaps be best remembered for the opening one-page articles, based on an annual theme, generally with a wide range of authors, though he himself contributed many times. His own articles were always very thoughtful, and he had the knack of saying much in a few words. On page 388 we reprint the conclusion of one of his last contributions to *The Testimony*, words that witness to the strong hope of better things to come that sustained him during his illness.—*Tony Benson*