

Caleb the Son of Jephunneh

Hebrews chapter 3 speaks of the unfaithful in Israel who died in the wilderness as a consequence of their lack of trust in Yahweh their God:

“...some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit **not all** that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?” (Heb. 3:16-17)

“Not all” of those who came out of Egypt fell through sin and disbelief: there were two individuals who endured the wilderness wanderings, and who received their inheritance – Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh. Hebrews Chapter 4 speaks of Israel’s position in relation to these men of faith:

“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, because *they were not united by faith to* (AV Margin) them that heard it ...” (Heb. 4:2).

With this further information, we learn that the “gospel” was “preached” to those who fell, and that we also have that gospel preached to us. The problem with Israel of old, is that they were not united by faith to those who brought that gospel to them. They did not believe the Gospel taught, and so fell as a consequence of their own lack of faith. Joshua and Caleb, as faithful preachers of the gospel, were permitted to take up their inheritance in the Promised Land, and stand as pillars of the Truth; strong examples of faith from which we can learn. In our thoughts today, we will consider one of these men: Caleb.

Caleb is described as “Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite” (Num. 32:12). The same Hebrew word is used in Genesis chapter 15, describing how the families of the Gentiles would have their lands taken away, and given to Abraham and his Seed:

“In the same day Yahweh made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed have I give this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the **Kenizzites**, and the Kadmonites ...” (Gen. 15:18-19).

Notice the irony in these passages: Abraham and his Seed were promised ownership of the land possessed by a number of peoples - including the Kenizzites - who were to be destroyed by the edge of the sword. But Caleb as a Gentile from those lands, voluntarily accepted the Hope of Israel, and by joining himself to Israel in faith, he was able to share their inheritance. He looked forward to that time when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ - and was strong in faith, knowing that the enemy would be vanquished through the power of Yahweh to save. Caleb joined the company of other Gentiles who embraced the Hope: Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, Naaman; all these were strong in faith when Israel were weak in disobedience.

In Hebrews chapter 4, cited above, we find that Caleb was among the people who came out of Egypt by the hand of Moses. What is interesting to notice is that there were provisions made for Gentile peoples to leave with Israel. The ten plagues were to impress the greatness of Israel’s God upon both Israel and the Gentiles in Egypt, and when Israel left, the Gentiles who embraced the Hope, and sought to join themselves to the congregation could leave with them. We learn this from Exodus chapter 12, described those who left: “and **a mixed multitude** went up also with them: and flocks and herds, even very much cattle” (Exo. 12:38). Again, we find that provision was made for those who desired to partake of the Passover meal of fellowship:

“... this is the ordinance of the Passover: There shall not stranger eat thereof: but every man’s servant that is bought for money, **when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof** ... and when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to

Yahweh, let all his males be circumcised, and ***then let him come near and keep it***; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof” (Exo. 12:45,48).

Caleb then, as a Gentile who sojourned with Yahweh’s people, would have submitted himself to be circumcised, and so become a Jew through faith. However, circumcision is but an outward sign of an inward disposition: “he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:29). Caleb, foreshadowing the way in which Gentiles could become Jews, was also circumcised in the heart, demonstrating how the way to obtain the inheritance promised to Abraham’s seed, involved the cutting off of the flesh. Not only did he become a Jew (i.e. from Judah), he became the head of that tribe in Israel. So we read concerning those who were sent to spy out the land:

“Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel of every tribe of their father’s shall ye send a man, ***every one a ruler among them***. And Moses by the commandment of Yahweh sent them from the wilderness of Paran: ***all those men were heads of the children of Israel***. And these were their names ... ***of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh ...***” (Num. 13:2-6, Cp Num. 34:19).

So it was, that Caleb and eleven others were sent to spy out the land, by way of preparation for the forthcoming invasion. Upon their return, we find that two very different interpretations of the same facts were put before the people. The first significant fact was that the land was a prosperous place, as evidenced by the fruits brought back by two of the spies (Caleb and Joshua?). The second significant fact is that this land was home to the Anakim. The voice of faith came from Caleb: “Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, ***Let us go up at once***, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” (Num. 13:30). He focused on the fruitfulness of the land that Yahweh had promised them, and had the faith that what Yahweh had promised, he would surely perform. However, the other 10 spies focused on the greatness of the enemy. They “brought up an evil report of the land ... saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 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: (Num. 13:32-33).

Notice that both parties saw the same facts: the Fruits and the Anakim. But both had very different spirits: one was strong in faith, but the other was daunted by the perceived difficulties involved with obtaining their inheritance. In these things, we have examples for us. There may be times in life when adverse circumstances loom large, to the extent that we become over preoccupied with our problems. But in those times, will we be like the 10 who fainted at the perceived greatness of the adversary, or will we be like the faithful remnant who believed in the power of Yahweh to overcome? The unfaithful, who died in the wilderness, compared the adversary with themselves, and their own smallness. “We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight”. But they should have rather compared the adversary to the power of Yahweh, and the great manifestation of power that they had already witnessed at the time when they left Egypt. Notice also, how that the spies exaggerated their plight: literally they were not the size of grasshoppers compared to the giants: it was only so in their minds. Twice they emphasized that they were “giants”. For us, also, our problems and trials can seem to loom large in our minds; things can seem worse than they really are when we are beset with seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

As a digression, we find a similar spirit to that of the 10 spies in Elisha’s servant, when the army who sought Elisha’s destruction surrounded the two men:

“and when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, and host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! How shall we do?” (2 Kings 6:15).

Here, Gehazi was comparing the greatness of the army, against two mortal men. But Elisha saw the reality of the situation, which could only be perceived with the eye of faith:

“he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Yahweh, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And Yahweh opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kings 6:16-17).

Though they are unperceived by the natural man, the Angel of Yahweh really does encompass the heirs of salvation, ministering to them, and delivering them according to His Will. Gehazi made the same mistake as Israel of old: he compared the might of the adversary to his own inabilities. Elisha on the other hand, discerned the indiscernible. Through the eye of faith, he saw the unseen, and trusted in the power of his God to save. Even so, in our circumstance, we must trust in the Angel of Yahweh’s providing:

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tried above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

There are many instances of this in Scripture: we think of Israel being pursued by the Egyptians, with the sea ahead of them, and the adversary behind. Humanly speaking, there was no help: yet the Angels opened up the Red Sea for the people to go through on dry land. Even taking off the chariot wheels, so that the Egyptians were hindered in their attempt to pursue, the angels were instrumental in providing a way of escape. We think of Daniel’s three friends of like precious faith, who were cast into the burning fiery furnace. Humanly speaking, they were condemned to certain death – yet the Angel delivered them from the flame. Daniel also, in the lion’s den - the Angel stopped the mouths of the lions. The list could continue, and the fact of the Angel’s presence is certain.

There is a note of caution here: the three friends of Daniel said: “if it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. **But if not**, but it known unto the king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (Dan. 3:17-18).

Here is the point: “*if not ...*” It may be that in the Father’s purpose, that we need to endure trials – but at the last, the great deliverance shall be from death itself – and that deliverance is guaranteed for those who are the heirs of salvation. “greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world” (1 Jno 5:9) is the overriding principle in all of our trials and tribulations. God is Great, and is able to deliver us, and no matter how great the modern day Anakims are, they become inconsequential when compared with Yahweh’s power to save.

Returning to the testimony of the 12 spies, we hear the voice of faith from Caleb: “let us **go up at once**, and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it” (Num. 13:30). The Scriptures commend Caleb, recording the divine approbation: “my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it” (Num. 14:24). Notice the use of the honorable title: “my servant” hitherto used only of Moses. Caleb rendered a full service; he followed Yahweh not only in the easy aspects, but “fully”. “Thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” was the commandment (Deut. 6:5). For men of faith, to yield their entire beings as a living sacrifice is their reasonable service (Rom. 12:1), and one which shall be plentifully rewarded at the last.

Moses, under Divine direction, promised Caleb: “surely the land **whereon thy feet have trodden** shall be thine inheritance, and thy children’s for ever, because thou hast wholly followed Yahweh thy God”. These words are most significant when compared with the faith of Abraham. Back in Genesis chapter 13 the Patriarch was told: “Arise, **walk through the land** in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee: (Gen. 13:17). As a token of his belief that he and his Seed would inherit the land, Abraham spent the rest of his life wandering through that land, backwards and

forwards. All the land he had trodden upon would be granted for a possession - and Caleb was a man of like faith. Alluding back to this, in speaking of how Gentiles might be partakers of an Israelitish inheritance, the apostle wrote that Abraham was: “the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in *the steps of that faith* of our Father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:12). Similarly, of Abraham’s Greater Seed it is written: “... Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should *follow his steps*” (1 Pet. 2:21). Caleb walked in the steps of the faithful of old, and so must we if we are to share an inheritance with them.

What is particularly significant in this context, is the place that Caleb went to when he searched out the Land. The land given was the same as the land into which he went, and this is said to be Hebron:

“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 unto this day, because that he wholly followed Yahweh Elohim of Israel” (Josh. 14:13-14).

This is most significant, for Hebron was the burial place of the Patriarchs of old. They rested in the cave of Machpelah there, awaiting the resurrection morn, and as a token of sharing the same faith as they, Caleb purposefully went to that portion of the land to see it. And this was the portion that also brought forth the fruits that the spies showed to the people. The principle being exhibited here, is that true fruitfulness comes through a faith that bears the fruit of the Spirit, even the characteristics which will prove to be worthy of perpetuity into the Kingdom.

The faith of Caleb was so much stronger than that of Israel as a nation, that he resolved to overthrow the feared Anakim himself. So it was that when the land was apportioned by Joshua: “unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a part among the children Judah, according to the commandment of Yahweh to Joshua, even the city of Arba the father of Anak, which city is Hebron. *And Caleb drove thence the three sons of Anak*, Seshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak” (Josh. 15:13-14).

The confidence that this man had in the power of Yahweh to save was absolute. The nation as a whole, and all the mightiest men of war were too afraid to come against the children of Anak. But with a faith to be seen many years later by David the shepherd boy, Caleb slew the giants and took possession of his land. Again, there are tremendous points of exhortation for us: when all around us fall by the wayside, we must remain resolute in our walk along the narrow path that leads to life. When the faith of many waxes cold, we must be steadfast and sure footed, having a fervent zeal and enthusiasm for the Truth. Even though an entire body of believers may lack the confidence to wage the warfare of faith, we must stand fast as an example to them, and to receive the same inheritance as the faithful men of old.

As we come to these examples of worthy men of old for exhortation and encouragement, we think of our own position, standing by faith. Just as Caleb brought the “gospel” message with fruits that showed forth his faith, so the Gospel has “come unto” us, “and bringeth forth fruit” (Col. 1:6). Just as the faith of Abraham, Caleb and Messiah himself is expressed in a “walk” in truth, so we must “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10). Just as Caleb was strengthened so that he lacked none of his youthful vigor, to wage a victorious warfare, so we are “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power” (Col. 1:11) to do likewise. And just as through faith, Caleb received his inheritance, so we “give thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:12-13). In the personage of Caleb, we have foreshadowed the manner by which we, as Gentiles might be partakers of an Israelitish inheritance. And all these things come to focus upon our Redeemer - the Victorious Warrior, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us therefore go and do likewise, that we might overcome the modern day Anakims, and enter into the Promised Land by faith.

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