

Caleb

'From the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh (the Kenizzite)' (Numbers 13:6).

The first time Caleb is mentioned in the Bible he was already an adult. We know little about his childhood except Caleb's father Jephunneh was not Jewish, he was a Kenizzite – a tribe considered to be enemies of Abraham many years earlier (Genesis 15:19). Caleb's mother, whose name is not recorded, would have been Jewish from the tribe of Judah. The name Caleb means 'dog' which reveals his questionable bloodline. He was a child of mixed race. In spite of this, Caleb spent his entire adult life obeying God's every command, loyally, faithfully, fearlessly, righteously, with humility and honour. As a result of his obedience Caleb was only one of two people blessed to enter the Promised Land to fulfil God's plan to build the nation of Israel so our Messiah could eventually come from Israel. Having a Jewish mother gave Caleb the right to claim land in Israel once Canaan had been conquered. Caleb was a brave warrior who wholly followed the Lord. He was called to accompany Joshua as a spy to see what the Promised Land was like. 'God spoke to Moses saying, "Send men so they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I will give to the Children of Israel. From every tribe you will send a man, everyone a prince among them." Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran according to the commandment of God. All of them were men who were heads of the Children of Israel' (Numbers 13:1 to 3). Caleb was one of the spies (Numbers 13:6).

Canaan was a very fruitful land in those days but pagans and giants lived there. Those giants terrified ten of the spies who sent an evil report of the land to the Children of Israel. Only Joshua and Caleb had a positive opinion. This is what the Bible reveals regarding that event. 'The spies came to the Valley of Eshcol and cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes and they bore it on a staff between two men. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the (huge) cluster of grapes the Children of Israel cut down from there. The spies returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. They came to Moses, Aaron and to all the congregation of the Children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh and brought back word to them all and showed them the fruit of the land. The spies told Moses, "We went to the land where you sent us and surely it flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. However the people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified and are very great. We saw the children of Anak there. Amalek dwells in the land of the South. The Hittite, the Jebusite and the Amorite dwell in the hill country. The Canaanite dwells by the sea and along by the side of the Jordan River." 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." But the men who went up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we are." They brought an evil report to the Children of Israel, of the land they had spied out saying, "The land through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up its inhabitants and all the people who we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the Nephilim (giants), the sons of Anak who come of the Nephilim and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight" (Numbers 13:23 to 33).

The Children of Israel were terrified. Only Caleb and Joshua had enough faith and trust in God to want to conquer the enemies and take the land. 'The entire congregation lifted up their voice and cried. The people wept that night. The Children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "We should have died in the land of Egypt or in this wilderness! Why did God bring us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be prey. It would be better for us to return into Egypt." They said one to another, "Let us make a captain and return to Egypt." Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before the assembly of the congregation of the Children of Israel. Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were two of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes and they spoke to all the congregation of the Children of Israel saying, "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceeding good land. If God delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us. A land that flows with milk and honey, only do not rebel against God neither fear the people of the land for they are bread for us. Their defence is removed from over them and God is with us. Do not fear them." But the congregation wanted to stone them with stones' (Numbers 14:1 to 10).

After this amount of fear and lack of trust in the Lord, God was furious and disinherited them all. That is, all except Caleb whose 'spirit' or attitude was different. 'God said to Moses, "How long will this people despise Me? How long will they not believe in Me after all the signs I have worked among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them ... All those men have seen My glory and My signs that I worked in Egypt and in the wilderness yet have tempted Me these ten times and have not listened to My voice. They will not see the land I swore to their fathers, neither will any of those who despised Me see it, except My servant Caleb because he had another spirit with him and has followed Me fully. Caleb will I bring into the land to which he went and spied and his descendents will possess it' (Numbers 14:11 & 12; 22 to 24).

'The Lord God spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, "How long will I bear with this evil congregation that murmur against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the Children of Israel, which they murmur against Me. Tell them, As I live, says the Lord, surely as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you. Your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness. All who were numbered of you, according to your whole number from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against Me, surely you will not come into the land, concerning which I swore I would make you dwell therein, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your little ones whom you said would be prey, them will I bring into the land and they will know the land you have rejected. As for you, your dead bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be wanderers in the wilderness forty years and will bear your prostitution until your dead bodies be consumed in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which you spied out the land, even forty days, for every day a year, you will bear your iniquities, even forty years and you will know My alienation. I, the Lord have spoken. Surely this will I do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they will be consumed and there they will die." The men whom Moses sent to spy out the land who returned and made the entire congregation to murmur against him by bringing up an evil report against the land, those men who did bring up an evil report of the land, died by the plague before God. But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive of those men who went to spy out the land' (Numbers 14:26 to 38). 'God had said of them, "They will surely die in the wilderness." There was not left a man of them except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun' (Numbers 26:65).

'The Lord God heard the voice of your words and was angry and swore saying, "Surely not one of these men of this evil generation will see the good land I swore to give to your fathers except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He will see it and to him will I give the land he has trodden on, and to his children because he has wholly followed the Lord"' (Deuteronomy 1:34 to 36). 'The Children of Judah drew near to Joshua in Gilgal. Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord spoke to Moses the man of God concerning me and concerning you in Kadesh Barnea (Hebron) ... Joshua blessed Caleb and gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for an inheritance. Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he wholly followed the God of Israel' (Joshua 14:6, 13 & 14).

'To Caleb the son of Jephunneh, Joshua gave a portion among the Children of Judah according to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, even Kiriath Arba, named after the father of Anak (the same is Hebron). Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmi, the children of Anak. He went up against the inhabitants of Debir. The name of Debir before was Kiriath Sepher. Caleb said, "He who strikes Kiriath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give Achsah my daughter as his wife." Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb took it so Caleb gave to Othniel, Achsah his daughter as his wife. When Achsah came (after they married), she had Othniel ask her father Caleb for a field. She got off of her donkey and Caleb said, "What do you want?" She said, "Give me a blessing. Because you have set me in the land of the South, give me also springs of water." Caleb gave Achsah the upper springs and the lower springs' (Joshua 15:13 to 19; Judges 1:12 to 15). 'They gave the fields of the city of Hebron and its villages to Caleb the son of Jephunneh for his possession' (Joshua 21:12). 'They gave Hebron to Caleb as Moses had spoken and he drove out the three sons of Anak' (Judges 1:20). 'When the children of Israel cried to the Lord, God raised up a saviour to the Children of Israel who saved them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of God came on him and he judged Israel ... The land had rest for forty years. Othniel the son of Kenaz died' (Judges 3:9 & 11). There is no verse that tells us exactly when Caleb died but for his nephew Othniel to become the judge of Israel, Caleb must have already been dead. The very last mention in the Bible of Caleb was this verse, 'The fields of the city (of Hebron) and its villages, they gave to Caleb the son of Jephunneh' (1 Chronicles 6:56).

Caleb, Kenaz and Othniel were obviously men of God but they had one descendent who was a very evil man. 'There was a man in Maon whose possessions were in Carmel and the man was very wealthy. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel. The name of the man was Nabal and his wife was Abigail. She was a woman was of good understanding and had a beautiful face but the man was churlish and evil in his doings. He was of the house of Caleb' (1 Samuel 25:2 & 3). Eventually, a large swathe of land was attributed to Caleb. 'King David said to him (a servant), "To whom belong you and whence are you?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite and my master left me because three days ago I fell sick. We made a raid on the South of the Cherethites, on the land which belongs to Judah and on the South of Caleb' (1 Samuel 30:14). There were other men named Caleb in the Bible but they came along years after this original Caleb.

After entering the Promised Land, Caleb was given the area now known as Hebron. He married and had three sons and a daughter. 'The sons of Caleb the son of Jephunneh were Iru, Elah and Naam' (1 Chronicles 4:15). Caleb's daughter was Achsah (Joshua 15:16). Caleb's younger brother was Kenaz (Judges 1:13) who had two sons, Othniel and Seraiah and a grandson, Hathath (1 Chronicles 4:13). Of all the millions of Israelites who left Egypt, plus the mixed multitude of Egyptians and other races that joined

them during the mass exodus and in the wilderness (Exodus 12:38; Numbers 11:4), only two men, Caleb and Joshua lived to enter the Promised Land. They seemed to be the only two people who wholly followed the Lord and they were the only two spies who gave the Promised Land a good report when the other ten spies were doubtful and gave an 'evil report' regarding the land. The Lord said, 'None of the men who came up out of Egypt from twenty years old and upward will see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, because they have wholly followed God' (Numbers 32:11 & 12).

Caleb may have had a very difficult childhood because he was a child of mixed race but he and his younger brother Kenaz did not let that stop them from being wholly committed to obeying God's every command. Our childhood or the early life we choose that may give us a dark past, no matter how hard that life may be, is no excuse for being lukewarm in our attitude to God. The Lord becomes angry with lukewarm people and will spit them out. "I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot but because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth" (Revelation 3:15 & 16). Caleb is a lesson to all who want to be God's servants. God will not bless people who are lukewarm in their attitude to serving Him. He will only bless those who are fully committed and who wholly follow Him no matter what the cost. We cannot be considered a follower or disciple of Jesus unless we give up or renounce our past. 'Whoever of you who does not renounce all he has cannot be My disciple' (Luke 14:33). However, if we submit to God and serve Him, He will honour us. 'If anyone serves Me let them follow Me. Where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me the Father will honour them' (John 12:26).

Amen and God bless you.

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