

THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

by Doug Goins

A few weeks ago we enjoyed the summer Olympic games in Atlanta. But do you know the story of Tony Volpentest and his relationship to the games? Last week in Atlanta he set a world record in the one-hundred-meter dash in the Paralympics, an international competition for people with physical disabilities. From an item in the September 2, 1996 issue of U.S. News and World Report, we learn about Tony:

Though he was born without hands or feet, Tony Volpentest took up track as a high school sophomore, hoping to make friends. Fitted with lightweight carbon-fiber prostheses that mimic the muscle action of natural feet, he has become a world-class sprinter. True, he's not as fast as Canada's Donovan Bailey, who claimed a gold medal in Atlanta last month by running 100 meters in a world-record time of 9.84 seconds. But running on the same track last week in the Paralympics, Volpentest posted his own world record in the same event. The 23-year-old sprinter from Federal Way, WA, clocked in at 11.36 seconds—only about a second and a half behind the world's fastest able-bodied man.

That kind of triumph of the human spirit strikes a chord in me, as I'm sure it does in you. We're challenged and encouraged by people who have to overcome limitation and loss to succeed in life, whether the difficulty they face is a physical handicap, the deprivation of a poverty-stricken childhood, or childhood abuse.

We'll see that same kind of wonderful story in Joshua 14 and 15. We're going to be introduced to Caleb, another real-life hero who comes from an unlikely background. As I was studying Caleb's life this week, I was thinking about our last study together, in which we examined four tests of credibility for the nation of Israel, four sinful temptations they would face that could undermine their credibility, or their faithfulness, as God's people. Reviewing Numbers 13 and 14 and our passage here, I found it was clear that Caleb passes every one of those tests. We're not going to find any credibility gap because of sinful failure in Caleb's life. It's a story told in the context of the distribution of the nine and one-half tribal territories west of the Jordan in Canaan.

Unfinished business

Joshua 14:1-5 is an introduction to chapters 14-19. This is a summary of the tribal allotments of all the nine and one-half tribes. We will focus in this message on the tribe of Judah, and on Caleb, who is of that tribe.

And these are the inheritances which the people of Israel received in the land of Canaan, which Elea'zar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the people of Israel distributed to them. Their inheritance was by lot, as the Lord had commanded Moses, for the nine and one-half tribes. For Moses had given an inheritance to the two and one-half tribes beyond the Jordan; but to the Levites he gave no inheritance among them. For the people of Joseph were two tribes, Manas'seh and E'phraim; and no portion was given to the Levites in the land, but only cities to dwell in, with their pasture lands for their cattle and their substance. The people of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses; they allotted the land.

This opening paragraph describes the system for assigning the territories in Canaan. There is shared leadership as Joshua is joined by this high priest Elea'zar and by one representative from each of the twelve tribes, to oversee this assigning of territory. There is a balanced representation because there is concern on a human level that there be no charge of favoritism from any tribe. In obedience to what Moses said, these men throw themselves on the sovereignty of God and cast lots before the Lord. They want God to decide how big an area each tribe needs and what area in the land each tribe is to have.

Judah is will get the largest geographic area within the land, as defined in 15:1-12. It extends from the western

shore of the Dead Sea, top to bottom, to the Mediterranean Sea. It contains the city of Jerusalem, which will later be very significant as King David's capital city when he brings together all twelve tribes under his monarchy. In 15:20-63 there is a detailed listing of 115 towns and cities in the area of Judah.

Verse 63 is important. Remember, in the last message we heard the indictment against the two and one-half tribes east of the Jordan: They couldn't drive out the Canaanites in the north, and so they weren't able to take full possession of their possession. The tribe of Judah receives the same indictment:

But the Jeb'usites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out; so the Jeb'usites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day.

Not just surviving but thriving

But now when we look at the life of Caleb, we're going to see a wonderful contrast. Here is a faithful man, an individual within the tribe of Judah, who does possess his possession. Let's read this very encouraging story in 14:6-15:

Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal; and Caleb the son of Jephun'neh the Ken'izzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Ka'desh-bar'ne-a concerning you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Ka'desh-bar'ne-a to spy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. But my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt; yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, 'Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children for ever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.' And now behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness; and now lo, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong to this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war, and for going and coming. So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day; for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities: it may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the Lord said."

Then Joshua blessed him; and he gave Hebron to Caleb the son of Jephun'neh for an inheritance. So Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb the son of Jephun'neh the Ken'izzite to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel. Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kir'iath-ar'ba; this Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim. And the land had rest from war.

Let's jump down to 15:13-14, which adds a few more details:

According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, he gave to Caleb the son of Jephun'neh a portion among the people of Judah, Kir'iath-ar'ba, that is, Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak, She'shai and Ahi'man and Talmi, the descendants of Anak.

"Caleb the son of Jephun'neh the Ken'izzite" tells us that Caleb's father was a Ken'izzite-his family of origin was not Jewish but Edomite. The first person the tribe of Judah sends up to claim his inheritance is not even of the Jewish people. The Ken'izzites were distant cousins to the nation of Israel. They were descended from Esau, Jacob's brother and the son of Isaac. When Esau lost his inheritance to his brother Jacob, he went and lived in Edom across the Jordan River. The Edomites were long-standing enemies of Israel. Throughout Israel's history they carried out a border warfare of skirmishes and incursions into the land.

If you trace Caleb's lineage in 1 Chronicles, you find that sometime in his family history he was adopted into a family within the tribe of Judah as a proselyte to Judaism. Gentile converts to the Jewish faith were folded directly into the nation and became members of one of the twelve tribes.

Caleb's name is very important. As you probably know, in the Bible, people names and place names have great spiritual significance. Caleb's name means "Dog." To call someone a dog in Old Testament times was the worst epithet. You can't help but wonder what kind of parents Caleb had that they would name their child this way. Dogs were of no value in that culture. All of this hints that Caleb might have been abandoned, an unwanted child who was providentially folded into the family of God. Before his adoption into Israel, he didn't have a family that he could be proud of. But God sovereignly placed him into the tribe of Judah. That means that he became a member of aristocracy, because from Judah came the kings, the great spiritual, political, and military leaders of the nation.

We have already seen this spiritual dynamic at work in our study in Joshua when we encountered Rahab the harlot, who was an Amorite (chapters 2, 6). And following the conquest and settlement, during the period of the Judges, Ruth, the Moabite woman who marries a Jewish man will get folded into the family of faith. All three of these people are ancestors of King David; they are taken into the kingly line of Judah. But more importantly, they are ancestors of Jesus, the Messiah, which makes them our spiritual ancestors.

I thought last week of the beautiful statement about Jesus in Hebrews 2:11, that he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. As Caleb was adopted as an alien into that people of God, each one of us through faith in Jesus Christ have been adopted into a spiritual family forever.

When you think about Caleb's origins and all the things that he had going against him as a child, the fact that he lives out his faith with such gusto, vitality, and enthusiasm is amazing. He really personifies the title of our series, The Adventure and Victory of Faith. There's a sense in which Caleb refused to be victimized by his past, or to be a prisoner of his own scripting, as we would say in modern parlance. So now in our passage, at the age of eighty-five, this tough old warrior comes to Joshua to claim his inheritance. He's really a spokesman for the rest of the tribe of Judah. He has become the prince of Judah, an honored leader in the largest, most prominent tribe in the nation.

Caleb makes reference in verses 6-9 to the history at Ka'desh-bar'ne-a. Let's review Numbers 13-14, this period of rebellion in the life of the nation, and the part that Caleb and Joshua played. Soon after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, they crossed the wilderness in the Sinai peninsula. Under Moses' leadership they came to Ka'desh-bar'ne-a on the southern border of Canaan. God had promised the people that although there were enemies occupying the land, they could occupy it. God said that it was beautiful, flowing with milk and honey; it had great natural resources. But the reason the twelve spies, including Joshua and Caleb, were sent into the land is that the nation didn't believe it.

Apparently each one of these twelve spies was assigned a separate area to check out. The area that Caleb explored is referred to in Joshua 14:12 as the hill country. Several times in our passage it's also called Hebron, which is really Mount Hebron, a beautiful area nineteen miles south of Jerusalem. There isn't much vegetation there now, but back then it was heavily wooded and had springs of water.

Hebron also was historically important to the people of Israel. It was associated with the patriarchs. It was in Hebron where Abraham lived when he first came into the land from Haran generations earlier. It was there that he built an altar of sacrifice. It was where God communicated most of the covenant relationship with Abraham: the promise of the land, the promise of a seed, the promise of the Messiah who was to come. Hebron is where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah are buried. So that place evokes important memories in the minds of God's people. The territory that Caleb was given to spy out was about the most prime piece of real estate you can imagine. The name Hebron in Hebrew means "Fellowship." It was a place of fellowship with God for Abraham, and for Caleb it represented what he could look forward to in fellowship with God in the land.

There is the problem of the Anakim, or the sons of Anak, as they're called in chapter 15. Caleb is realistic about that. These people have been noted before in Old Testament history. They are giants who arrived in Canaan hundreds of years before the Israelites got there. In the Old Testament they have many different names because the different peoples around Canaan each had their own descriptions for them. In one place they're called the Rephaim, meaning the shadowy, ghostly, or mysterious ones. The people of Moab called them the Emims, meaning terrors or horrible ones. There is one place where they're called Zamzummims, meaning

people who speak gibberish, because no one around them could understand a word they said. Throughout the first five books of the Bible, the Anakim are proverbial for enemies impossible to conquer. The question is asked, "Who can stand before the Anakim?" implying that it's impossible ever to win victory over these terrifying, ghostly people.

So as Caleb conducted his reconnaissance in the hill country, he saw the beauty, but he understood that he was faced with this opposition. But as he returned to Ka'desh-bar'ne-a, he was looking at the land through the eyes of faith, as was Joshua. They believed God was bigger than the giants, he was a God of provision, and he could overcome any kind of opposition that they were facing. Unfortunately, when the other ten spies came back, they gave what is called in the book of Numbers an evil report. They also lied: They said that all the people of the land were giants, although only a small percentage of the population were of the Anakim. Even though the ten faithless spies did say that it was beautiful, and there were great resources, the reality was that the giants and the fortified cities were what dominated their perception. It wasn't through eyes of faith but through eyes of disbelief and faithlessness that they evaluated the land. So the majority report said they were unable to take the land.

Overflowing with confidence in God

Our passage here, 14:6-9, reviews the confident optimism of Caleb and Joshua. In verse 7 Caleb says, "I brought him word again as it was in my heart." It literally says in the Hebrew that his heart was overflowing with confidence, in direct contrast to the hearts of the ten spies. Caleb believed God could take this land through them. And Moses responded to Caleb's godly optimism with the promise Caleb repeats in verse 9: "Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children for ever."

Unfortunately, the rest of the nation did not share Moses', Caleb's, and Joshua's optimism and hope. Numbers 14 records that they tried to execute Joshua and Caleb. But as Joshua 14:10 makes clear, "And now behold, the Lord has kept me alive, as he said, these forty-five years...." It was a tough forty-five years; thirty-eight years in the wilderness waiting for the promise of the inheritance to be fulfilled, and then seven years of difficult, intense warfare in the land. Yet God kept Caleb alive and sustained his faith, even though God had turned his back on that entire generation of Israelite people. During the wilderness period, everyone who left Egypt at age twenty or over died, except for Joshua and Caleb. More than a million people died in the wilderness. And through all those difficult years, Caleb hung on to the promise that God made him through Moses that he would survive and claim his inheritance in the land. I believe that hope gave him great joy and courage as he endured all those years of wandering and waiting. He tells Joshua in verse 10, "I didn't just survive, I thrived!" He is a man of tremendous vitality, energy, and enthusiasm.

How could he sustain that through all of the years of traveling with these people who were murmuring and complaining about how tough life was? There was a consistent pattern throughout those years of resisting Moses' leadership and complaining about him. Further, there were people dying physically every day. How can Caleb show up at age eighty-five full of spiritual vitality? The answer is that even though his physical body was in the wilderness, his heart and mind were already in Canaan, hoping against hope for what God had promised him. He was fellowshiping with the Lord in that beautiful hill country of Hebron already.

We as Christians have a tremendous eternal hope of being in heaven with the difficulties in life over with. But we're also convinced that we have already received our inheritance in Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1:3, we can claim every spiritual blessing. Caleb is a great example of the living hope the apostle Peter described in 1 Peter 1:3. This living hope for the future helps us to not just survive but thrive here and now, even when things are really tough, confusing, and discouraging.

That's why in verse 12 Caleb is able to make this bold, courageous claim: "So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day...." At age eighty-five he says, "My time is now. I want my inheritance-Hebron, the best place I can imagine. I want the place of richest fellowship with the Lord, the place of deepest intimacy with him. And no opposition from terrifying giants is going to stop me." The last phrase in verse 13 isn't very well translated: "It may be that the Lord will be with me...." The emphasis is really on the promise of a God who is true to his word. There is no thought in Caleb's mind that he might not receive the land. He is convinced that he will have what God promised him. What we see here, in verse 12 especially, is a

man of spiritual hope, confidence, expectancy, and optimism. There is not a word of pessimism, discouragement, or negativity, even though he has spent forty years surrounded by such attitudes.

Whenever I get negative and critical, and I start thinking that things aren't going to work out, it comes down to lacking faith in God. A negative spirit is the mark of the flesh, of carnality at work. We weren't given a spirit of fear (see 2 Timothy 1:7), but of hope, confidence, and optimism. Second Corinthians 1:20 says that God's promises are yes and amen. I struggle at times to trust God to be at work in the people around me and in my circumstances. But if we are really a spiritual son or daughter of Caleb, we ought to be the most constructive, positive, excited people in the world, not negative or even neutral, as we look at life. We need to have the optimism of Caleb even in the face of impossibility.

Last week through Dennis Sheehan I met Doug Layton, a businessman from Nashville, TN, whose life was interrupted by the Lord five years ago. Right after the Gulf War, the United Nations and the U. S. set up a no-fly zone above the thirty-sixth parallel in the north of Iraq so that the Kurdish people would have a place of safety and protection. The U.S. also worked to repatriate a number of Kurdish nationals, and six thousand of them came to Nashville. Doug and his wife got connected with seventeen of them through their church (he said he adopted one guy and ended up with seventeen because of mothers-in-law, brothers, grandkids, etc.). God put on his heart a burden for the salvation of these Muslims who were in our country, and so he worked with Campus Crusade to get the Jesus film translated into the Kurdish language. He even had some Muslim Kurds from Nashville speak the parts in the Jesus film. That work was completed four years ago. Then, Doug said, God gave him a burden to get the Jesus film into Kurdistan, in the north of Iraq. But he didn't know how to do it. That was the biggest obstacle for him. He tried to get other people to take it, but nobody would. Thirty years earlier Doug himself had been a drug smuggler in Turkey, and he had a criminal record there. He said, "Lord, there's no way I'm going to get from Turkey into Iraq." But God kept telling him to go. So in obedience Doug followed the Lord, flying around the world, getting through Turkey to take both the film version and the video cassette version of the Jesus film into Kurdistan. That's really the spirit of Caleb at work: "Lord, you've called me to do something, and you don't make promises without the hope of fulfillment."

In our passage we see that Caleb succeeds in his mission and takes Hebron away from the Anakim. This ought to be the hallmark of our life as well. The apostle Paul rejoices, "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph..." (2 Corinthians 2:14). Our inheritance in Jesus Christ includes victorious living here and now, not just the hope of eventually getting to heaven. Someone said that we are born again to be monuments to God's strength and power, not monuments to his impotence. Listen to what the apostle John writes: "...This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 John 5:4). Jesus says, "In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). John again exults, "...He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Then the apostle Paul writes, "For sin will have no dominion over you...." (Romans 6:14), and again, "...We are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). What God did in the life of Caleb, he is doing in the lives of men and women today. It is normative Christianity, if we're willing to live by faith.

When Doug Layton arrived in Iraq, he didn't know what he was going to do with the film. There are several amazing stories of how God fulfilled the promise. Let me tell you one. A Kurdish Christian friend of Doug's took the film to a commercial theater in a large city in the north. He met with the manager and said, "I have here an American film release, but it's in the Kurdish language." (There are no films in the Kurdish language; everything they bring in either has subtitles, or they have to listen to it in the foreign language soundtrack.) The manager said, "I'd love to show it, but tonight is a premiere of the newest Rambo film." The Kurdish freedom fighters are warriors of warriors, and they love the high adventure of the American superhero movies. The manager said there was no way he was going to show a film about Jesus instead of the Rambo film. But Doug's friend was persistent and said, "Look, I think they'll like it. Tell them it's a double feature and put it on first. If they don't like the Jesus film, we'll shut it off and go right to Rambo." And he persuaded the manager to run the Jesus film.

The theater was packed with big Kurdish men with their rifles and swords. They were smoking up a storm. The manager was too fearful to tell them what he was doing, so he just started the film. It got very quiet, and it

stayed quiet. You could have heard a pin drop through the entire showing of the Jesus film. The manager scurried down to the front at the conclusion of it and said, "Thank you so much for your patience, now we have a double feature, you have the privilege of seeing the newest Rambo release." A tall man in the front stood up and said, "No. To watch a film about Rambo would be blasphemous after what we have seen about the prophet Jesus. We should not see that film." And they all left. Doug's hope was realized! God honored his desire for the Muslims in Kurdistan to be exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The impact of living for God's best

Caleb has tremendous influence on the people around him. His life of faith impacts his own family, and through his family it impacts the entire nation of Israel. Chapter 15 verses 15-19 talk about another campaign Caleb is involved in:

And he [Caleb] went up from there against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir was formerly Kir'iath-sepher. And Caleb said, "Whoever smites Kir'iath-sepher, and takes it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter as wife." And Oth'ni-el the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it; and he gave him Achsah his daughter as wife. When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field; and she alighted from her ass and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to him, "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

Those springs are still there today in the modern city of Debir. Hundreds of gallons of water per minute gush from them. The area around Debir is dry and barren, so the possession of the springs of water was important for their crops and livestock.

This is a great story about Caleb's influence. He encourages his nephew Oth'ni-el as they're facing this strong Canaanite city. In essence Caleb is saying to this young man, "You can take it. We can conquer this city." Oth'ni-el, who has seen the results of faith in his uncle Caleb's life, leads the victory over the city and gains his young bride, Achsah, who is also a woman of faith. As a new bride, Achsah comes back to her father asking for his spiritual blessing on her life and her marriage, and also for the gift of these springs of water. Her father's influence on her is apparent. She is not afraid to ask for the best, the highest, the greatest good in this place. Caleb has become a source of blessing, encouragement, spiritual influence, and strength in his own family. In the period of the Judges, Oth'ni-el will become the very first deliverer-judge God raises up to lead the nation of Israel during that dark, confusing, tumultuous period. He will continue the family spiritual leadership.

And it all starts with these springs of water. I can't help but remember Jesus' words in John 7:38: "He who believes in Me...From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water..." That promise is for us. As people of faith, we can be a source of blessing, encouragement, spiritual life, and impact like Caleb on our families and those around us, because of the life of Christ flowing through us.

How did Caleb so consistently live this kind of life? There is a certain statement made about him six times in the Bible, three times in the book of Numbers and three times in our passage here, the first time in 14:8. Caleb says of himself to Moses, "...I wholly followed the Lord my God." In 14:9, after Moses has given him the promise of the inheritance, he says, "...because you have wholly followed the Lord my God." In 14:14, Joshua writes why he fulfilled the promise of the inheritance: "...because he [Caleb] wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel." That phrase "wholly followed the Lord" literally means that he was filled to the full with God, flooded with the presence and power of God.

The apostle Paul describes this same kind of authentic Christian life in 2 Corinthians. He honestly talks about the difficulty, the tension of following Jesus Christ faithfully, asking the rhetorical question in 2:16, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Who can live out this kind of life? And then he answers the question in 3:5-6, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant..." That new-covenant lifestyle was the key to Caleb's success in life. He completely followed his God, the Lord God of Israel. He was flooded with the presence of

God himself. Only one other person in the whole Old Testament is described as one who wholly followed the Lord: King David, the greatest human hero after Caleb until the Messiah himself came and lived.

What set Caleb apart from everyone else is that he wanted the very best that God had for him, and nothing less. To experience the best, he had to allow God to fill him, to pervade every area of his life. So his hope, strength, optimism, and sufficiency were from God. He was totally dependent on the Lord. That was the secret of his life, and what made him a man of spiritual success and influence. The victories he experienced in Hebron and then in Debir were accomplished in the power of God. That is the key to triumph out of tragedy for each one of us.

That's the life of Caleb, the outcast who had few personal resources, a terrible family background, and nothing within himself to give. Yet because he wholly followed the Lord God of Israel, he was a hero, a great encouragement to us. More importantly, according to the Scriptures, a man of faith like Caleb is heroic in God's eyes. The Lord looks on him with great delight.

Do you have impossible races to run, terrifying battles to fight, deep holes of disadvantage to climb out of? If you are a child of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, then claim the absolute certainty that you are flooded with the presence of a God who will run, fight, and climb with you, for you, and through you. The promises of God are yes and amen. We can take that to the bank.

JOSHUA-THE ADVENTURE AND VICTORY OF FAITH

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Joshua 14:1-16:10

Sixteenth Message

Doug Goins

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