

Background Characters in the Old Testament

Caleb: Living with the Wait

Lesson #2 for October 9, 2010

Scriptures: Numbers 13,14; Joshua 14; Judges 1:12-15. Deuteronomy 1:19-33.

1. This lesson is about Caleb and his nephew Othniel who were both fairly major players in the establishment of the children of Israel in the land of Canaan.
2. This series of lessons is about background characters. What did the following important background characters do: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, Geuel? (Numbers 13:3-15) What if I told you that they were sent on a mission with Caleb and Joshua? Would you recognize them then?
3. The first time we really read about Caleb is in Numbers 13:1-16. How do you explain Numbers 13:1,2 in contrast with Deuteronomy 1:19-22? Whose idea was it to send the spies into Canaan? Was their faith getting a little shaky? Did they need more evidence that God was leading them? As a trained general, Moses must have known about the use of spies! Was Moses getting old and his memory failing when he wrote Deuteronomy? Compare Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Which version of the Sabbath commandment was actually written on the tables of stone? (Deuteronomy 5:22) But what about Exodus 20:1,2? Don't those verses agree with Deuteronomy 5:22?
4. We will assume—based on comparing the above passages—that the idea of sending spies into Canaan was an idea that the people came up with themselves. Try to imagine that you were one of those 12 spies. What would you have done while traveling through the land of Canaan for the first time? Would you want to try out the products of the land? That land had been described as a land “flowing with milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:8,17; 13:5; 33:4) What do you suppose those words meant?
5. The 12 spies, along with the rest of the children of Israel, had been eating manna for more than a year. How do you suppose it felt to eat the good produce from the land of Canaan? When the spies returned safely to the camp of Israel, they reported on what they had found. After taking one look at those grapes and whatever else they may have brought back from the land, what would your comment be? Wouldn't you have said, “Let's go”?
6. When the 12 spies returned, they were carrying a bunch of grapes that was so large Moses said it had to be carried on a stick between two men. (Numbers 13:23) Today, the symbol for the tourist industry in Israel is a picture of two men with a stick on their shoulders carrying a large bunch of grapes! If you look at the picture in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, it seems to suggest that there were other types of fruit on the stick as well as grapes. (See Numbers 13:23) Was that large bunch of grapes carried on a stick because they were trying to prevent it from being jostled and spoiled? Or, was it so large and so heavy that it needed to be carried by two men?
7. Read Numbers 13:25-29,31-33. Notice that the report itself was contradictory. How could it be a land rich and fertile with grapes such as those they brought back and at the same time be a “land [that] doesn't even produce enough to feed the people who live there. Everyone we saw was very tall, ³³and we even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak.” Hadn't some of them wanted to go back to Egypt for a long time?
8. Did the 10 spies believe that all the evidence was stacked against them? Were they certain that the “facts” were so overwhelming that their faith in God would mean nothing?
9. What report would you have given if you had been one of those spies? From a human

point of view, didn't it seem like the conquest of the land would be impossible? Did the 10 spies allow their vision of the land and its inhabitants to overwhelm their faith in God?

10. Read Numbers 14:5-10. After having seen the plagues in Egypt and experienced the events at Mount Sinai, was there really any basis for doubting God's ability to take them into Canaan? Hadn't they seen God wipe out the Egyptian army? Hadn't they already defeated the Amalekite army once? Hadn't God provided the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to protect and guide them? Hadn't God provided manna and water for them everywhere they went? How could they be asking for more miracles? Did all those miracles produce more faith? The real question was: Who was going to conquer the Canaanites? Would it be God? Or would it be the Israelites? Would they need to depend on God? Or would they depend on their own military abilities?
11. Read Numbers 14:11-25. Was that the first time Moses had such a conversation with God? (Exodus 32:11-14) Did God lose His temper? Did Moses really convince Him to change His mind? (1 Samuel 15:10,11,29,35; Joel 2:14; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:9,10; Malachi 3:6) Did God choose Saul because God thought he would be the best king possible at that time? Or, did God choose Saul because God wanted them to have a king? Or, did God choose Saul because God knew that he was the kind of king the people wanted? Wasn't God sorry about Saul from the very beginning? Why is that conversation between Moses and God recorded in the writings of Moses? What does it say to us about God? About Moses? Did the Devil and God have a conversation about Moses similar to their conversation about Job which is recorded in Job 1 & 2? Was this conversation between God and Moses to demonstrate why God wanted to take Moses to heaven some forty years later? Was God showing the onlooking universe that Moses could be trusted? Remember that Moses had been trained in the religious practices of the Egyptians. He was also a murderer! Just take a look at what an incredible difference there was between the attitude of Moses and that of the people!
12. No matter what God said, they disagreed! Who died in the wilderness? (Numbers 14:29) Everybody? Clearly, that is not true. Just the men from the age of twenty (military age)? What about the tribe of Levi? They were counted from the age of one month. (Numbers 3:15) And they began their service at the age of thirty. They were not included among the spies that were sent in, and clearly, Eleazar, Aaron's son, survived, and he must have been over twenty because he was already serving as a priest since his brothers were killed. (Leviticus 11) And he was still alive in Canaan. (Joshua 17:4; 24:33) And what about all the women over twenty? Did they all die?
13. Remember that Caleb and the rest of the Israelites had grown up in Egypt where they were continually told that the Egyptian gods were superior to their Israelite God because their God could not even get them out of slavery!
14. Review briefly what we know about Caleb. When Caleb was 40 years of age, Moses returned from herding sheep in the wilderness; suddenly, everything changed. Caleb lived through the 10 plagues of Egypt. He sprinkled his door with the blood of the Passover. He prepared the Passover meal with his wife. He and his family walked down along the Red Sea and in that frightful experience at nighttime crossed the sea on dry land. He was there at the foot of Mount Sinai through the incredible experiences of God giving the Ten Commandments and the rest of His instruction from the Mount. No doubt, he assisted in bringing together supplies and material for the building of the tabernacle.
15. When the construction of the tabernacle was completed, they followed the Cloud and set out straight for the promised land. Everything looked so promising. It should have been a

journey of no more than two or three weeks from Sinai into the land of Canaan. Then, he was chosen as one of the 12 spies. After the terrible rebellion at Kadesh Barnea and through no fault of his own and against his advice to the people, he was forced to go with them back into the wilderness to wander for forty years in the desert sands. During those forty years, he watched every one of his peers die except Joshua, Eleazar, perhaps some of the tribe of Levi, and maybe some of the women.

16. The 10 leaders of the tribes who had been chosen to be spies and who had turned against the Lord and were unfaithful were struck dead with some fatal disease. (Numbers 14:36-38) Was it an infectious disease? Was it a punishment from God? Only Caleb and Joshua survived. Twice more in rapid succession the people tried to rebel against God. (Numbers 14) Both attempts were fruitless and thousands of people died.
17. Just before entering the land and while Moses was still alive, Caleb, among others, was asked to be on the committee to choose the fairest way to divide up the land. Only Caleb and Joshua had actually been there. Did their opinions hold great weight for that reason? How well do you think they remembered what they had seen forty years earlier?
18. Finally, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness and having survived the terrible apostasy at Baal Peor and after Moses died, Joshua and Caleb crossed the Jordan along with their families and relatives and entered the land of Canaan. The next 5 to 7 years were filled with almost constant battles as they worked on driving out or destroying the people living there.
19. After the period of fighting was more or less over, Caleb went to Joshua and asked to be given the piece of property that God had promised him. At 85 years of age, Caleb was not afraid of the giants! Caleb knew that God was on his side! Shouldn't it have been very clear to every warrior in Israel by that time that when God was on their side, they were invincible; whereas, when God was not on their side, they could not win anything? Was Caleb absolutely convinced that God would fight on his side? What was different about his experience from that of the rest of Israel?
20. Compare your life with those of Caleb and Joshua. How many mighty miracles of God have you seen with your own eyes? Does it require greater faith to live in our world today than it did in their day?
21. Read Joshua 14:6-15. It describes a man who had fought many battles. He had spent forty years wandering the desert with the other Israelites during the cold as well as the scorching sun while living on manna. Along with his relatives, Caleb made a specific request to be given the land around Hebron that was inhabited by those giants. We are not told exactly what happened in the battle for Hebron; we are told only that God gave the city and the surrounding territory to Caleb. (Joshua 15:13-19) Caleb did not believe his work was finished when he conquered that territory. There were other giants living in a nearby area, and they needed to be dealt with as well.
22. So, he promised his daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who succeeded in conquering Kiriath Sepher. His nephew Othniel succeeded. So, he was given Achsah as a wife. On the wedding day, Achsah asked her father for a gift. She was given land and two springs—the upper and lower springs. Caleb was very generous even in his old age. Didn't Caleb know that whatever was given to his daughter would then be inherited by her husband's family and not his own family?
23. Read Judges 1:18-21. Do you think other members of the tribe of Judah assisted Caleb in his conquest of Hebron? Why do you think that entire tribes such as the tribe of Dan, the

tribe of Benjamin, and others that are mentioned failed to drive out large groups of people living in their territory while Caleb with a small group mostly of his own family members managed to drive out “giants”? It was all about cooperation with God!

24. Caleb could not have lived too many more years. However, we do know that Joshua, his associate, lived to be 110. (Joshua 24:29) In any case, Othniel who had married Caleb’s daughter and was Caleb’s nephew served very admirably as one of the first judges of the children of Israel; and the land was at peace for forty years. (Judges 3:7-11)
25. Read 1 Samuel 30:17-20. When David was running away from Saul, he escaped and lived for a significant period of time in the small city of Ziklag which was in Philistine territory. Was that part of Caleb’s original possession? Was David a descendent of Caleb?
26. Read 1 Samuel 25:2,3. Remember the story of Abigail and Nabal. Nabal was reported to be a descendent of Caleb. Was it the same Caleb? How do you understand 1 Chronicles 4?
27. In our day, how often are we bombarded with “facts” on such ideas as the theory of evolution? Do we allow ourselves to be swept away by those facts? How can we learn to clearly distinguish between the hard data—the real facts—and people’s interpretation of those facts? Are we prepared to trust God to take us across the “heavenly Jordan” and enter the heavenly Canaan?

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Last Modified: August 23, 2010

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