

## GOD'S OLD-TIME PIONEER

"He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." Joshua 14:14.

Six times in the Bible it is said that Caleb "wholly followed the Lord." He spoke for himself saying, "Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the Lord my God" (Joshua 14:8). Of Caleb Moses spoke, 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 my God" (Joshua 14:9). Most important of all, God spoke of Caleb as follows: "But my servant Caleb, because he hath 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" (Numbers 14:24). "Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swore to give unto your fathers, Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord" (Deuteronomy 1:35-36). Such repetition has great significance. It unfolds to view the innermost secret of Caleb's life. It mirrors his very soul to us. Whenever God says that a man has followed Him fully, that man, who has such praise recorded of him, is well worthy of our study and consideration.

Our first glimpse of Caleb, whose name means "wholehearted" and to which he was true, is at Kadesh-Barnea when he was forty years of age. The children of Israel had left Egypt intending to enter Canaan. For two years they had been making their way toward the Promised Land. The road which led there passed through the wilderness, but God was with them to guide them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He provided them with food, drink and clothing. He protected them from all enemies. He had declared to them the excellence of the land, promised them that He would guide them to it, then commanded them to go up and possess it.

In contrast with the land of burdens and bondage from which they had been delivered, and the barrenness of the wilderness through which they had just passed, it was a land of sufficiency, safety and satisfaction. Such a land was set before them as an outright gift to be had for the taking. It was already theirs so far as God was concerned, but it was to be made theirs in actual possession by simple faith and obedience.

But what did they do? Upon arrival at the borderland of their dreams, instead of going at once and possessing the land as God had commanded them, through unbelief they failed to go all the way and claim their inheritance. Many today are like them in that they make a good start and a fair showing, but fail to go all the way. They refuse to attempt great things for God. They are afraid to take risks for the Kingdom. An eminent English lawyer had often spoken to one of his wealthy clients about the salvation of his soul. The rich man always answered, "I don't believe in going all the way." It happened that they were traveling by train from London to Brighton. When the train was approaching a certain station, the lawyer said to his friend, "This is your destination," and helped him to get his baggage together. Upon seeing that he had made a mistake, the wealthy man said, "Why did you say that this was my station?" The lawyer replied, "You don't believe in going all the way." "Oh," said he, "that is in religion. I go all the way in my business." Many others are like that, but Caleb was not among that number. "He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."

Instead of obediently possessing the land, the children of Israel asked Moses to appoint an appraisal committee to spy out the land. A committee of twelve was selected, one man from each tribe and each one a man of distinction, judgment and discretion. They were chosen for physical endurance, quickness of eye, tact in emergencies, and good judgment of the land and people.

They were to spy out the land, carefully examine the soil and report whether it was fit for pasturage or tillage, whether it was fertile or barren, wooded or bare. To confirm and illustrate what they might say of the soil, they were to bring of the fruit of the

land. They were to bring information about the towns, whether they were walled and fortified or open and unprotected. They were to bring particulars of the dwellings of the people and note especially their numbers, character, habits and strength. From these things their power of resistance might be inferred.

As a representative of his tribe, Caleb went with the eleven representatives of the other tribes to investigate Canaan and report on both its resources and its facilities for resisting conquest. I like to think of Caleb marching at the head of this group—head up, eyes like an eagle, girdle tight, step quick and firm, and hair streaming in the wind. He could march all day, sleep on the ground and be the first man up in the morning. Nothing escaped the notice of Caleb. He saw the hills and the valleys, the brooks and the springs, the olive orchards and the vineyards, and the fig trees laden with fruit. After observing the wheat and barley fields, he gazed with pleasure upon the cities with their massive walls. Truly, they had found a land of magic charms, luscious fruits, alluvial soil and marvelous advantages.

However, when God's old-time pioneer saw the temples filled with idols and beheld the obscene orgies of their worship his soul blazed with holy indignation. Caleb was not afraid of any crowd who worshipped a piece of painted wood, prayed to a polished stone, or put their faces in the dust before a metal image that he could knock to pieces with his hammer. He said, "I am not afraid of men who worship things like these, no matter how big they are or what sort of walls they hide behind."

After a forty days' exploration of Canaan the twelve spies returned to Kadesh-Barnea. It must have been very interesting to hear their reports, because they were not unanimous. Both the majority and the minority agreed that the land which they had just explored was well worth possessing. They said it was a very fertile and fruitful land, flowing with milk and honey. But the majority, or ten of the twelve spies, declared that the difficulties in the way of getting possession of the land were so great as to make any effort in that direction an absolute futility. They said the land was inhabited by fierce and warlike tribes who dwelt in strong and high-walled cities. They also reported that some of the men were of gigantic stature, so large, they said, that "we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." Upon hearing that discouraging report, there was an immediate outburst of panic and confusion. There was consternation, disappointment and sobbing among the people. They feared, trembled and refused to advance. God had already given them the land, but they would not take it. They lacked faith in Him and a willingness to obey Him. They had a keener sense of the difficulties than they had of the presence and power of God. They lacked the courage and willingness to make the sacrifice and to pay the price of success.

This was Caleb's opportunity. He wanted to shut the mouths of those whining cowards as they made their report, so he and Joshua submitted a minority report. Fully aware of the difficulties, Caleb was absolutely certain they could be overcome. Being a man of great faith in God, Caleb courageously stepped forward and said, "Let us go up at once and possess the land; we are well able to overcome it." Instead of being pessimistic, Caleb was radiant with optimism and hope. He did not minimize the difficulties, but he magnified the Lord God. His faith in their ability to overcome was more than mere optimism; it was an expression of real trust in God.

To take the stand that he did required courage. It meant not only facing the sneers and ridicule of the majority, but it involved positive danger. This majority was fast becoming a frenzied mob that was threatening to stone him for making the proposal which he did. This age needs a bit of the iron which was in Caleb's blood. He stood for God and goodness, truth and trust, humility and obedience, love and liberality. The important thing, after all, is to know that you are in the center of God's will and obedient to His Word. Such a realization gives one all the courage that is needed.

The secret of Caleb's strength and courage and faith was that "he wholly followed the Lord." There are not many in the Bible of whom that could truthfully be said. Many of the Bible characters, like most of us today, were quite satisfied to follow the Lord now and then, partly, occasionally, but not fully or wholly as Caleb did. When Caleb said, "I wholly followed the Lord my God," he was not boasting, but he was testifying truthfully. He was stating a truth to which those who knew him best could bear witness also. Moreover, there was a note of deep gladness in his testimony. There was solid joy and satisfaction in it. Caleb was not wringing his hands in vain regret over ill-spent years. In humility and gratitude he was rejoicing over his radiant yesterdays. It is indeed significant that no soul has ever been found who looked with regret upon a life of loyal service to God.

On his second visit to Europe, in 1872, Dwight L. Moody, at an early morning meeting in a haymow near Dublin, heard Henry Varley say in a quiet way: "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly dedicated to Him." The next Lord's Day, sitting high up in Spurgeon's tabernacle in London, in the same seat he had occupied in 1867, Moody, as he thrilled to the preaching of Spurgeon, was hearing over and over again those words of Varley. He said to himself, "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man. Varley meant any man. Varley didn't say he had to be educated, or brilliant, or anything else--just a man! Well, by the Holy Spirit in me, I will be one of those men!" Sympathetic Christians who went to talk with him, thinking that he was under the conviction of sin, learned that it was not a case of sin or penitence, but great joy, the joy of dedication to a high purpose. Henceforth his was a life like that of Caleb. Moody followed fully the Lord his God.

One admires Caleb's Christ-like patience. When his resolution to go up at once and possess the land was voted down by an overwhelming majority, he did not show any anger. Even though he was absolutely sure that his position was right, he did not withdraw and have nothing more to do with the faithless and cowardly crowd. He still believed that with all their faults they were the hope of the world. He said to himself, "If my generation has failed, we must train another to be more loyal and more faithful than we have been."

The rebellious and wicked people were doomed for their sin to wander forty years in the wilderness, until the carcasses of all who were over twenty years of age on leaving Egypt had fallen there. But God never forgot Caleb's fidelity. He said, "Surely they shall not see the land, but my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went; and his seed shall possess it."

Through all those forty years of wandering in the wilderness Caleb never lost faith in God, and never forgot the promise that the Lord made to him and Joshua, that although their contemporaries should whiten the wilderness with their bones for their unbelief, they two, of all the host, should enter Canaan and possess the land. During that long wait Caleb saw his contemporaries perish one by one. He saw more funerals than any other man. His environment was against him, but he never wavered through unbelief.

When Caleb was eighty-five years of age he walked into the tent of Joshua and sat down. "What now, old comrade?" said Joshua. "Well, I have been thinking about those giants up there in the hills. You know the very sight of them frightened a lot of our fellows forty-five years ago. I said then we could drive them out, but it has not been done. I have come to ask you to give me my inheritance where they live and I will go up there and finish them." "But Caleb, you are getting old. Let some younger man have the job." With his eyes flashing, Caleb replied, "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. Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the Lord 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 will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the Lord said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance." We need people in the warfare against Satan and sin who, like Caleb, will go all the way with God; with a faith that will dare to do the impossible; men who have learned the secret of drawing their strength from God and in the name of Christ claim their inheritance.