

THE MAN FOR THE TIMES

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

Six times in the Bible we are told that Caleb "wholly followed the Lord." Such repetition has great significance. It unfolds to view the innermost secret of his life. It mirrors his soul to us. The name Caleb means wholehearted. He was true to his name. Our first glimpse of him is at Kadesh-Barnea when he was forty years of age. At that time he was suddenly brought into action as one of the twelve spies appointed by Moses to search out the land of Canaan.

For two years the Israelites 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. God had declared to them the excellence of the land, promised them that he would guide them to it, give them possession of 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, satisfaction and safety. 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 arriving at the borderland of their dreams, instead of going at once and possessing the land as God had commanded them, they asked Moses to appoint an appraisal committee to spy out the land. Clearly their duty was not to send men to search out the land, but, trusting in God, to obey His voice and go and take possession of it. The committee of twelve was selected, one man from each tribe and each one a man of distinction, judgment and discretion. Doubtless, they seemed the best men for the purpose; chosen for physical endurance, quickness of eye, tact in emergencies, and good judgment of the land and people. Yet, some very important requisites were evidently not considered. Out of the twelve only two were men of faith in God and men of deep convictions as to the destiny of Israel.

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 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.

In the glorious summer-time, thus commissioned, they set out on their journey. At that time the country looked the most beautiful. 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, hair streaming in the wind! He had the spirit of the true pioneer. He could march all day, sleep on the ground and be the first man up in the morning.

They passed up through the whole country from the south to the extreme north. They did their work thoroughly, traversing the valleys and climbing the hills. Nothing escaped Caleb as he climbed the hills of the promised country. He saw the hills and the valleys, the brooks and the springs, the olive orchards and vineyards, and the fig trees laden with fruit. He saw the fields where the wheat and barley grew, and he was filled with pride as he thought how God had given them such a land. With pleasure he gazed upon the cities with their massive walls.

After forty days' search the twelve spies returned bringing with them a branch with a great cluster of grapes and also a specimen of the pomegranates and figs. They had found a land of magic charms, luscious fruits, alluvial soil and marvelous advantages. God had miraculously led them from Egypt to this wonderful Promised Land.

Ten of the spies saw all the good overshadowed by great difficulties; the other two--Joshua and Caleb -- saw the same difficulties but they had the definite conviction that God would see them through. The ten were controlled by human weakness; the two were confirmed by divine guidance. The ten faltered on the threshold of a difficult undertaking; the two fearlessly faced it.

When the children of Israel, who had counted on an easy victory heard the report of ten spies, they gave way to a cowardly despair, even before the report was finished. Upon hearing the words, "the people be strong that dwell in the land and the cities are walled and very great, " there was an immediate outburst of panic and confusion. There was consternation, bitterness, disappointment, confusion and even sobbing among the people. They feared and trembled and refused to advance. It is a story of a people who threw away their chance and failed miserably. They murdered their opportunity. God had already given them the land, but they would not take it. They lacked faith in 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 pay the price of success. What tragedy is more commonplace? Multitudes thus fail to achieve their possibilities and possess their possessions.

Caleb wanted to shut the mouths of those whining cowards as they made their report which revealed how they felt. Apparently, it never dawned on him that the Israelites would be influenced by that group of weaklings, for he judged others in the light of his own intrepid spirit. Being an optimist, Caleb was radiant with hope. He did not minimize the difficulties, but he magnified the Lord God. He was animated by faith in God instead of the fear of giants. His attitude toward God was one of calm confidence and of absolute assurance based on unquestioning faith in His promise. To Caleb it was a land to be desired, to be entered and to be possessed. His faith that "we are well able to overcome" was more than natural optimism; it was a real trust in God. His deep-rooted conviction, his undaunted courage, his calm confidence and his complete consecration inspired him to heroic action. "He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."

For approximately thirty-eight years the children of Israel wandered to and fro in the wilderness. Not until those long and weary years had passed, and that generation of weaklings had been replaced by stronger and more virile men, was the conquest of Canaan again attempted. Of all the grown men who had crossed the Red Sea, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones who survived those weary years. During those weary years Caleb "wholly followed the Lord God of Israel." In other words, he did his duty and waited patiently. Not for one moment did he lose confidence in the promise of God.

Caleb not only had a bold, generous, courageous, noble and heroic spirit, but his spirit was marked by independent inquiry, heroic faith and reliance on God. Caleb was one of the finest characters in the Bible. He was stalwart and honest, a man who obeyed God without question, and never feared to do his duty. He was humble, thoughtful, considerate, loving and courageous. After all, it is the spirit that determines the quality of any man.

Caleb did whatever God told him to do. He was as ready to fight the giants as he was to carry the clusters. In reward for his faithful following of his Master, he was given a long life of vigor, he received great honor among his brethren, he was given more and

harder service to render and his life was preserved in the hour of judgment. If any man follows God fully, God will fully take care of him.

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. These times call for men of humble mind who are ready to perform works of love in order that God may be glorified. 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.

To follow God fully requires sincerity, cheerfulness, heroism and constancy. Caleb remained true to his religious convictions throughout his life and exemplified these excellent qualities in a marvelous way. "He wholly followed the Lord God of Israel."