

Faith to Move Mountains

Joshua 14

The division continues in west Canaan and Caleb provides an example of following the Lord to receive an inheritance. His trust in God empowers him to move mountains.

Summary of the Text

Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the heads of the tribes distribute the land by lot in Canaan to the nine and one-half tribes (vv. 1-2). The other two and one-half dwelt east of the Jordan, and the Levites receive no inheritance, all accomplished “as the Lord commanded Moses” (vv. 5, 2). The children of Judah travel to Joshua in Gilgal where Caleb recounts that forty-five years ago, when he was forty years old, how Moses sent him and Joshua from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land (vv. 6-7). He brought back word which was in his heart to Moses, but the other spies with unbelief caused the heart of the people to melt (vv. 7-8). Moses swore then that the land Caleb walked on would be his and his children’s inheritance forever because he wholly followed the Lord (v. 9). Caleb says the Lord has kept him these forty-five years, through the wilderness, and he remains as strong today for war as he was then (vv. 10-11). Therefore, give him the mountain that Yahweh spoke of that day, as the Anakim dwelt there amidst huge and fortified cities. The Lord may be with him that he will be able to drive them out, as He said (v. 12). Joshua blesses and gives Hebron to Caleb for an inheritance, and thus it remained because he wholly followed Yahweh of Israel (v. 14). Hebron had been named Kirjath Arba after Arba, the greatest of the Anakim (v. 15).

The Backbone of Faith

Joshua’s remembers a tumultuous time. Israel had been out of Egypt for a year. They survived the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn, where the angel of the Lord passed over the houses with the blood of a lamb on the doorposts and lintel, but took the life of the firstborn son of those that didn’t. They walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, saw Pharaoh’s chariots and horses drown in the sea, drank water from the rock, ate manna from heaven, received the law on Sinai, built the golden calf and destroyed it, built the tabernacle, and went to Kadesh Barnea on the cusp of the Promised Land. Here the spies went out and brought back contradicting reports. They all saw the enormous fruit, the land flowing with milk and honey, and the huge people descended from Anak (Num. 13:27-28). Caleb quieted the commotion: “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (v. 29). But the other spies, except for Joshua, went soft and led the congregation into complaining and unbelief (vv. 31-33). Moses and Aaron fall on their faces before Israel, but Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and exhorted them to desire the good land: “If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into the land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey” (Num. 14:8). This was not a rational discussion, at least on Israel’s side; they took up stones to murder Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:10). It didn’t go well for Israel. That entire generation fell in the wilderness except for these two guys talking about it in this passage. Rather than doubt, die in the wilderness, become cynical about the Lord’s people, “deconstruct”, or shrink back from trusting the Lord, forty-five years later Caleb is ready go to the same mountain and claim it, if God will bless him. Faith has a backbone, is contrarian when necessary, and endures in hope.

The Foundation of Faith

Caleb’s convictions rest upon what the Lord said: “You know the word which the Lord said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea” (v. 6). He recalls what God did as well, sending him to spy out the land through His servant Moses (v. 7). He states Yahweh kept him alive these forty-five years “as He said” (v. 10; cf. Num. 14:24, 30), and now he heads to the mountain the Lord spoke of in that day (v. 12).

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Though the spy mission almost got him killed, he trusted the Lord then and has continued to do to this point. God's word endures forever, and His promises are true including during a forty-year sand trek, but you have to believe Him. And if you believe in God's promises, you take action. Joshua doesn't track Caleb down and remind him about what God said; Caleb is all over it because he has been believing God the entire time. The question was not *if* God was going to fulfill His word, but *when*. It's very strange when commentators on this passage say we shouldn't look to Caleb as an example, but more as a part of redemptive history—as if these two things can be separated. Caleb's faith is revealed by his godly actions and so he's a faithful character within redemptive history: "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (Jms. 2:18). Your faith is not in your faith. Your faith is in the one who gave it to you. We are saved by what Jesus did for us on the cross, and that grace is given to us through the instrument of faith—by trusting Him for it: "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal. 2:16). So when Caleb trusts in God, that means going to Joshua and asking for Kirjath Arba because that's what he was promised. When Paul stays in Corinth because the Lord says He has many people in that city (Acts 18:10), that's faith, or what he calls "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:4). Stand on the foundation of faith, believing what God has promised you in His word even if you first heard it forty years ago and things have been very difficult since.

The Insight of Faith

As it did forty-five years ago, the mountain still hosts descendants of Anak (v. 12). Caleb knows his dependence on the Lord and the size of the task: "It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the Lord said" (v. 12). Is it possible for the mission to fail? Sure: Caleb could flake, a new Achan could compromise the mission, or some other insanity of sin could get in the way. Does this mean he no longer believes like he did at Kadesh Barnea? He still is an optimist about the Lord keeping His word and the success of His kingdom going forward, even while he knows that his little part of it is not guaranteed. He believes without being presumptuous. He receives the inheritance "because he wholly followed the LORD God of Israel" (v. 14). Faith is not a crystal ball to peer into the future and know precisely how things will unfold. Faith is trusting God now, knowing what He has said, and relying on Him for the outcome. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego understood: "If that is the case [us going into the fire], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:17-18). In ourselves we are weak, but God uses that weakness for strength: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Caleb was strong and took the mountain. As wonderful as this was, his work was not complete without us taking up the mantle (Heb. 11:39-40). Jesus tells the disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to *this* mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done" (Matt. 21:21). That mountain was the temple mount, and it was thrown into the sea in a couple ways. The Romans destroyed it in AD 70, but the worship that occurred there since Solomon has been taken up by the new man, the Jew-Gentile united in Christ, worshipping God in Spirit and in truth among all the nations, the "seas" of the old covenant (cf. Is. 60:5). There are a lot more mountains needing to be moved. Ask the Lord to be with you to move one.