

Giants of Faith: Joshua *and* Caleb



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Num. 13:6, 30–32; Josh. 14:6–14; Luke 18:1–5; Josh. 19:49–51; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (*Hebrews 13:7, ESV*).

Every parent knows that their children learn by example, don't they? How many parents have fretted over seeing their children follow their bad traits instead of their good ones? Whatever our age, we find it easier to do wrong than to do right. It's just part of what it means to be fallen beings. “For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (*Rom. 7:15, NKJV*). Who can't relate?

From birth, humans are shaped by the power of example. We learn to do the most basic things in life—such as walking, talking, and expressing our emotions—by imitating those closest to us. As adults, we still need role models, and even if they are not perfect, we can admire and emulate those spiritual traits that made them giants of faith.

This week, we will take a deeper look into the personal examples of two giants of faith in the book of Joshua: Caleb and Joshua. What is it that made them stand out in their generation and play a key role in the life of God's people during one of the most crucial periods of Israel's history?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 22.

Faithfulness

Read Numbers 13:6, 30–32 and Joshua 14:6, 14. Who was Caleb? What was his place among the people of Israel?

The name of Caleb comes from the Hebrew word *keleb*, “dog,” which occurs in the Old Testament, always in a negative context. However, *keleb* is used in extra-biblical letters and hymns to express a servant’s courage, tenacity, and faithfulness to his or her master. In this respect, Caleb was faithful to his name, demonstrating throughout his life unwavering loyalty to his Lord.

What does it say about Caleb that he was willing to speak his mind even though the majority of the spies had a completely different opinion, and the people of Israel threatened him with death? See Num. 14:6–10, 21–25; Num. 26:65; Num. 32:12.

Consider these important Israelite leaders, contemporaries of Joshua and Caleb: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, and Geuel. Do these names sound familiar?

Probably not.

Why? Because they are the names of the other ten spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan. They are forgotten because their names were not worthy of being remembered. The report that they brought portrayed the Promised Land as impossible to conquer. They saw themselves as grasshoppers compared to the giants who inhabited some areas of the land, and their hearts melted with fear at the “impregnable” walls of the fortified cities in Canaan.

Caleb, as the older of the two spies who brought a positive report, takes the lead in presenting another possibility: the attitude of faith. He was willing to speak up for what he knew was right, despite the opposition, even in the face of potential death: “And all the congregation said to stone them with stones” (Num. 14:10, NKJV).

What do you do when most people around you seem to have a different opinion, one that goes contrary to your deepest convictions?

Give Me This Hill Country

Read Joshua 14:6–14, Numbers 14:24, Numbers 32:12, Deuteronomy 1:36, and Luke 6:45. How would you describe Caleb and Joshua's attitude? What does it mean to follow the Lord fully?

Caleb never forgot the promise the Lord had given him through Moses: that he would enter the land where his feet had trodden (*Num. 14:24*). Forty years later, he refers to his own report on the land as a word “as it was in my heart” (*Josh. 14:7, NKJV*). His report was based on his conviction that, with God's guidance and help, Israel would be able to conquer the land.

In contrast to the report of the other ten spies, who inspired fear among the Israelites, Caleb manifested a wholehearted trust and commitment to the promise of the Lord. The Hebrew phrase, which literally means “I was full after the LORD” (*Josh. 14:8*), is probably a short form of a longer idiom: “My heart was fully following the LORD,” or “I filled my heart to walk behind/after the LORD.” In contrast with others who walked after foreign gods and who did not follow the Lord fully, Caleb's heart was wholly dedicated to the Lord.

The same expression later is repeated twice, emphasizing Caleb's faithfulness (*Josh. 14:9, 14*). His own characterization is in harmony with what the Lord Himself called a “different spirit” (*Num. 14:24, NKJV*) that distinguished Caleb from the other ten spies. Even at the age of 85, he continued to be an example of what the Lord can achieve through people whose hearts are fully dedicated to Him and His cause.

Caleb understood that the territory each tribe would eventually possess was directly proportionate to the extent to which they dared to claim the promises of the Lord and how much land they were willing to tread upon by faith. God's promises are not self-fulfilling, in the sense that they come true irrespective of our will. Rather, they require faith accompanied by resolute action. The Hebrew term *'ulay*, “maybe” (*Josh. 14:12*), can express fear and doubt, but it usually denotes hope and the anticipation that something positive will take place (*Gen. 16:2; Num. 22:6, 11; Num. 23:3*).

What compromises, “small” compromises, are the kinds of things that can keep us from fully following the Lord?

The Power of Example

Read Joshua 15:16–19, Judges 1:13, and Judges 3:7–11. What does this story tell you about the power of example? How is Caleb's attitude being reproduced in the younger generation?

In this passage, Caleb offers his daughter, Achsah, in marriage to the one who conquers Debir. Othniel captures the city and wins the hand of Achsah. This story is important because, once again, it reveals Caleb's courage, faith, and readiness to take on challenges.

It also shows that the next generation of Israelites followed the example of these giants of faith, Caleb and Joshua. As the older generation closes their ministry, there is a new generation ready to face the challenges and continue to fulfill God's plan for Israel.

In a way that is not unlike Caleb's request to Joshua, "Give me this hill country," Achsah, encouraged by her husband, displays the same faith and resolution that her father demonstrated. Through her determination and boldness, Achsah continues the line of Caleb's example of the fulfillment of the promise to possess the land.

Indeed, the land is a gift from Yahweh to Israel, but Israel must appropriate it by claiming the promises of the Lord with faith and courage. Achsah's determination foreshadows the perseverance of those women in the Gospels who would not be turned away by the crowd or the disciples and would not give up until they received Jesus' blessing for themselves and their families.

Read Luke 18:1–5. What lesson is here for us?

Passing on the torch of faith to the next generation is crucial to the fulfillment of the mission God has entrusted to us. Think about the challenges of passing on faith to the next generation, on the one hand, and about the opportunities for young people to assume more responsibility in the work of God, on the other. What can we do to facilitate and train youth to assume godly leadership? How crucial is our example in this process?

Humble Hero

The long lists of place names, which constituted landmarks on the borders of the territories assigned to the tribes of Israel, are bookended by the report of land allocation to the two heroes, Caleb and Joshua, of the first reconnoiter. Caleb received his inheritance first, while Joshua received his last. Up to this point, Joshua allocated the land to the tribes of Israel; now it is time for the people of Israel to give Joshua his inheritance.

Read Joshua 19:49–51. What are the implications of the fact that the great leader of Israel who apportioned the land receives his inheritance last?

The city that Joshua receives is Timnath-serah, a name composed of two words. The first, Timnath, derives from a verb (*manah*) whose meaning is to count or to assign, and it means portion or territory. The second word can be derived from a Hebrew verb (*serach*), and it means excess or leftover (*compare with Exod. 26:12*). The name of Joshua's city can be translated as the leftover portion or the remaining territory.

The name of the city that Joshua has chosen from what was left testifies to the noble character of Israel's second leader. First of all, he waited until all the people received their portion. Then, Joshua did not choose one of the densely populated territories of the land or the most impressive cities as his inheritance but a modest city, or perhaps the ruins of it, in order to rebuild it with arduous work (*compare with Josh. 19:50*).

Moreover, Timnath-serah was located near Shiloh, in the vicinity of the sanctuary, which shows where Joshua's priorities lay and where his heart was bound. Certainly, after the newly born nation of Israel had been led into the Promised Land, and, with God's help, secured the inheritance of each tribe and family, it would not have objected to Joshua's demand for a more impressive inheritance. Yet, Joshua was content to live a simple life with a focus on what is most important, thus embodying the prayer expressed later by David: "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (*Ps. 27:4, NKJV*).

What lessons can you draw for yourself regarding Joshua's attitude? How might you apply it to yourself now?

Changed by Contemplation

Contemplating the life example of great heroes of faith is essential for our spiritual growth. At the same time, our ultimate example is Jesus Christ—His life and teachings. How does focusing on the life of Jesus change us? See *Heb. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 3:18*.

Marco Iacoboni, a neuroscientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, researched the function of mirror neurons. These small cell circuits are activated both when we perform a certain action—such as laughing or embracing someone—and when we observe someone else performing the same action. The activity of these neurons reduces the distinction between seeing and doing.

Ellen G. White speaks about the importance of beholding the character of Jesus: “Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct. We develop a character which is the counterpart of the divine character. Growing into His likeness, we enlarge our capacity for knowing God. More and more we enter into fellowship with the heavenly world, and we have continually increasing power to receive the riches of the knowledge and wisdom of eternity.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 355.

Read Romans 12:1, 2. What two processes work for conflicting purposes in our lives? How can we be sure that we give room to the right one?

In the summary chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul speaks about two antagonistic forces trying to shape our lives. On the one hand, the surrounding world, with its various influences, tries to force us daily into its own mold, effecting a conformation in us that works from the outside in.

To counteract this impact, the Holy Spirit is able to transform us inside out in a manner similar to the way a caterpillar metamorphoses into a beautiful butterfly. But for that process to happen, we need to consecrate ourselves to God and ask Him to continue the good work that He has started in us (*Phil. 1:6*). In the end, we have to make the conscious choice, moment by moment, to walk in the Spirit.

Further Thought: “Caleb’s faith now was just what it was when his testimony had contradicted the evil report of the spies. He had believed God’s promise that He would put His people in possession of Canaan, and in this he had followed the Lord fully. He had endured with his people the long wandering in the wilderness, thus sharing the disappointments and burdens of the guilty; yet he made no complaint of this, but exalted the mercy of God that had preserved him in the wilderness when his brethren were cut off. Amid all the hardships, perils, and plagues of the desert wanderings, and during the years of warfare since entering Canaan, the Lord had preserved him; and now at upwards of fourscore his vigor was unabated. He did not ask for himself a land already conquered, but the place which above all others the spies had thought it impossible to subdue. By the help of God he would wrest his stronghold from the very giants whose power had staggered the faith of Israel. It was no desire for honor or aggrandizement that prompted Caleb’s request. The brave old warrior was desirous of giving to the people an example that would honor God, and encourage the tribes fully to subdue the land which their fathers had deemed unconquerable.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 512, 513.

“It was Caleb’s faith in God that gave him courage, that kept him from the fear of man, and enabled him to stand boldly and unflinchingly in the defense of the right. Through reliance on the same power, the mighty General of the armies of heaven, every true soldier of the cross may receive strength and courage to overcome the obstacles that seem insurmountable.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 30, 1912.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Discuss the power of peer pressure and the courage it takes to speak up when others do not. What is the role of courage in practicing our faith? How can we avoid being rude while standing for what we believe is right?
- ❷ Share in your class some examples of faith from your church or community that shaped your life and character. What are the traits of these people that are worth following?
- ❸ Think about and discuss the influence media has on our lives. How can we avoid its negative effect while harnessing its potential for good purposes?
- ❹ Reflect more on the humility of Joshua as a leader and his desire to live close to the sanctuary. In what ways does his example speak to you?

Accidental Missionary

Kim Sun couldn't believe that the man slammed the door in his face.

The 19-year-old student from South Korea was going door-to-door to invite people to evangelistic meetings in the Philippines. Many people responded kindly when he and his friends knocked. But at this particular house, the 25-year-old man reacted rudely to the visitors. He didn't reply when one asked if they could enter to visit. He just slammed the door shut.

Sun felt embarrassed and upset. The other students, however, weren't bothered. Sun couldn't understand why. He suggested that they return the next day. It was Monday, and the evangelistic meetings ran through Sabbath.

On Tuesday, the students knocked on the door again. The same man came to the door and immediately recognized the visitors. He looked ashamed and invited them in. "I'm sorry that I closed the door yesterday," he said.

The students spoke about the love of Jesus and invited him to the meetings. They met with him again on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. On Saturday, the man decided to give his heart to Jesus in baptism.

"I love Jesus Christ," he said. "I want to live a new life."

Sun was amazed. As he watched the baptism, he thought, *This man has changed so much. He is a completely different person compared to Monday. Is it possible for someone to change so much?*

Sun was an accidental missionary. He didn't come to the Philippines to seek baptisms. He had been living his own life in South Korea when his parents had intervened. They sent him to the Philippines to learn English and to become a nurse, and then they wanted him to work in the United States.

Arriving at his parents' chosen school, the Adventist University of the Philippines, Sun was surprised to see that his classmates went to church on Saturday. He had thought that all Christians worshiped on Sunday. But he was required to go to church, so he attended a Korean-speaking church on campus. Young people from the church organized evangelistic meetings with the 1000 Missionary Movement, an organization that is part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southern Asia-Pacific Division. Sun didn't

speaking much English, and he didn't know much about the Bible. But he joined the students in going door-to-door to invite people to the meetings. In seeking after the man who had slammed the door, he became an accidental missionary.



Kim Sun is associate director of the 1000 Missionary Movement, whose headquarters in Silang, Philippines, were constructed with the help of a 1996 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering. Read more next week.

Part I: Overview

Key Text: *Hebrews 13:7*

Study Focus: *Num. 13:6, 30–32; Josh. 14:6–14; Luke 18:1–5; Josh. 19:49–51; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:1, 2.*

Joshua and Caleb had quite intense lives. They spent their early years as slaves in Egypt. At the beginning of adulthood, they witnessed the mighty acts of God in the Exodus. During middle age, they roamed in the wilderness with the doomed generation who tried to kill them when they stood up against their unbelief. Finally, in their senior years, they crossed the Jordan River to take possession of the land. Their lives encompassed the events narrated in the entire Pentateuch, except for Genesis. These experiences and events shaped the characters of these exceptional men of God. They underwent slavery and freedom, disillusion and hope, delay and fulfillment.

This week, we have the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual success of Joshua and Caleb. Two decisive moments characterize their faith and commitment. The first is found in the return of the 12 spies when Joshua and Caleb try to encourage the first generation to go ahead and possess the land, despite the threats posed by the Canaanites (*Num. 13:30–33, Num. 14:5–10*). Forty years later, in the second episode, Joshua and Caleb choose land for their inheritance. The unusual aspect of their choice (*Josh. 14:6–15*) shows why they are marked in the biblical story as examples of faith, courage, commitment, and perseverance. Their legacy remains today, and it can inspire the present generation to trust in God in the most daring situations.

Part II: Commentary

The Perspective of Faith (Num. 13:25–14:10)

In Numbers 13:25–14:10, all the 12 spies agreed on the pure facts of their report. The land was highly fertile. The fruit they brought back was proof that the land was “flowing with milk and honey,” a stock phrase in the ancient Near East describing an abundance of food (*see Num. 13:27*). This wording is not a coincidence, as the same expression appears in God’s speech about Canaan to Moses and the people (*Exod. 3:8, Lev. 20:24*). Indeed, the land was extraordinary. God was right. They all also agreed on the military capability of the Canaanites, characterizing them as strong and living in huge, fortified cities (*Num. 13:28*). Up to this point, Joshua and Caleb were silent, as they could not deny what they had seen.

Disagreement started in the interpretation of these facts. The majority concluded: “ ‘We are not able to go up to the people because they are stronger than us. . . . The land that we went through to explore is a land that eats its inhabitants. . . . We were like grasshoppers in our own sight’ ” (*Num. 13:31–33, LEB*). In their pessimistic assessment, the ten spies also distorted the facts by affirming that the land “ ‘eats its inhabitants.’ ” Thus, they contradicted themselves and the reality that the land was indeed vomiting out its nations (*Lev. 18:26–29*), not eating them. The interpretation of the minority (Caleb and Joshua) was completely different.

Ellen G. White vividly describes the effect of the ten-spy report over the congregation: “Their unbelief cast a gloomy shadow over the congregation, and the mighty power of God, so often manifested in behalf of the chosen nation, was forgotten. The people did not wait to reflect; they did not reason that He who had brought them thus far would certainly give them the land; they did not call to mind how wonderfully God had delivered them from their oppressors, cutting a path through the sea and destroying the pursuing hosts of Pharaoh. They left God out of the question, and acted as though they must depend solely on the power of arms.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 388.

In contrast to the cowardice and faithlessness of the ten spies, Caleb insisted: “ ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it’ ” (*Num. 13:30, NKJV*). In concert with this positive exhortation, Joshua, tearing his clothes in dismay, reaffirmed that they had no reason to fear if the Lord was on their side (*Num. 14:8–10*). Directly contradicting the unbelieving report about the land, Joshua affirmed that its inhabitants would be food for Israel, not vice versa (*Num. 14:9*).

Right Choices

If life is made of choices, choices also reveal character and define our future and legacy. At the end of Joshua and Caleb’s lives, they made unusual decisions regarding their retirement places. These choices show that time had not changed their total commitment to God’s plan and that they lived to glorify God, not themselves.

Mount Hebron

Caleb asked Joshua for permission to inherit Mount Hebron (*Josh. 14:12*). But why Hebron? True, the place had historical significance. The place was also known as Kiriath-Arba and was one of the oldest inhabited regions mentioned in the Bible (*Gen. 23:1, 2*). Furthermore, Abraham himself had dwelt there and was buried with Isaac in the region (*Gen. 25:9, 10; Gen. 35:27–29*). However, this was not the reason for Caleb’s choice. Because Caleb was 85, he could have been looking for a place with

easy access. But access was not the reason either, because he was asking for a mountain, after all. Nothing makes the reader believe that Mount Hebron was a good retirement state, with agricultural opportunities, excellent infrastructure, or decent security.

Caleb himself explicitly declared the reason for his choice: “ ‘For you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified’ ” (*Josh. 14:12, NKJV*). He wanted the giants’ refuge! One well-known Anakite was Goliath from Gath, the only place in the land where these people were still left (*Josh. 11:22*). Goliath was 9.5 feet (2.9 meters) tall. Caleb wanted to conquer one of the most challenging spots in the land. But why would Caleb, at 85, desire to overthrow such a place? All those years since Kadesh Barnea hadn’t erased his faith or his way of seeing facts from the perspective of faith. Likely, his request had three objectives: to inspire faith in this new generation, to prove that his generation was wrong, and to exalt God’s name. An old man who trusted in God’s power could overcome what terrified an entire nation.

Joshua’s Inheritance

Likewise, Joshua’s choice was not driven by personal gain. Both Joshua and Caleb exemplify the true essence of leadership: to serve others rather than oneself. Although little is mentioned about Caleb, Joshua’s trajectory—from being Moses’ assistant (*Josh. 1:1, NKJV*) to becoming a servant of Yahweh (*Josh. 24:29*)—is relatively straightforward. How, though, did Joshua develop his character as a leader?

First, Joshua learned under the shadow of a great leader. Throughout Joshua’s appearances in the Pentateuch, he was under Moses’ authority. For example, in Exodus 17:8–13, Joshua’s victory on the battlefield relied on Moses’ holding his staff high. In Exodus 32:17, 18, Joshua was seen following Moses on the top of the mountain. As a clear sign of authority over Joshua, Moses changed his name (*Num. 13:16*).

Still very young (*naar*), Joshua was selected to follow Moses (*Exod. 33:11*), and, during all his adult life, he was closely connected to him. Second, despite his initial lack of experience, he was chosen by God because he was a spiritual man (*Num. 27:18*). Consequently, his life was not driven by any earthly ambition for self-aggrandizement or personal satisfaction. Seeing things from a spiritual perspective, Joshua lived for God’s glory, prioritizing what was truly important. Finally, Joshua learned from his own mistakes. After Moses’ death, Joshua was still a leader in training. This idea is evident in the episode of Ai (*Joshua 7*) and the incident with the Gibeonites (*Joshua 9*). In fact, learning leadership is a lifelong journey of training, growth, and transformation.

The life of these two spiritual giants, Joshua and Caleb, teaches us at least

five valuable lessons. First, the facts of life matter less than how you perceive them. In a fallen world, facts are often harsh, but the divine revelation provides the right glasses to see them in their actual, and temporary, perspective. Second, faith does not ignore facts; it simply offers a different angle of understanding. Third, instead of complaining, we are called to trust and submit ourselves to God's plans, which are always better than ours. Fourth, blessings come to those who wholly abide in the Lord. In the spiritual realm, many people find their faith dwindling over time, as they lose their "first love" (*Rev. 2:4*). However, such a loss of love and faith was not the case with Joshua and Caleb, who maintained their faith and total commitment to God's plan throughout their lives. Finally, life in all its dimensions should be lived according to the plans established by God, not motivated by greedy and selfish ambition. The lives of Joshua and Caleb exemplify the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Therefore, whether you eat or you drink or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God" (*LEB*).

Part III: Life Application

What Is Your Perspective?

When people have the chance to fly on an airplane or climb a high mountain to see a city from above, they realize how small the buildings appear from a distance. However, when they walk through the same town, they realize how small they are in comparison to these structures. What changed? Only the perspective, the point of view from which they were seeing things.

When faced with life's challenges, we can view them from the perspective of doubt or faith. As someone once said: "Doubt sees the obstacles. Faith sees the way! Doubt sees the darkest night, Faith sees the day! Doubt dreads to take a step. Faith soars on high! Doubt questions, 'Who believes?' Faith answers, 'I!'" —Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, 1996), p. 404.

Consider the following stories and think about the role of doubt and faith in them:

- 1. Abraham, at 100, trusts in God's promise of numerous offspring**
(*Gen. 15:1–6, Gen. 17:1–7, Gen. 21:1–7*).

2. Elisha prays to have his servant's eyes opened to see God's army around them (*2 Kings 6:17*).

3. Jesus explains to His disciples that, through the blind man, the works of God would be revealed (*John 9:1-7*).

4. Paul, the prisoner, appeals to King Agrippa and his court to become like him (*Acts 26:28, 29*).

5. Reflect on the painful, and challenging, realities in the narrative of your own life. How can viewing these things from the perspective of faith give you encouragement and resolution to face them?