

Joshua 14-15, The Story Of Caleb

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Overview

The boundary lists contain four kinds of building blocks, not all used in all lists. Illustrate from Judah, which does have all four. From most common to least common:

1. Most common (all): list of cities and towns (15:20-62).
2. Second most common (all but Simeon): description of the boundary (15:1-12)
3. Rare (Judah, Josephites, Dan, Joshua at the very end of ch. 17): Special deeds of valour and special assignments of territory (Caleb and family, 14:6-15; 15:13-19)
4. Rare (Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh): Cities not conquered (15:63)

The last two items emphasize the point seen already in 13:1-6. Because Joshua is old and stricken in years, he cannot personally continue to supervise the conquest, so the responsibility must be passed on to the tribes. Now they must emulate his courage and discipline, and their performance is spotty.

Today we begin with a segment of Type 3, the story of Caleb.

- His background as one of the twelve spies from Numbers 13-14;
- His continuing faith in claiming the most difficult part of the land, the part that seems to have terrified the ten sites the most
- His discipline in passing on his principles to his children.

Caleb's Background

Descent

Num. 13:6, son of Jephunneh, descendant of Judah, thus this is the time for him to receive his inheritance.

Josh. 14:6, 14; cf. Num. 32:12, he is called a "Kenezite." The same term in Hebrew (though transliterated differently in English) appears in Gen 15:19 as one of the tribes of Canaan, and the base name reappears as the name of one of Esau's grandsons in Gen 36:15, 42. Apparently some of Abraham's peers threw in their lot with his clan and made their way into the family of Jacob, perhaps through intermarriage, before the time of Moses and thus the laws against intermingling.

Application: Cf. Rahab and Ruth; God always honors the faith of those who seek him with a pure heart.

Num 13-14, Performance at Kadesh-Barnea

13:26-29, Caleb and the other spies agree on the facts: good fruit, strong people and cities.

They differ on their recommendation:

- Caleb, v.30: God will give it to us. Cf. 14:6-9, supported by Joshua.

- The others, 31-33: Conquest is impossible.

The result of the nation's lack of faith is the wandering in the desert for 40 years, but God makes a specific exception of Caleb and Joshua because of their faith: Num. 14:28-38; 32:10-12.

Because of this blessing, the process of distributing the land begins and ends with their allocations:

- Caleb at the beginning in 14:6ff
- Joshua at the end in 19:49-50.

Application: It has been 45 years since the events at Kadesh Barnea, and perhaps over that time Joshua and Caleb might have cause to wonder whether the Lord would fulfill the promise he made to them, but now the time has come. Two points:

1. God does not forget his promises to his people.
2. His timing in fulfilling them may be quite lengthy.

See the moral as set forth in 2 Pet 3:8-9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, though he is accustomed to reckon 1000 years as one day and thus may take his own good time.

Josh 14:6b-15, Caleb's Request

We are told that the (leaders of) the children of Judah came with Caleb, perhaps to endorse his request; he would not go behind their backs, even to claim something that had been promised him.

6b-12, Caleb's Request

He enumerates two reasons that Joshua should give him this specific city.

6-9, Moses promised it to me because of my faithfulness

The specific promise is not recorded in Numbers, but Joshua heard it at the time and is able to verify the truth of Caleb's claim. "You [Joshua] know." In fact, Joshua probably also received the same promise, which is fulfilled in the allocation of Timnath-Serah, 19:49,50.

The reference to Moses' Promise in 6b-7a, 9 encircles the record of Caleb's Faithfulness that led to that promise in 7b-8. Caleb is awarded an inheritance in the land because of the report he brought back. It had three important characteristics:

7b, It was *honest*. He spoke "as it was in mine heart." Joshua and Caleb didn't try to hide the difficulties of the conquest. With the other spies, they acknowledged the strong cities and mighty people that were there.

8a, It was *supportive* of the nation as a whole, unlike the behavior of the other spies, with whom he explicitly contrasts himself: "As for my brethren: ... but as for me,"

8b, It was *trusting*. He is quoting the phrase "wholly follow the Lord" from Num 32:11,12, where it is affirmed of Joshua and Caleb and denied of the other spies, and affirmed of Caleb in 14:24. The failing of the others was unbelief, 14:11. The Lord said, "follow me into the land."

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They went only so far as to see it, but would not go in to possess it, because they doubted his ability to give it to them.

Application: These are three helpful touch-stones for us in assessing our attitude in service to the Lord.

- Some believers have a caustic, critical attitude toward the Scriptures, justifying it on the grounds that they must be honest with what they see to be the facts, but this is neither supportive nor trusting.
- Supportiveness alone is no good if it is dishonest, or leads us to reject the word of God. (“Loving God” syndrome)
- Trust in God alone does not justify abandoning his people.

This reason is as true of Joshua as it is of Caleb, but the next reason is true only of Caleb:

10-11, I have the strength to take the city.

Together with vv. 7, v.10 gives us some idea of the chronology of the conquest.

- Deut 2:13 establishes 38 years from Kadesh-Barnea (whence the spies) to the crossing of Zered on the final march north to the plains of Moab.
- The spies were a year and a half after Egypt (late summer, time of first-ripe grapes), and another six months to conquer Sihon and Og and camp in plains of Moab.
- Josh 5:6, 10, the entrance into the land was just before Passover, 40 years after the passover that brought them out of Egypt. This was 38.5 years after the spies; Caleb would be at this time 78-79 years old.
- Now we find him 85 years old, or 6.5 years more, which is the duration of the events covered in the first twelve chapters.

11 reports Caleb’s condition at this time: as strong as he was as a spy, both for war and for the active responsibilities of daily life (“to go out and to come in”). Contrast this with Joshua, who at 13:1 is “old and stricken in years.”

Application: Why did the Lord leave Caleb strong to conquer Hebron, while taking Joshua’s health? It is up to him to dispose of his servants as he sees fit.

12, Request: Give me Hebron.

What a symbol of Caleb’s continuing trust in the Lord! Of all the places he could have requested, he asks for Hebron, the one city singled out in Num. 13:22,28 as the home of the giants. Caleb feels the shame of the failure at Kadesh Barnea will not be relieved until the Lord’s power over the Anakim is demonstrated, and he is willing to shoulder the task.

Question: Wasn’t Hebron already conquered, in 10:36,37? Answer: We see the same contrast for other cities as well, e.g., Jerusalem and Debir. The cities were conquered by the fighting men, but were not occupied by the people immediately, since the camp remained at Gilgal, and apparently the indigenous population returned after the Israelite army moved on.

Application: Here is an example for us of the need not to rest on our laurels, but to remain active in spiritual warfare as long as the Lord gives us strength. The Lord often expects us to labor diligently and expectantly for the things he delights to give us.

13-15, Joshua's Grant to Caleb

Caleb's argument is persuasive and his faith infectious, and Joshua grants his request.

Josh. 15:13-19, Caleb's Gift

An account of his actions toward two cities: Hebron, the metropolis, and Debir, a smaller city near it that apparently fell within its sphere of protection and was part of the grant to Caleb. (Note that in 10:38 Joshua defeats Debir even though it is not listed in the opening of the chapter as part of the enemy; the alliance would have been through Hebron.)

13-14, Hebron

Here we read of Caleb's successful subduing of the city. It is interesting that in 21:11-12 the city is subsequently declared to be one of the Levitical cities (and in fact, 20:7, one of the six cities of refuge).

This might be because Caleb ceded it for this higher purpose (the levitical cities in general being taken out of the tribal allotments already given). His main interest in Hebron seems to be to glorify God by clearing it of the sons of Anak, not to enrich himself.

It may also reflect on the nature of the levitical cities as being partly occupied by non-levites. Note from Lev. 25:32-34 that it appears to be the HOUSES of the Levites that are inalienably theirs, not the city as a whole, since non-Levites are conceived of as buying them. He may well have considered it an honor to have his city assigned as one of the teaching centers in Israel.

15-19, Debir

Apparently within the territory of Hebron, and so also within Caleb's jurisdiction. He offers an incentive (his daughter) to encourage his compatriots in the conquest, thus perpetuating his own ethic of aggressive pursuit of the Lord's blessings. The one who claimed the blessing became Israel's first judge (Jud 3:9).

Note that the gift comes in three stages:

1. The city, by conquest
2. A field, by Othniel's request at Achsah's insistence
3. Springs to water the field, by Achsah's direct request, because the land was southerly, with scarce rain, thus requiring a more reliable source of water than cisterns.

Application: Sometimes the fruits of spiritual victory don't come all at once, but only piece by piece, so that we will realize how precious each component is.

One of the keys to the identification of Khirbet Raboud as Debir is the existence nearby of two wells, one higher up the valley than the other, corresponding to the two springs Achsah requested of her father.