Meditations on the Book of Joshua

Joshua 14

Caleb's Purpose of Heart

H. L. Rossier

sacrifice for sin, all that in which God finds His eternal delight. We have communion with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Christ Himself our example, the Levite without spot, the perfect Servant, passed through the same blessed experiences in His pathway here. If He looks towards the earth, He says: "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup"; if He looks upward He adds: "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." (Ps. 16: 5, 6)

Beloved, we may indeed say that our present portion is at the same time our future one; and the priests of the tribe of Levi will also realise this blessing when Israel will peacefully enjoy the millennial glory under Messiah's reign. In speaking of this wondrous moment, the prophet Ezekiel says: "And it shall be unto them for an inheritance; I am their inheritance; and ye shall give them no possession in Israel: I am their possession" (Ezek. 44: 28-30); and he goes on to show that the offerings of the Lord will be their portion in this day of glory.

And now let us turn to Revelation 4 and 5. Does not the heavenly scene there speak to us of the same things? Unbroken communion with God and with the Lamb will be the portion of our inheritance, and that for ever.

Joshua 14

CALEB'S PURPOSE OF HEART

I desire to dwell a little on this chapter, on account of its practical importance. Caleb is a type of the perseverance of faith, His name is mentioned for the first time in Numbers 13: 6, when, from the desert of Paran, Moses sends a man of each tribe to search the land. Amongst these twelve we find Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Oshea, the son of Nun, whom Moses called Jehoshua. (vs. 8, 16)

From this moment the name of Caleb is found so closely linked with that of Joshua (see Num. 14: 30, 38; Num. 26: 65; Num. 34: 17-19; Deut. 1: 36, 38; Joshua 14: 13) that one might almost say they are inseparable. Together they search the land, together they cross the desert, together they enter Canaan. United as they are no doubt in their special character as men of faith, the word points out to us another blessed reason for their association. Joshua pre-figures Christ, the Saviour Jesus, bringing His people into the rest of the promised land; and Caleb walks in company with him. The great name of Joshua overshadows, so to speak, that of Caleb, and imprints upon it its character. These two men have but one thought, they have the same faith, confidence, and courage, the same

starting-point, the same path, the same purpose of heart, the same goal. Is it so with us, dear readers? Are we so associated with Christ that our name cannot be uttered without His, and that our very existence owes its value to the fact that, by grace, we have been made companions of the Lord Jesus?

In Numbers 13 the twelve men sent by Moses, having reached Hebron, thence proceed to Eshcol to carry back from that spot the magnificent fruits which are to prove the beauty of the country. But it was not, as one might have thought, Eshcol which arrested the gaze and captivated the heart of Caleb, his faith reached on to something better. Hebron, whereon his feet had trodden, is given to him. (Joshua 14: 9) From that moment its name was graven on his heart during forty-five years, until the day when he should appear before Joshua to claim "this mountain whereof the Lord spake" as his everlasting possession.

This spot nevertheless was not lacking in celebrity — to the flesh, in truth, it could not but inspire terror — the formidable Anakims dwelt there, those giants whose name alone made the heart of the people to melt. But what a powerful reminder the place of the sepulchre of the fathers was for Caleb's soul! Rich in memories, it was to become the reward of this man of God. There, when Lot preferred the cities of the plain, Abraham, the father of the people, chose his abode (Gen. 13: 18); there he built an altar to Jehovah and received the promise of God (Gen. 18: 1); but, more than all, Hebron is pre-eminently the place of death, and to Abraham first. It was there that Sarah died (Gen. 23: 2), there that she was buried, and Abraham too (Gen. 25: 10); also Isaac (Gen. 35: 27-29); and then Jacob and the patriarchs. Yes; Hebron is indeed the place of the sepulchre, the scene of death, the end of man. What is there in it to attract? Nothing for the natural man, everything for faith. There is one supreme spot where the believer learns the end of himself: it is the cross of Christ. Again it is from Hebron that Joseph sets forth in search of his brethren. (Gen. 37: 14) Later (Joshua 21) it becomes a city of refuge and the property of the Levites. Yet more, it is the starting-point of David's kingdom (2 Sam. 2: 1-4), for it is in virtue of His death that Jesus has been raised and crowned with glory, and that He will wear on His head the diadem of royalty. Finally, it is there that all the tribes of Israel acknowledge their king and come to do him homage. (2 Sam. 5: 1)

Is it not a wondrous spot? What a succession of blessings it records! The place of death, the place of refuge, the starting-point of Israel's blessings, of the promises, and of the kingdom and glory, the rallying-point when the glory is there, and with all that the lasting object for the heart and affections of a poor pilgrim who found there his characteristic starting-point and his goal, the place of his eternal rest. Ah! how Caleb prized this

spot, to the outward eye so unattractive. He desired it for his everlasting inheritance; and, beloved, it will be our eternal part to fathom what is contained in the meaning of this place. Faith in Caleb laid hold, from the very outset, on what Abrahamic faith had there discovered: himself done with — self set aside — old things passed away; and here we see a man setting out in dependence on God, with no confidence in himself, and continuing in this blessed path until the end, the full enjoyment of the promises, is reached in the place where man has come to his end.

We have been considering two characteristic features in Caleb: the first is that his name is inseparable from that of Joshua; the second is that a special object has so won his affections and gained possession of his heart, that the memory of it remains with him all along his desert pathway. I would further add, that our affections are always in activity when occupied with Christ on the cross giving Himself for us; whilst a glorified Christ imparts energy to reach Him.

But there is a third characteristic of this man of faith. Caleb realises his hope. He enters Canaan first, not as a dweller, but as a visitor; but it is there, and not in the desert, that his course begins. He returns to the desert with an indelible impress on his heart of the reality and beauty of the things which he has seen, and which during forty-five years form the object of his hope. It is the same with the Psalmist (Ps. 43: 1, 2) — a man walking after the example of Caleb — he has seen God in the sanctuary, and starting thence, he comes down to the earth filled with the glorious reality of those divine things which will be for the sustenance of his heart to the end of the journey.

A fourth point links itself with this. To the soul fed with the marrow and fatness of the sanctuary, the desert loses not only its attraction, but assumes its true character of dearth and drought: heaven becomes the measure of earth; things that are seen lose their apparent value, and become emptiness and a barren waste.

But to return, dear friends, to that which is so prominent in Caleb's character, his purpose of heart. Without the four previously-mentioned points: attachment to Christ, the knowledge of the infinite value of His work, a realised hope, a heart detached from earth, there can be no perseverance in the path of faith. In Caleb's life it is linked with three positions which are inseparable the one from the other.

We see him first taking knowledge of the good land that God would give to His people, and the divine comment on his history at this point is that he "wholly followed the Lord." (Num. 14: 24; Deut. 1: 36; Joshua 14: 8, 9) But the forty years of desert life have yet to be trodden, and he courageously does it right on to the end, because he carries in his heart

the remembrance of the riches and the treasure of Canaan. To him the difficulties of the desert are nothing; he heeds not the burning sands, the scorching sun, weariness, or thirst. He dreams not for a moment of seeking anything in the scene around him. His courage is sustained by a hope; and the believer's hope is not merely Canaan, that is to say, heaven, in a general way, but it is Christ.

There was a man of renown, of whom God could not speak in these terms, Solomon failed just where Caleb persevered. The desert had become something to this great king; and a moment came when, having allowed his heart to be allured in it, he turned his back on God. It is said of him (1 Kings 11: 6), "He went not fully after the Lord." The world had attractions for him, and, however small they were at the beginning, it was not long before he succumbed to them, and his kingdom was lost. It was otherwise with Caleb, for through his perseverance in following the Lord he gained his inheritance.

But there was a third aspect of Caleb's perseverance: we must see him taking possession of Canaan. Five years have run their course, during which the fight has continued, and then by his sword he gains possession of his own particular portion, the mountain of which Jehovah had spoken. He enters at large into his inheritance, in spite of the formidable power of the enemy, and the terror which the sons of Anak inspired. But, like us, Caleb meets in "him who had the power of death" a vanquished enemy, who has no power to intimidate us.

Death is ours. Caleb, as I said, takes full possession of his inheritance. His perseverance is crowned with success. He is the only one in Israel who seems to have driven out all his enemies. What a lesson for us, beloved! Let us remember that Caleb's taking possession speaks to us of a present fact, and not only of future enjoyment. Have we persevered in the conflict so as to enjoy now our privileges? May God give us, like him, purpose of heart in these three things: the hope, the path, and the fight.

I would notice two more accompanying characteristics of perseverance, one of which is found at the close of our chapter. Caleb says in verse 11: "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." Caleb was fourscore and five years old, but neither his great age, nor the weary desert journey had diminished in the smallest degree his strength. And why? Because he had no confidence in himself. Hebron's lesson had remained graven in his heart. He says in verse 12: "If so be the Lord will be with me." Do you think from this that he mistrusted the Lord? No; he mistrusted himself — he realised that if

there were any obstacle to the Lord's being with him, it must proceed from himself. We realise strength in proportion as we mistrust self, and these two things surely go together. It is thus that we go from strength to strength.

Isaiah 40: 28-31 beautifully expresses the same truth: "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail." This is the end of man's best strength, but "the everlasting God, the Lord . . . fainteth not, neither is weary." Our confidence is in Him, and more: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." He communicates His strength to the feeble; it is made perfect in weakness. Then he adds: "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Such was the case with Caleb. He walked in the consciousness that his strength was in and with God. May it be the same with us; and not only so, but may we live in the enjoyment of heavenly things, take part in the scene of conflict, and run patiently and with unwearied feet the race which leads to the glory.

I have yet to touch upon the second accessory characteristic of perseverance — it produces perseverance or purpose of heart in others. Caleb was in this way particularly blessed in his family circle, following him, as they did, in his path of faith. In Joshua 15: 16 (see also Judges 1: 12, 13) it says: "And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife." The nephew steps worthily in the footprints of the uncle. The object of such priceless value in his eye is Caleb's daughter, and, bent on possessing her, he enters the conflict. And we, are we set upon having Christ at all cost? In Judges 3 Othniel becomes the first judge in Israel. An overcomer for himself, he is raised up to deliver others, and in this new character perseveres to the close.

Achsah, Caleb's daughter, is a fresh example of perseverance. Caleb had given her to Othniel, and she moves her husband to ask yet more. She would have a field and besides, springs of water. So she craves a blessing on the field of her possession, and, to obtain it, lights off her ass to proffer her request, an example of perseverance in prayer and supplications. The springs of water are richly bestowed upon her, types of spiritual blessings; and this also, dear reader, is of daily instruction for us. When we take the word of God in our hands, do we earnestly ask God for springs to water it? To many Christians this living Word is like a parched meridian land in which their souls find no sustenance. If such be your case, have you, like Achsah, taken the suppliant's place, asking from

God that spiritual aid which can alone cause it to be fruitful for your soul? Would He not give you an answer such as Caleb gave to Achsah?

Before leaving this subject, I would like to touch on yet one or two important points. It is said of Caleb that "he wholly followed the Lord his God." He had persevered in following Christ, known to him as the Jehovah of the Old Testament. And what is it to follow Christ? One often forms a very vague idea of what it is. It is to walk after a Person whom we acknowledge as the Guide that we need. The one who has confidence in himself does not want a guide. Moreover, following the Lord implies not merely confidence in Him, but humble dependence on Him. Again, if I follow some one, my eyes are fixed on him, so as to imitate him. Now imitating the Lord is seeking to reproduce Him, to be like Him; and in whatever position God sets me, His object is that I should reproduce Christ in that position: Christ, as a brother has said, in His daily intercourse, His service, His testimony, and His sufferings. This is what Caleb did. He wholly (I do not say perfectly) followed the Lord his God.

But, you may ask, to what does perseverance apply? I will cite some of the passages which in the New Testament fully answer this question.

Acts 1: 14: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Here it was to prayer that perseverance applied, and moreover this perseverance was collective. They did not confine themselves to bowing the knee each one for himself and his own needs before the Lord, but they prayed with one accord for the things that concerned them in common.

Acts 2: 42. Here again we find collective perseverance, but applied to four things: first, "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." The early Christians did not limit themselves to following the apostles' doctrine; but the lives of these ambassadors of the Lord became their models. Next, "breaking of bread and prayers;" the memorial of Christ, and the intercourse of the soul with God, expressed in dependence on Him.

1 Timothy 5: 5. Here we have individual perseverance "in supplications and prayers." Why is it the part of the widow to continue in them "night and day"? Because alone, and deprived of every resource, she can only turn to God, and in this manner learn dependence.

1 Timothy 4: 16. Here (read carefully what precedes the passage cited) we find perseverance in everything relating to godliness.

2 Timothy 3: 10. Timothy had wholly followed the apostle in all those traits that had marked his life. The apostle himself (2 Tim. 4: 7) had persevered to the end in "the fight," "the course," and "the faith."