

# Caleb: Living With *the Wait*



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Numbers 13, 14, Joshua 14, Judg. 1:12–15.*

**Memory Text:** “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning; I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption” (*Psalms 130:6, 7*).

He saw the best of times and the worst of times. Caleb knew what slavery was like. He had been there when the Lord had led His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. He had seen the sea open before Israel and swallow the Egyptian chariots and army. He had been with Israel at Mount Sinai and had seen Moses descend from the mountain with God's law. He had been one of the first to see the land of Canaan. And through no fault of his own, he had to spend his best years wandering in the desert with the Israelites. He had watched all of his generation die there too. At last, as an old man, he was able to enter into the land of Canaan. Even then he shows courage and faith in God.

Caleb was a leader who seemed to work more behind the scenes than in front of an audience. This week we will learn from his gentle leadership style. We will get to know a great leader willing to take risks and to lead by example, someone who was generous and encouraged leadership in younger people. But beyond the many positive character traits of Caleb, we will study a story relevant to us, who live at the end of earth's history, as we wait to cross over into the heavenly Canaan.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 9.*

## The “Facts”

About 15 months earlier, Israel had left Egypt. Tents dot the desert of Paran, close to the border of Canaan. Everyone is excited to know about the land that is soon to be their home. At God’s direction, 12 explorers are chosen. Caleb is to represent Judah as one of the 12 who will conduct a fact-finding mission to Canaan. The spies spend 40 days exploring the land, and finally they return and prepare to give their report.

**Read** Numbers 13:26–14:2. What lesson can we learn from this account about living by faith and not by sight?

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The spies bring along something that they can see, smell, and taste. Although the 12 spies are all exposed to the same facts, they come to very different conclusions.

Ten of them interpret the fertile land and great cities to mean that they are doomed, that there is no way these wandering ex-slaves can take the land. Conveniently, they seem to forget that they would not be standing on the border of the Promised Land if it were not for the miracles of the plagues in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the water from a rock, and the daily manna that they received for more than a year. God did all these things for them, and now, for some reason, they fail to trust Him and His promises, going by what they see instead of what God has promised. How easy for all of us to do the same thing!

What we see, and how we interpret what we see, can have very direct personal consequences. Our interpretations of “facts” form the building blocks of our daily decisions, and these “facts” so often interact with our emotions. The idea that we can believe whatever we like without those beliefs affecting who we are and what we do is a myth.

Facing the “facts” *without* God’s Word will lead to interpretations that point away from God and toward faithlessness. Facing the facts *with* God will lead to evidence that will help us to trust God and strengthen our faith in Him.

**Why is it so easy to live by sight and not by faith? When was the last time you faced something similar to what we have read today? How did you respond, and what did you learn from your response and all that followed about trusting in God and in His promises, despite the “facts”?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Psalms 90:12–17*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Identify the patterns of Caleb’s behavior in which he is described as serving God “wholeheartedly.”

**Feel:** Long to live just such a life of faithfulness as Caleb did, in the midst of family and friends who might choose to live differently.

**Do:** Model single-mindedness toward God’s purposes in servant leadership, regardless of the consequences.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Warrior Leadership**

**A** Where others saw impossibilities, Caleb saw opportunity. What evidence of faith did Caleb reveal in his words and actions?

**B** How did Caleb’s faith affect his leadership when he was in the desert, as well as when he was claiming the territory that God had given him in the Promised Land?

**II. Feel: A Lonely Road**

**A** It can be a thankless and isolated journey when we follow God’s way while almost everyone else feels no compunction to travel the way with us. How did Caleb respond when he was faced with a complaining and rebellious mob?

**B** How did Caleb relate to the punishment that Israel deserved but that he didn’t?

**III. Do: Single-minded, Servant Leadership**

**A** Caleb chose to take some of the most difficult and challenging property as his share of the Promised Land, though he was much older than most of Israel. What aspects of our lives could use a good dose of Caleb’s courage and determination to follow where God leads?

**B** How can we model faithfulness to those who follow us?

► **Summary:** Caleb never swerved from honoring God’s purposes and modeling faith and obedience, though he was in the minority of those faithful to God.

## Standing Tall When It Counts

It is not always easy to stand out and stand tall. Group pressure is a tremendous force. The sheer power of thousands of people cheering in a stadium for the home team carries an energy that is very intimidating to opponents. Not many of us would be foolish enough to shout for the opposing team or wave the other team's colors in the middle of the opposition. This is the reason supporters of opposing teams, such as in soccer, often are kept apart during games. When they do meet, reason steps aside and violence often results.

For the Israelites, though, this was no game. Their future and their survival seemed to be threatened, and they all wept. To witness thousands of people weeping together must have been very moving. And here Caleb, who normally seems to be in the background, steps forward.

**Focus** on Numbers 13:30. What can we learn about Caleb and about trusting in God's promises from what he said?

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The same information can be conveyed in many ways. *How* we say something is as important as *what* we say. Caleb shows a lot of character by not arguing with or insulting the faithless ten spies in public and not remonstrating with the people for their lack of faith. Instead, Caleb talks courageously and calls for trust and action. However, the people do not want to hear this. They have made up their minds and try to stone Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

**Read** Numbers 14:1–10, 20–24. What do we see here as an end result of rejecting God's Word and thus coming to a faulty interpretation of the "facts"?

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Caleb must have been bitterly disappointed. He had seen the good land. He was faithful and ready to enter. But now he must wander in the desert for 40 years because of everyone else's fault. Caleb, however, has a strong sense of community and realizes what it means to be part of a whole. He leads by example and encourages. Caleb does not break away and start a new movement. The spirit of simply leaving when there is trouble or lack of faith may be a current phenomenon, but it is not biblical. In Caleb we see a man who stays on, even during the punishment years, without a spirit of "I told you so."

**In what ways have you suffered from other people's bad choices? How have you handled yourself in these situations?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** We must learn to view our world through the eyes of faith, in good times and bad.

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that faith helps us to perceive and act upon our circumstances correctly.

We all know how hard it is to keep the faith when times are hard and when God seems far away. In such circumstances, faith conflicts with logic. We have to maintain our belief in God and in His promises, even when no reason for hope or faith is apparent.

The time in which Caleb lived was the opposite. God had just brought the Israelites through the desert with many and daily examples of miracles and supernatural manifestations, capped off with a reprise of the parting of the Red Sea. Few of us ever have experienced such clear evidence of God's care and guidance. So, it seems quite inconceivable that the Israelites would assess the situation, determine that it was hopeless, and huddle in the proverbial fetal position. Yet, they did! Caleb was one of the few who took God at His word.

The other Israelites probably viewed themselves not as pessimists but as realists. But in the light of their recent experience, it was Caleb who was the realist. May God help us to be realistic enough to believe in His miracles!

**Discuss With the Class:** Most of us believe that God can help us with the struggles in our lives, whether physical, spiritual, financial, and so forth. Indeed, most of us can—if we think about it—point to many times in which God has helped us in these areas. Why then do we, as did the Israelites of Caleb's time, have such difficulty believing that God will help us in the future?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** Note that God has plans, and we have a place in those plans. We are, in some sense, both the object of the plans and the means by which they are accomplished. Sometimes we are the means by which they are impeded or delayed. Of course, we all can see when others are impeding or delaying them. Caleb's anger toward, and resentment of, his fellow Israelites would have been

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## Claiming God's Promises

Forty years have passed. The Israelites have crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Like hungry people eyeing a table loaded with good food, they gaze toward the Promised Land. Campfire discussions center on what the best sections of land are and who is going to get them. Long before entering the Promised Land, Moses already had recognized the potential for infighting and left directions for the division of the land. The division of the land is touched on in Joshua 14.

**Read Joshua 14.** What request does Caleb make, and why do you think he made it? What does this tell us about him and his faith?

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Amid the dividing of the land, Caleb steps forward and, surprisingly, asks for land. This is to be land not for his tribe but rather for him personally. At first glance this meeting between Joshua and Caleb, the two oldest men in Israel, seems a little out of character. Even though Caleb insists that he is strong and ready for battle, first and foremost he wants to claim a promise given to him by God.

Caleb obviously is unafraid to claim God's promises. Caleb's request is not motivated by selfish ambition. The principle of "getting to give" is deeply entrenched in the old man. Caleb does not make claim to the nicest, most lush areas; rather, he chooses the area inhabited by the sons of Anak—giants. That is, the land he is asking for isn't yet conquered. These very giants had made the Israelites so afraid 40 years earlier (*Num. 13:33*).

Caleb, perhaps, is eager to see that the current generation does not make the mistakes of their forefathers. Now Caleb demonstrates his faith in God by choosing the most challenging, instead of the easiest, territory.

Once again, Caleb is leading by example. In the process, he is living an object lesson. He is, in effect, saying: "If God can use one of the oldest men to drive out the giants, then the rest of you need not fear. God can and will give the victory." Joshua 15:13, 14 records Caleb's victory over Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the descendants of Anak. What had terrified a whole nation was conquered by one old man who trusted in God's power.

**Read Joshua 14:14.** What does it mean to serve the Lord "wholeheartedly"? What kind of things in our lives, if not constantly put down, will make this difficult for us to do?

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

**exceptionally well-founded. Yet, he didn't give in to it. We have no evidence it even existed. What does this say to us?**

## Bible Commentary


### I. Lost in Place (Review Numbers 13:30, 14:20–24 with your class.)

One thing almost everyone knows about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is that the Israelites wandered for 40 years. What is not generally known is that this was not necessary. The Sinai desert—assuming traditions about the setting are correct—did not take 40 years to cross. The Israelites were not so directionally challenged as to get lost in a tiny strip of desert and take 40 years to get their bearings. It was not dictated by the Bible's preoccupation with the number 40; if it were, 40 days, weeks, or months would have been sufficient.

No, God was quite ready to give them the land of Canaan right away. But the Israelites didn't believe it was possible. Only Caleb responded with confidence, saying, " 'Let us go up at once and possess it' " (*Num. 13:30*). The others looked at the challenges and magnified them. The faithless, pessimistic "realists" were the ones seeing mythical beings from bad science fiction, all to avoid the obvious conclusion that God could do what He said He would do.

And this after God had demonstrated His power in dramatic, supernatural ways ten times (*Num. 14:22*). God, who had every right to test them, allowed them to test Him ten times, humbling one of the greatest empires in the ancient world in the process. And still they didn't believe in His ability to give them the land that had been promised to them since the time of Abraham. Given a choice between trusting God and circling around the same conglomeration of sand and rock formations for decades, they chose the latter.

Knowing, as we do, how the story ends, it's easy to deride the children of Israel. But what about us? How many times have we, in the full knowledge that God wanted something new, different, and better for us, gone back to the things that were "safe," the things that we knew? Addictions that we wanted taken away but not quite yet? Refusing to grow spiritually because we didn't want the responsibility that came with it? Avoiding real intimacy with God because we weren't sure what He would ask from us or

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## Passing on the Legacy

In some cultures old age is highly respected, and older people are well integrated into society and looked to for advice and wisdom. In others, senior citizens are seen as no longer productive and are ignored and marginalized. The latter view seems to be growing worldwide. Caleb gives a wonderful example of the positive use of one's old age.

Caleb avoids the extremes normally associated with the senior years. He does not allow himself to be intimidated by others because of his years. He does not simply give up on life and withdraw. He does not use his age as an excuse for not being involved in his community. Neither does he hang on to his position and see all attempts of younger people to lead as personal threats.

### **What** does Psalm 92:12–15 say about old age?

It has been said that God has no grandchildren. As long as God remains the God of my fathers, He has nothing to do with me personally. Caleb knows that every generation must have its own experience with God. The Israelites, collectively and individually, could not live off the miracles of Egypt or even the wilderness experience of their parents. Caleb sees it as his duty to create an environment for the younger generation to take their first steps of faith.

### **What** sort of experience is Caleb facilitating in Judges 1:12, 13?

The people of Judah are taking possession of their land. The tribes of Judah and Simeon cooperate and work together in faith in order to make good on God's promises. But on coming up against the fortified city of Kirjathsepher (*vs. 12*), they face a tremendous challenge. We know from archaeology about the often elaborate design of Late Bronze Age fortification systems in Palestine. However, instead of focusing on the walls, Caleb sees this challenge as an opportunity for growth. Here someone can claim God's promises and have the victory. Although it may sound strange to us, Caleb offers a wonderful incentive. Whoever conquers the city would become his son-in-law. Othniel, Caleb's nephew (*Judg. 1:13*), takes up the challenge, and God gives him victory. Through Caleb's nurturing, a new hero is born. Caleb's investment would pay rich dividends in later years. God would use this young man as Israel's first judge and deliverer (*Judg. 3:7–11*).

**As you have matured, how have your attitudes changed? What have you learned simply by experience? How can you avoid getting entrenched in wrong habits and attitudes?**



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

how other people would react? Aren't those same rock formations losing their appeal the five hundredth time around?

**Consider This:** God gives us a chance to go somewhere new and be something new, just as He did the Israelites. What is standing in the way of our claiming the promises He has made to us? How can we set them aside and attain the better things He has for us?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that although life is a struggle and that there are people who don't wish the best for us and that there are circumstances that can wear us down, God is equal to all of them.

**Thought Questions:**

Strictly defined, a miracle is a perceptible contravention of the laws of nature, such as might occur through direct divine intervention or through the medium of a holy person or "miracle worker." Have you personally experienced miracles or divine intervention? How did they affect your conduct of life from that point?

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**Application Questions:**

① Life is full of dangers and potential negative outcomes. As such, it is only natural that we take such possibilities into account and plan for worst-case scenarios. On the other hand, the Bible implicitly and explicitly cautions us against worry (*Pss. 37:1, 5; 91:1, 2*). What is the difference between worry and prudence? Given that worry is both an emotion and a habit, how can we control a tendency to worry? What is lost when we give in to it? What is at the heart of worry? How do we uproot our unbelief?

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## Giving Freely

**Read** Judges 1:14, 15. What more does this tell us about the character of Caleb?

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Inheritance was very important to the Israelites. Owning land to pass on to your heirs was seen as a way of ensuring that your legacy would not die out. As a matter of fact, this was so important that detailed laws were given to provide for an heir if a man died childless, so that someone would take the deceased's name and continue his legacy (*see the Levirate laws in Deut. 25:5–10*).

At Caleb's age, he would have been thinking seriously about his own inheritance. The later genealogical records show that Caleb had sons. He would have been eager to leave them as much as possible. Although Acsah was his daughter, any land that was given to her would leave Caleb's immediate family and become part of her husband's property. We do not know exactly what prompted Acsah's request for land, but we do know that refusing her request would have been acceptable and in line with the social norms of protecting one's own inheritance.

The surprising thing is that Caleb not only gives her the field but then also gives the springs of water, too. And not just one spring of water but both the upper and lower springs.

Generosity works both ways. Proverbs 11:25 states that “a generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (*NIV*). When we are not ready to give freely, it is perhaps a sign that we have not yet received.

**What** implications does this story have for our spiritual life in, for example, the area of forgiveness? Read Matthew 6:15 and 18:21–35.

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We can give only what we have. If we are unable to forgive, then it is a sure sign that we have not claimed God's forgiveness for ourselves. Caleb had received blessings from God and was happy to share them. He showed a generosity far beyond the social norms of his time.

**How generous are you with what you have? Do you find that the more you have, the more willing you are to share with others, or do you tend to hoard? How can you learn to be more willing to give of yourself for the good of others?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

2 An extreme tendency to worry, and to fully expect the worst—to the extent that we leave God out of the equation—is something we see very clearly in the behavior of the other spies in the story of Caleb. But is it possible to err in the direction of a denial of existing reality and presumption in the face of future challenges? How can we distinguish this presumption from faith, especially when others may try to guilt-trip us into doing things or going along with courses of action we may feel to be unwise?

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### ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is meant to emphasize the fact that God is equal to any of the troubles or fears that we face now or in the future.

**Cut up scrap paper into roughly equal-sized bits, at least enough for the maximum number of people who might appear at your class. Bring a medium-sized box or other container.**

**Activity:** Mention that we all have fears and worries about things that might happen or that might not happen or that might not turn out as we hope or expect. Pass around the slips of paper and ask each member to write down anonymously something he or she fears or worries about. Pass around the container and have each class member put the slip of paper into the container. When it comes back to you, lead the class in a free-form prayer over the contents of the container, asking God to resolve these issues. You can pray the prayer yourself, or you can solicit input from class members. Follow this with a disposal of the slips of paper in whatever manner you choose.

Alternatively, you may perform the same exercise without supplies. Invite class members to construct the worry box in their minds. Next ask them to imagine writing their worry on a slip of paper, folding it up, and putting it into the box. Now ask them to imagine nailing the box shut and then burning the box until there is nothing left. Tell them that this is what God wants to do with our worry. Invite them to construct the worry box in their minds anytime they find themselves worrying and to pray that God will give them the strength to put their worries inside it and nail the lid shut. Remind them to pray to our God, who is a “consuming fire,” that He will burn the box and its contents to ashes.

**Further Study:** “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.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① As Christians we are constantly bombarded with “facts” that are interpreted in ways that contradict our faith. Notice, the key word is *interpreted*. What are ways that we can confront these challenges without making fools of ourselves and yet at the same time maintain our integrity?
- ② Dwell more on the idea that how we interpret “facts” isn’t always correct. For instance, we look at matter and see it as solid; yet, in reality, matter is almost all empty space. We look at the ground and judge it to be unmoving, even though it is moving very quickly through space. We can be in a closed, empty room and hear nothing, even though the air in the room is filled with radio waves carrying all sorts of sounds that we, left to ourselves, can’t hear. What lessons can we draw from this about what it means to live by faith and not by sight?
- ③ Drawing on the life of Caleb, how can we nurture new believers, young people, and children to fill positions of leadership and responsibility in our church?
- ④ Caleb stuck with his people, even amid their gross sins and mistakes. What lessons does this have for us today as Seventh-day Adventists?