

AM Numbers 14:11-24 & Joshua 14:6-15 Lessons from the life of Caleb

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 January 2026

Preacher: Mr Nigel Kenny

[0 : 00] Because we're going to be looking later at the life of Caleb. We're not going to read every passage about him.

! He's referred to many times in the Old Testament. But there are two sections, roughly Numbers chapter 14 and Joshua chapter 14.

But just to see the context, we're going to start by reading a few verses from Numbers chapter 13. Now that is on page 144 of the Pew Bibles.

Numbers chapter 13. I'll just take you through a few select verses to set the context of the spies that went into Canaan.

So Numbers 13 verses 1 to 3. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel.

[1 : 01] From each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, everyone a chief among them. So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran, according to the command of the Lord, all of the men who were heads of the people of Israel.

Then over the page and down to verse 17, 17 to 20. Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan and said to them, Go up into the Negev and go up into the hill country and see what the land is and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, and whether the land that they dwell in is good or bad, and whether the cities that they dwell in are camps or strongholds, and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not.

Be of good courage and bring some of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the season of the first ripe grapes. And then down to verse 25.

At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land, and they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh.

They brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

[2 : 35] However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large, and besides we saw the descendants of Anak there.

The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negev. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell on the hill country, and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and along the Jordan.

But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.

And then Numbers chapter 14, just to summarize the first 10 verses there, the people there rebel and don't want to go along with what Joshua and Caleb said, and the Lord is very displeased with them.

Verse 11, And the Lord said to Moses, How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me? In spite of all the signs that I have done among them, I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.

[3 : 57] But Moses said to the Lord, Then the Egyptians will hear of it. For you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land.

They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For you, O Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them, and you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night.

Now, if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them, that he has killed them in the wilderness.

And now please let the power of the Lord be great, as you have promised, saying the Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity, and transgression.

But he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.

[4 : 59] Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people from Egypt until now.

Then the Lord said, I have pardoned according to your word, but truly as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times, and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers.

And none of those who despised me shall see it. But my servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit, and has followed me fully, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it.

And then turning over to Joshua chapter 14, we'll read verses 6 to 15, that will be the final reading, 6 to the end of the chapter, that's page 241, well, 241 in my Bible, maybe a different page in yours, 228, 228.

So Joshua 14, verse 6. Then the people of Judah came to Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, said to him, You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God in Kadesh Barnea concerning you and me?

[6 : 38] I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought him word again, as it was in my heart.

But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, yet I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance for you and your children forever, because you have wholly followed the Lord my God.

And now behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years, since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness.

And now behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me. My strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. So now give me this hill country, of which the Lord spoke on that day. For you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities.

[7 : 56] It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out, just as the Lord said.

Then Joshua blessed him, and he gave Hebron to Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, for an inheritance.

Therefore Hebron became the inheritance of Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, to this day, because he wholly followed the Lord, the God of Israel.

Now the name of Hebron formerly was Kiriath Arba. Arba was the greatest man among the Anakim, and the land had rest from war.

Well, when I was studying law at the University of Glasgow in the 1980s, I worshipped at St. George's Tron, and sat under the ministry of Eric Alexander.

And 40 years ago this month, he began a year's sabbatical. He had been minister of the church there for some nine years at that stage, and the court session agreed for him to have a year's sabbatical.

[9 : 19] So a year later, the first Sunday in 1987, the congregation awaited his first sermon with eager anticipation, wondering what it was that he had learned from the Lord during that sabbatical that he wanted to share with us from God's Word.

And we were not disappointed. Indeed, the sermon title itself was a sermon. And to this day, I don't think I have ever heard a more challenging sermon title.

And here it is. What will you be remembered for most by those who knew you best? What will you be remembered for most by those who knew you best?

Well, that's a really important question for all of us to ask ourselves, isn't it? Because none of us leads a life of isolation.

All of our lives impact and influence others in many, many ways, for good or for ill.

[10 : 38] And so it's a question that we really ought to ask ourselves at least once a year, probably far more often than that. What kind of a spiritual legacy am I leaving for those who are closest to me?

What will I be remembered for most by those who knew me best? Well, the life of Caleb has many lessons to teach us in this regard.

And there may be one or two things from that sermon that will appear. But I've long since misplaced my tape of the recording. So hopefully there's not too much plagiarism in what I have to say this morning just for my own reflections on the life of Caleb.

Now, if you grew up in Sunday school, you probably first heard about Caleb if you sang choruses with 12 men went to spy out Canaan.

10 were bad, 2 were good. That's the actions if I can remember them. And Caleb was one of the good guys, one of the two who were good, along with Joshua.

[12 : 01] And as we read in Joshua chapter 14, he reminded Joshua that it was indeed some 45 years ago when they met together at Gilgal.

And the first thing that we see about Caleb is that as we read at the end of Numbers 14 verse 24, he was a man of a different spirit.

It's fascinating that this wasn't just what Moses or others said about Caleb or indeed, as we read, what he thought of himself.

It was God himself speaking through Moses who had this assessment of Caleb. And that is one of the most important lessons.

It is God's assessment of us rather than our own or others that is the only assessment that counts. Caleb was truly different from others in Israel.

[13 : 04] And we're told that that difference was seen in that he wholly, fully served God. Or we could say he served God wholeheartedly.

He and Joshua had a completely different attitude from the other ten spies who only saw the obstacles in the way of entering Canaan. But Caleb saw beyond that to trust in God's great ability to fulfill his promises.

And as a result, Caleb and his descendants would receive what God had promised them. And I guess it reminds us as well as we were thinking earlier of John G. Payton.

He was a man that faced enormous challenges, huge, huge challenges with the islanders there in the New Hebrides. They were very violent people.

Yet he believed that God had called him and he trusted God's promises. And indeed God honoured that faith, honoured that trust, that complete dependence upon him.

[14 : 14] And there was great gospel fruit that came, that is there even to this day. So we see secondly, turning to Joshua chapter 14, that Caleb recalled the promises of God in verses 7 and 9.

What God had promised Caleb was an earthly inheritance and Caleb never forgot it and it shaped his life for the next 45 years.

The promises God had made, sorry, the promises God has made to us in Christ are spiritual in nature and are far greater. Indeed, Peter describes them in his second letter as God's very great and precious promises.

And we should maybe ask ourselves, do we recall them? How many of God's promises could we recite here and now? Do they shape our lives and keep us going through all the ups and downs in particular through life's disappointments and trials and challenges?

And it's interesting that as Peter develops his thinking about these promises in the first chapter of his second letter, they are inextricably linked with our being wholehearted in our approach to the Christian life.

[15 : 49] Peter says that as we grow in Christian maturity, we are to add to our faith the qualities that come through that which are produced by God's Spirit will keep us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Jesus.

Incredibly, as we persevere in the faith, Peter tells us that we will never stumble and we'll receive a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom.

What a wonderful promise that is. What a great incentive. And so often we feel as we'll be hearing this evening that faltering and stumbling and weakness are pretty well inevitable and we're not going to know anything other than that.

Well, God's word would beg to differ. That as we add to our faith, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, as we persevere, we will never finally stumble, we will never make shipwreck of our faith but instead we'll receive a rich welcome into Christ's eternal kingdom. Well, the next thing that we see about Caleb is the second part of verse 7 that he was a man of conviction.

[17 : 14] Caleb brought his report back from Canaan back to Moses according to his conviction.

Or as it was in my heart, that's really what the phrase means. means. And it reminds us, doesn't it, that while head knowledge is a good thing, it's actually useless if it only remains in our head and doesn't get to our heart.

Because Paul tells us, doesn't he, in Romans chapter 10, that it is with our heart that we believe and are justified. God's word must take root, just as I was praying earlier, for the good soil, and that's the soil of our hearts.

For God's word to take root in our hearts and to become part of us, to become part of our lives. We can know something in our heads, but unless it takes root in our hearts, it will do us no good at all. But Caleb was a man very much of heart conviction. And that heart conviction went against the grain.

[18 : 40] But Caleb was burdened to say, he was in the minority, he and Joshua were in the minority, but he was burdened to say what was in his heart, no matter how unpopular or out of step that was, with what even those within the covenant community of Israel were thinking.

And it led to great blessing for those who went on and entered the land. Having a different spirit means that we will be men and women of heart conviction.

Are we prepared to stand up and be counted for all the Bible has to say, no matter how unpopular or out of step with our culture that might be?

Next, we see in verse 8 of Joshua 14 that Caleb wasn't deterred by others' negativity. This is a really key point.

Look at verse 8. But my brothers who went up with me made the heart of the people melt. Terrible, terrible leadership. So negative.

[19 : 52] So despondent. No faith at all. And that had a very detrimental impact on the rest of the people of God.

It made their heart melt. Now the thing is that what they saw wasn't an exaggeration.

It was all accurate. There were many, many godless tribes in Canaan. That was true.

They weren't exaggerating. But crucially, these ten spies had left God out of the picture. They walked by sight, not faith.

And Caleb's fellow Israelites, the least ten spies that had gone with him, had tragically been very successful with their negative message of doom and gloom.

[20 : 51] It was infectious in the wrong way because the people's hearts melted with fear. fear. And we can so often be discouraged and deterred from following Christ wholeheartedly by the negativity of others, even those perhaps in Christian leadership.

And the disastrous effects that that can have if poor leadership influences others in that way. But Caleb wasn't like that.

there was no hint of discouragement in what he had to say. It was almost as if his life motto was, though none go with me, I still will follow.

That needs to be our motto too in these challenging times. And the only way that we can do that is to be like Caleb and to follow the Lord wholeheartedly, wholly following the Lord.

And then as we move on through the chapter, second half of verse 8, second half of verse 9, we see that Caleb was wholehearted in his devotion.

[22 : 05] It's incredible that Caleb is described six times in the Bible as a man who wholly served God. This is what he was best known for amongst those who knew him best.

This was God's own assessment of Caleb. What a tremendous testimony. What did this mean then? Well, in a nutshell, it was all about what drove him.

His service wasn't just about duty or obligation or habit. In particular, it wasn't about maintaining a reputation. No, he was passionate about serving God and he sought to do so with all his heart and soul and mind and strength.

When we think of the greatest commandments, we so often think that it is the proof that we're all sinners. Now, that is true. Often, you've maybe heard of the evangelistic strategy of taking people

through the Ten Commandments and even if they think that they've never done X, Y, or Z, you take them to the greatest commandment and people realize that they're sinners because of that. Now, that is one of the purposes of God's law, but it is not the only purpose. We know that Jesus has fulfilled the law for us, but it doesn't mean that it is impossible for any Christian to be a whole hearted, follower of Jesus because Caleb was and God said that Caleb was and if you think about it, we have the fullness of God's revelation in Christ.

[23 : 58] We have his indwelling spirit if we are Christians, so we really have no excuse for being half-hearted. Indeed, if we try and think perhaps of another word to describe being half-hearted with the word lukewarm come to mind, well think what Jesus said to the church at Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3, because they were neither hot nor cold but lukewarm, he was going to spew them out of his mouth.

So each one of us is called to be on fire for Christ, to be whole-hearted in our devotion. But next we see in verse 10 that Caleb was also mindful of God's faithfulness.

He says, the Lord has kept me alive just as he said these 45 years since the time that the Lord spoke his word to Moses. Now Caleb wasn't boasting that he'd made it to 85.

he openly acknowledged that it was God who had kept him alive and had given him the strength to persevere through all of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.

It's interesting that if you were to trace that roundabout route that the Israelites took over those 40 years, it forms the shape of a heart.

[25 : 32] And that was what was happening spiritually. Israel's hearts were wandering from God. It should not have taken them nearly so long to get to Canaan.

It wasn't that far. But they wandered around and vacillated and complained and grumbled and rebelled. And in the midst of that Caleb was the man of the different spirit and he served the Lord with all his heart.

Now remembering God's faithfulness to us, acknowledging that we are dependent on him for the very breath in our nostrils each and every day. If we have that humble dependence on him daily, that will go a long way to keeping our hearts right before God.

Because we owe our very existence to his faithfulness and grace. peace. Now another thing about Caleb that we see in verse 11 that is really significant is that he was faithful to God for 45 years in obscurity.

We never hear anything in the Old Testament of what Caleb did over those 45 years. Yet we know that he remained utterly faithful faithful to God during those years.

[27 : 05] Now wherever God may call in particular the children in the congregation here, they may well be called to live and to serve somewhere that's a little bit out of the way.

Somewhere that's maybe not in a city, maybe not in a large congregation, but wherever God would call them, wherever God would call us, we ought to be faithful.

We don't need to be in the limelight in order to be faithful. And the final thing that we see about Caleb here in verse 12 is that he was still a man of confident faith at the end of his life.

There's quite an age spread here this morning, but the challenge for all of us is that whatever age or stage we are in life, we need to make it our goal not to drift or to cruise if we're spared for retirement, but indeed to go on faithfully to the very end of our lives.

I think it is fitting to say that the number of children that we have here this morning I'm sure have been the answer for many prayers for many years from those older members of the congregation here and it's so encouraging to see those prayers answer, to see the next generation coming up here, which is not guaranteed, it is not always the case in many congregations in Scotland, but what an encouragement this morning to see that and how we need to be investing in prayer in these precious young lives that God would raise them up to be men and women of God for the next generation.

[29 : 23] It is God alone that can bring this about. He is the one who enables us to do anything of eternal value for his glory, but we need to trust him, we need to be dependent upon him.

But in closing, Caleb, like so many of the great heroes of the faith in the Old Testament, is surely a type of the Lord Jesus himself.

Let's go back over these points and see the similarities. Jesus had a different spirit. He taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus recalled the promises of God. Hebrews 12 tells us that for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

Jesus, above all else, was a man of conviction. In John 18 he says, everyone on the side of truth listens to me. He was aware that he was the incarnate son of God and the very embodiment of all that was good and right and true.

[30 : 41] Jesus wasn't deterred by others' negativity. How many times his disciples did not have faith, indeed ended up abandoning him the night he was betrayed.

You of little faith, why are you so afraid? But he set his heart towards Jerusalem and went all the way to the cross in obedience to the Father as we read in Philippians 2.

Jesus was wholehearted in his devotion to his heavenly Father. I always do what pleases him. And I'm sure we have seen that the Lord Jesus no doubt frequently prayed the 23rd psalm.

And if we can borrow from that we can see that Jesus was mindful of God's faithfulness. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Jesus was faithful in obscurity for many years. We read Jesus when he began his ministry was about 30 years of his life.

[32 : 02] He lived in relative obscurity. The son of a carpenter in Nazareth almost certainly taking over that business as most commentators believe that Joseph was an older man and had died by the time that Jesus entered his ministry.

And then finally Jesus still had confident faith in God the Father at the end of his earthly life. In the Garden of Gethsemane he submits his will to the Father, his human will to his heavenly Father.

Not my will but yours be done. So in closing let's apply this to ourselves. Do we desire to serve the Lord with all of our hearts?

I mentioned earlier about those in Laodicea that were half hearted, apathetic, indifferent, lukewarm. Being half hearted is a very dangerous place for any of us to be.

So what is the remedy? Well surely it is to be of a different spirit like Caleb. can that be said of us?

[33 : 21] Remember what Jesus said in Luke 11. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the difference.

Jesus said that although his disciples were evil they knew how to give good gifts to their children.

And how much more will God give his Holy Spirit in increasing measure? We are exhorted to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day, aren't we? only God can do that.

And it's only through being filled with his Holy Spirit that we are able to live the Christian life. How great our need, but even greater is the God who is so willing and so ready to supply that need by his good Spirit.

Spirit. As we look back at the end of the year that's just passed, certainly I am increasingly convinced that in fulfilling his purposes God uses ordinary people like you and me.

We are the body of Christ after all and God uses us to accomplish his purposes. He works in us and through us.

[34 : 35] And we don't know whether the Lord will tarry for another hundred years or more before his return. We don't know whether it will be ten years. We don't know whether it will be just a couple of years.

But however long it is until he returns, the church will need men and women like Caleb, those who have a different spirit and who wholly follow the Lord.

As we go into 2026, may that be true of each and every one of us and what we are all remembered for most by those who knew us best.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you that your word tells us that we are to imitate those who by faith inherited your promises.

And we thank you that Caleb was one of them. we thank you for his remarkable life, but remarkable only because you made it so. And we thank you that it is indeed possible for every single one of us who knows the Lord Jesus by the indwelling of your Holy Spirit to wholly follow you.

[35 : 55] And Lord, we pray that you would first and foremost give us the deep desire for that. We do not want to be half-hearted Lord, we want to follow you with all of our hearts because that is what you have created us in Christ to do.

And we pray Lord that we would lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles and run with perseverance that race that is marked out for us.

And we do pray Lord that if there are any this morning for whom all of this is still strange and new may they begin that journey of wholehearted faith even this day as your spirit brings them to that

point of conviction of their need for Christ and his saving grace and his wonderful eternal life.
In his name we ask it. Amen.