

## CALEB: YOUNG IN SPIRIT, IS 85 THE NEW 40?

By Bob Young

### Introduction

Mexico City is sinking. According to an article in *The New York Times*, "So much water has been pumped out from the aquifer beneath the city to satisfy the water needs of its residents that the ground is collapsing at a stunning rate. The city has sunk 30 feet in the last 100 years." Something similar can happen spiritually. We can give so much to others that energy wanes and we begin to sink. Drained and depleted, our life begins to collapse in on itself. What started as a noble venture to help thirsty people becomes desert journey. What do we do?

My last name is hard for many Spanish-speakers to pronounce. As a result, I often explain the meaning of my name. A not uncommon observation is that I am not all that "young" except in name. People seem to like commenting on the disconnection between my name and my age. Perhaps that is why I appreciated the comment of one student during a recent Bible Conference. He had heard part of my class and observed my conversations, demeanor and attitude in relationships with others. As we shared the typical conversation, he said, "But you are young in spirit." I thanked him and said that I hoped that was the case, because I thought it kept hope alive for all that God is doing and will do in the spread of Christianity in Latin America. His comment has given me a new goal: I want always to be young in spirit.

Where are you spiritually today? What do you see when you look at your spiritual life? The advantage of aging: a different spirit--a different place. Can you feel it? It is our strength. We face problems when we do not cultivate that different spirit. We cannot handle the thirst by ourselves, we cannot find peace alone, we cannot fill our spiritual reservoirs without that different spirit, and unless our spiritual reservoir is replenished, we cannot refresh the parched souls around us.

I introduce Caleb—unknown, unappreciated, a personality who appeared on a historical landscape that was monotonously flat. From the sending forth of twelve spies, through wilderness wanderings, into Canaan and the Promised Land, Caleb went further than Moses and went further than Joshua. Why? Perhaps the answer is in Numbers 14:24: "My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully, I will bring him into the land."

Caleb is unappreciated because he is unknown, yet he discharged his duties with skill and dedication. Consider these things about Caleb.

**First, consider his name.** Names are interesting. Names often reflect character. In Caleb, we meet a man with the name "dog." Some suggest this may reflect a man with canine qualities—the rabid one, biting, snarling. In Egyptian cuneiform, the term was used of abject servitude: the Canaanite king is the "dog" of the Egyptian Pharaoh.

**Second, Caleb's relationship with the Kenizzites** may indicate the presence of non-Israelites who became identified with the people and faith of Israel as early as the time of Joshua. Caleb and his descendants are identified as part of the tribe of Judah, but may have mixed background.

**Third, the twelve spies** sent by Moses scouted the land of Canaan for 40 days. When they returned, all but Joshua and Caleb gave a pessimistic report: "When we look at ourselves, we see ourselves as grasshoppers, and we are such in their sight also" (Numbers 13:33). The faithless ones saw only difficulties and defeat. Were there giants, yes! Were these giants great, yes! Is our God

greater, absolutely yes! How easily we forget God.

**Here is an Old Testament story about a man with a different spirit.** The man is Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, one of the spies sent to survey the land of Canaan in Numbers 13. He was one of two spies who were willing to trust the Lord and enter Canaan. The ten spies were filled with doubt and died in the wilderness. Joshua led the people into the Promised Land. What about Caleb? The answer begins in Numbers 14:24 but the story finishes in Joshua 14:6-12. Caleb also helped with the land allotments of the respective tribes in the Promised Land (Numbers 34:19).

At the time of the conquest, Caleb was 85 years old (Joshua 14:7, 10). His request is simple: "Give me this mountain." The town of Hebron was assigned to Caleb and he occupied it after expelling the Anakim who have previously dwelt there (Joshua 14:13, 14). Let us focus on the life of this man who began with two strikes against him.

**-I- Caleb: a God to live for.**

Regardless of the ethnic background of Caleb, his character is rooted in his recognition of God. He recognizes a higher power and a higher purpose. He understands that man is not of himself. Real character comes from without and is built from within. This truth explains Paul, David (after God's own heart), and Caleb (followed God wholeheartedly, fulfilled the purpose of God). This truth also explains the ungodly who deny God (Romans 3).

**-II- Caleb: a Purpose to live out.**

Caleb lived out the purpose of God in his life. He had a sense of "niche." He knew the answer to life's basic questions: Why am I here, what am I to do, where am I going?

**-III- Caleb: a Self he could live with.**

Caleb became a person with a different spirit. He finally reached his goal—at age 85.

**-IV- Caleb: a Faith to live by.**

It is not enough to acknowledge God. Having a God to live for leads to having a faith to live by. Caleb was a man of faith. In the matter of the spies, in depending upon God, in requesting his homestead and fighting the battle, even at age 85. This kind of faith is more than acknowledging God. It is more than saluting God one time each week. It is more than a token presence in worship.

**-V- Caleb: a Hope to live in.**

A man who moves forward at age 85 is obviously not ready to throw in the towel. Caleb lived for the future; he lived for the ultimate victory.

We today have these five things through our relationship to God in Jesus Christ. When we clearly see God's purpose in this world, the way he remakes us and redefines us, and how he sustains us by bridging into our lives to give strength when we are insufficient in ourselves, that different spirit is at work. Our deepest satisfaction and inexhaustible supply is in Jesus Christ. That singular truth empowers the phrase: a different spirit. Do you know the difference? Are you part of the difference? Will you help make a difference? No more sameness, no more looking like the world, no more depending on the world's ways. This dream depends on each one of us, it depends on you. Let us seek to be people with a different spirit.