

Wholehearted: The Story Of Caleb

Numbers 14

Beloved, our words have power. Not in any mystical way, but in a pure Biblical sense—our words have power to mutually upbuild (Romans 14:19), or tear down and condemn (James 3:6). In today's text we see the enormous fallout of evil words spoken:

Numbers 14:1

*(KJV) And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.
(NIV) That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud.*

When the congregation heard the evil report of the ten scouts, it crushed their spirit, and aroused their sin—evil beget evil. The Israelites were already hard-hearted and without faith in God and His goodness in providing bountiful Canaan. The evil report of the scouts simply exposed their unbelief in and distrust of their God.

What we speak can be life or death to our hearers:

Proverbs 18:21

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.

So, speak life. Speak faith. Speak God's pure, unchanging word!

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do you recall a crisis in your life when you spoke human reason into the situation rather than God's truth? What was the outcome? In retrospect, how do you think things would have been different if you had prayed Holy Scripture into your crisis?

*STUDY POINT: Find three instances in the Old Testament when God responded to the prayer and proclamation of His Word. Journal the events leading up to, and following, the answer and subsequent deliverance.

Numbers 14:2

*(KJV) And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!
(NIV) All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness!"*

Now their selfish grief turns to personal attacks on God's chosen leaders, especially Moses:

Numbers 12:7-8

My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

God heard all their murmurings and verbal attacks of His singularly anointed servant.

In this verse we can read between the lines of the Israelites' words—they despised God's plan for them. They had forgotten the depths of darkness from which God has saved them—a life

of slavery and bondage. Oh, beloved, let us never harden our hearts to this extent where we don't trust God's plan and purpose for our lives!

Proverbs 4:23

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Hebrews 3:15-19

While it is said, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So, we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Numbers 14:3

*(KJV) And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?
(NIV) Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?"*

Hmm, it's the Egypt thing again! This is truly a forgetful and deceived people. And they are hiding behind the well-being of their wives and children when it is really their own self-interest they are protecting.

Numbers 14:4

*(KJV) And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.
(NIV) And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."*

Another attack on Moses! This time they make it known they want a leader who will take them back to Egypt. They would choose harsh leadership and slavery and bondage over God's loving guidance and provision and powerful protection. Now the Israelites have reached a new low of pure evil. Moses and Aaron respond in deep sorrow and repentance on behalf of their evil flock:

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Complaining is certainly the fruit of our fallen nature. What are some practical and spiritual ways you can cut off this evil branch from your growing in Christ?

*STUDY POINT: Write out all the Scriptures concerning Caleb. What life lessons can we glean from these accounts of our faithful hero? What would be some application points from these verses that you could pull into your own life?

Numbers 14:5

*(KJV) Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.
(NIV) Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there.*

This is the heart of a leader. Interceding on behalf of those they love and protect, especially when rebellion rears its ugly head! Joshua and Caleb tear their clothes, also in an act of deep

repentance. Keep in mind they were among the twelve that searched the land—but the only two who saw Canaan through the eyes of faith.

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Numbers 14:6-7

(KJV) And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.

(NIV) Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good."

These are words of faith. Sadly, the words describing what Joshua and Caleb observed through the lens of faith and belief fell upon deaf ears and hardened hearts.

Numbers 14:8

(KJV) If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

(NIV) If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.

God is most pleased with us when we love Him by believing His Word and obeying it.

Luke 10:27

And he answering said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

John 6:28-29

Then said they unto him, what shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

John 14:15

If ye love me, keep my commandments.

Israel did not believe God's promises of the promised land nor did they obey His Word. So, the words of Joshua and Caleb fell upon deaf spiritual ears.

Numbers 14:9

(KJV) Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.

(NIV) Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

Rebellion is as witchcraft to the Lord (1 Samuel 15:23) and Joshua and Caleb pleaded with the Israelites to:

1. Cease rebelling against God.
2. Understand that God was their defense against the intimidating enemy forces.
3. Trust that God alone was their defense; the enemy was laid bare and vulnerable to attack.
4. Believe that they were not given a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

Numbers 14:10

(KJV) But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

(NIV) But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites.

This was the final straw—the Israelites now plotted to physically attack and kill Joshua and Caleb. Their cup of iniquity had run over. God, in His perfect timing and judgment, shows up to exact punishment:

Numbers 14:11

(KJV) And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?

(NIV) The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?"

Could God ever win over the hearts of the Israelites? What more could He have done in the supernatural realm to prove His love for them. What would it take? Answer: His discipline!

Numbers 14:12

(KJV) I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

(NIV) I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they."

Note well here that God is confiding in His chosen leader Moses alone. Moses would hear God out and have the correct heart to respond to Him in the best interest of the Israelites, but outside of God's wrath. This is such an extraordinary place in Scripture, as we witness the power of the fervent prayers of a righteous man:

James 5:16

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Also, God promises to wipe out Israel and create a whole new strong, obedient nation from Moses. Wow!

Numbers 14:13

(KJV) And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)

(NIV) Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them.

Because of God's foreknowledge and perfect mercy, He knew that Moses would be His instrument of merciful appeal. Thus Moses appeals to God to guard His reputation among the watching nations, namely Egypt.

Numbers 14:14

(KJV) And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

(NIV) And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard that you, LORD, are with these people and that you, LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

They have heard. Divine sponsorship in this time meant that the watching nations attributed any and all spiritual activity or movement among their foes—along with subsequent wins and losses—to the specific gods that people worshipped. So, in this verse Moses is appealing to God to stay true to His visible covenant love for and guidance of Moses and the Israelites.

Numbers 14:15-16

(KJV) Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

(NIV) If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 'The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

Moses reasons with God that, if the Lord slaughtered the Israelites, it would be perceived as not only a loss but a failure on God's part to keep His promises and deliver His children into the promised land. Moses then quotes from Exodus 34—God's own words:

Exodus 34:5-7

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Numbers 14:17-19

(KJV) And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

(NIV) "Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared:) 'The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.' In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now."

In accordance with Who You have proclaimed Yourself to be, God, pardon Your people. Again, Moses is appealing to God using God's own testimony about Himself in His Word!

Numbers 14:20

(KJV) And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

(NIV) The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked.

Amazingly, but not surprisingly, God responds to Moses according to His promises in Scripture:

1John 5:14-15

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Numbers 14:21

(KJV) But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

(NIV) Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth.

God will go ahead and perform His perfect will in such a way as to glorify Himself to the maximum—in both blessing and punishment. So, the Israelites would be pardoned (blessing), but also bear the consequences (punishment) for their sin. In both cases, the Lord would be glorified among the watching nations.

Numbers 14:22

(KJV) Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

(NIV) not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—

God seeks to glorify Himself, for He is the only One worthy of our ultimate worship.

Psalms 19:1

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

How much more, then, does God seek and deserve the worship of His children, the Israelites, through his miracle of bringing them out of Egypt, and the miracle of bringing water out of a rock (Exodus 17:1-7) in the wilderness. Countless supernatural works to stir His children's faith! Instead, God's own chose rebellion—and yes, God was keeping track of their iniquity—because they had hardened their hearts:

Hebrews 3:17-19

But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Numbers 14:23

(KJV) Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:

(NIV) not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

One cannot but think perhaps the Israelites did not deserve the promised land God set before them! The blessing was cast aside by the Israelites in favour of self-interest. Beloved, let us not forsake God's blessings and good purposes for our lives by worshipping the god of self:

Philippians 3:18-19

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Numbers 14:24

(KJV) But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

(NIV) But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

But my servant Caleb. This phrase is significant because this man of faith would receive due reward on earth—and heaven—for his wholehearted devotion to God. Oh, that all of God's children would humble themselves and repent and desire restored relationship with God through Jesus!

Numbers 14:25

(KJV) (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) To morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

(NIV) Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea."

A detour, perhaps? God's grace directs the Israelites safely around enemy encampments. This same God directs our paths and tasks every day. We cannot comprehend His goodness as He graciously guards us from evil every moment of every day!

Numbers 14:26-27

(KJV) And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

(NIV) The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites.

The Israelites murmur—a lot! From the tone of this text, we can feel the wrath of God growing.

In the Webster's dictionary, "murmur" is defined as : A complaint half suppressed, or uttered in a low, muttering voice.

As if God cannot hear their murmurings! Complaining, grumbling, and murmuring are all evidence of the absence of thankfulness. The hearts of the people were so hardened, the goodness of God was no longer acknowledged. Beloved, let us cultivate thankful hearts.

Numbers 14:28-29

(KJV) Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,

(NIV) So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me.

As ye have spoken in mine ears. God heard their statement that they wished they had died in Egypt or in the wilderness, and that they would fall by the sword and their wives and children become prey to the enemy (Numbers 14:1-3). Their grumbling and complaining entered God's ears—their unbelief rang out loud and clear! Now their grumbling and complaining would have grave consequences!

Numbers 14:30

(KJV) Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

(NIV) Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

Like all the champions of faith in Holy Scripture, Joshua and Caleb believed God. They sowed belief and faith through their positive report about Canaan to the people, and now would reap the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Given that the Israelites forfeited their blessing from God with their carnality and unbelief, what a poignant message to us today to guard our hearts and monitor our attitudes (Proverbs 4:23). We must also daily allow God to investigate the dialogue in our hearts and minds:

Psalms 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Numbers 14:31

(KJV) But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

(NIV) As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected.

This verse proves once again that God heard every word of their murmuring. He blesses the children that the Israelites held forth as an excuse for their lack of faith.

Numbers 14:32

(KJV) But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.

(NIV) But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness.

Just as the Israelites complained and predicted!

Numbers 14:33

(KJV) And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness.

(NIV) Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness.

Tragically, the next generation will also pay for their parents' unfaithfulness. Note well that God's punishment here is perfect, thorough, and complete. He knows just the right degree and timing with which to exact His justice. These hard lessons in Biblical history ought to serve as a warning to His church today:

1Corinthians 10:11

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Numbers 14:34

(KJV) After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.

(NIV) For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.'

Forty years without right relationship with God. Beloved, this should cause us deep grief. It is never God that turns from us:

Hebrews 13:5

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

Rather, we turn from Him by hardening our hearts with sins of covetousness and idolatry. But we can watch over and protect one another from such evil:

Hebrews 3:13

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Numbers 14:35

(KJV) I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

(NIV) I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die."

Which has banded together against me. Psalm 1 records the awful state of humankind as they turn against God, to the point of becoming mockers:

Psalms 1:1

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,

Numbers 14:36-37

(KJV) And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD.

(NIV) So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it— these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD.

Bubonic plague. What a way to end life! After God's provision of an "exceeding good land" (Numbers 14:7), these ten men refused to see Canaan through eyes of faith—or believe and trust His promises in Scripture. Their tragic deaths were but an example to the congregation of Israel that their cup of iniquity had run over. God must punish.

Numbers 14:38

(KJV) But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still.

(NIV) Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

Lived still. Joshua and Caleb were recipients of God's grace through their faith and obedience. As believers today we can draw so much encouragement from these two men who spoke words of life to the Israelites. We need to remember that we are only responsible for obeying God and taking Him at His unchanging truth—He then controls the outcome. Knowing and obeying God's Word is everything!

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Taking spiritual inventory at this point in our study would be wise. We have seen in the text two contrasting attitudes towards God. What points of character do you see in yourself from either camp—obedience or rebellion? Write these points down and present them to God. Ask Him to refine the good in you and cut off the bad. This is all to His glory!

Numbers 14:39

(KJV) And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly.

(NIV) When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly.

We have to regard the tears of the Israelites as selfish. They mourn bitterly not because they have grieved the heart of God, but because of the painful consequences of their unbelief. Such mourning does not lead to true repentance. It is worldly:

2Corinthians 7:10

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Numbers 14:40

(KJV) And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

(NIV) Early the next morning they set out for the highest point in the hill country, saying, "Now we are ready to go up to the land the LORD promised. Surely we have sinned!"

And here, out of their worldly sorrow, the Israelites try to manufacture false repentance. Too little, too late. There is no way their hearts are suddenly engaged in godly sorrow after the evil fruit they bore before Moses and before God. Not possible!

Numbers 14:41-42

(KJV) And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

(NIV) But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies,

There is a time when God's mercy runs out. The Israelites thought that they could reignite their faith from hard hearts—that God would all of a sudden go before them in battle. For us reading this passage today, we see how spiritually blind God's children become when their hearts are far from Him:

Isaiah 29:13

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch, as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Numbers 14:43-44

(KJV) For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

(NIV) for the Amalekites and the Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, he will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the highest point in the hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp.

Oh, to enter into battle without the Chief Commander! He stood back while his troops marched forward in presumption—defenceless and certain to die in battle.

Grievous.

Numbers 14:45

(KJV) Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

(NIV) Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

The tragic end was defeat. When would God's people learn to seek the Lord at all times—in and out of battle?

Beloved, our takeaway from this series is simply to emulate the winners in this story, and learn from the losers. Caleb is one of the great men of faith in the Bible because he believed God and gave a good, faithful report. Simple, right? Simple enough that each of us should live this way.

Amen.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland