

Kenezites and Kenites (2)*

Deborah Hurn

IN [THE FIRST part](#) of this article we considered the origins and territories of the Kenezites and Kenites, and how the Kenezite Caleb became associated with Israel and then a prince of the tribe of Judah. We continue by considering others of the Calebite family, and conclude with a look at the territory of the Calebites and then at the position of the Kenites in Israel.

Othniel

In Joshua 15:16,17 we read of how "Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb" took Debir and was given Caleb's daughter Achsah to wife. The account is duplicated in Judges 1:11-13 with one addition: "Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother", which detail is also noted in 3:9. In all three occurrences it is unclear whether Othniel or Kenaz was Caleb's brother; it depends on where we put our mental parentheses. For Othniel the son of Kenaz to be younger brother to Caleb the son of Jephunneh, it was necessary for them to have the same mother. This would be possible if their mother was married first to Jephunneh and bore Caleb, and then married Jephunneh's brother Kenaz, to whom she bore Othniel, and also Seraiah (1 Chron. 4:13).

It may be simpler to hold, as some do, that Kenaz and Caleb were full brothers and that Othniel was therefore Caleb's nephew and Achsah's cousin. But as Kenaz's age relative to Caleb is irrelevant to the story in which Othniel is the subject, I prefer to hold that Othniel was Caleb's younger (half-)brother. In either circumstance, Caleb could give his daughter as wife to Othniel, for it does not appear that marriage between the children of half-brothers or between cousins was prohibited under the Law (*cf.* 2 Sam. 13:13).

As according to Numbers 14:29 those who were over twenty at the time of the spies incident died in the wilderness (except Joshua and Caleb), and as Caleb was forty at that time (Josh. 14:7), Othniel must have been at least twenty years younger than Caleb. This may be why he lacked the courage to ask his half-brother for Achsah's hand, although he certainly would have known that she was available for marriage. His reluctance is not surprising considering Caleb's towering reputation, his warrior's constitution and, as later illustrated ([see below](#)), his gruff temperament. In

leading others in the conquest of Debir against formidable Canaanite opponents, Othniel would have proved, at least to himself, that he was as strong and capable as his famous brother, and began to live up to his name, meaning 'force of God'.

As a reward for his faith and courage, Caleb had received an inheritance among the people of Judah (15:13) for which he had petitioned Joshua by reminding him of Yahweh's vow by Moses (14:9). Othniel, as a descendent of Esau and not a son of Judah born, had no family inheritance within Israel and was therefore dependent on Caleb's bounty. His reward for valour was Achsah to wife, and, though it is not recorded that Caleb granted him possession of Debir, it seems reasonable to assume that he did.

Seraiah, Othniel's full brother (see above) also had no rights to an inheritance other than through Caleb. His descendants, termed the Harashim, became craftsmen (1 Chron. 4:14), abandoning their heritage of shepherding, presumably so as not to be dependent on the ownership of land, nor to intrude as pastoral nomads on the territory of others. They settled in a commercially accessible location near the borders of Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim, close to the city of Lydda and the port of Joppa. Their industrial centre became known as Geharashim, Valley of the Craftsmen (Neh. 11:35).

Sometime after Joshua's and Caleb's deaths, the people turned to idolatry, abandoning the worship of Yahweh (Judg. 2:7,11-13). Consequently, Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, subdued and oppressed Israel for eight years. Perhaps with Achsah's encouragement and support, Othniel's confidence grew and he came out from his famous brother's shadow. Although now he must have been at least as old as Caleb was when he conquered Hebron, Othniel went out to war against an organised army and delivered Israel. He then rose to become Israel's

* Thanks to Sister Faith Erickson-Gini for archaeological consulting, Sister Cindy Higgs for her work on the genealogies and Brethren Michael Owen and Tony Benson for archival material. Scripture quotations are from the RSV unless stated otherwise.

first judge, keeping peace and upholding justice for forty years until his death at about the age of 130 years (3:7-11).

Achsah

Achsah's mother is not named, but I like to think that Achsah was Caleb's daughter by his original wife (he may have had later ones), who I suggested was one of the youngest of the seven daughters of the Kenite Jethro (see [Part 1](#)).

As a dark-skinned 'daughter' of the Cushite Keturah, Achsah may have suffered subtle exclusion by the people of Judah, as did Zipporah at Miriam's hands (Num. 12:1). Welcoming a useful and well-connected Edomite such as Caleb into the tribe was expedient, but for an Israelite to marry one of his own sons to Caleb's Kenezite daughter would be quite a different matter. This could be why Achsah remained unmarried during the wilderness wanderings and for the seven years of the conquest of Canaan. Her father Caleb, hoping that someone would step forward with the incentive of a hero's victory and a city inheritance into the bargain, offered her hand in marriage to the conqueror of Kiriath-Sepher/Debir (Judg. 1:11,12).

With such a compressed record we can only wonder whether Caleb was surprised that Othniel took up the challenge, and whether he would otherwise have approved the match. If Achsah was born around the time of the Exodus, she would have been close enough in age to her father's younger half-brother for such a union to be acceptable. As a Kenite-Kenezite woman, Achsah also had more cultural and historical affinity with her Kenezite uncle, Othniel, than with the Israelite men of Judah.

After a lifetime of vagrant existence, Caleb eagerly sought an inheritance in the forested hills of the Hebron district (Josh. 14:12).¹ He may have supposed that Othniel and Achsah would also enjoy city life, not realising that his daughter was deeply attached to a pastoral existence. Achsah "urged" her new husband to ask a "field" of Caleb, which they duly received, for Caleb was not ungenerous, though perhaps somewhat distracted (15:18,19). Her request is similar to the prayer of Jabez, also a Kenite (1 Chron. 4:9,10; cf. 2:55), who equated the ownership of land with a blessing: "Oh that Thou wouldst bless me and enlarge my border" (4:10).

Although their new inheritance was lacking in water sources, Othniel seems to have declined to ask a further favour of Caleb (Josh. 15:18), so

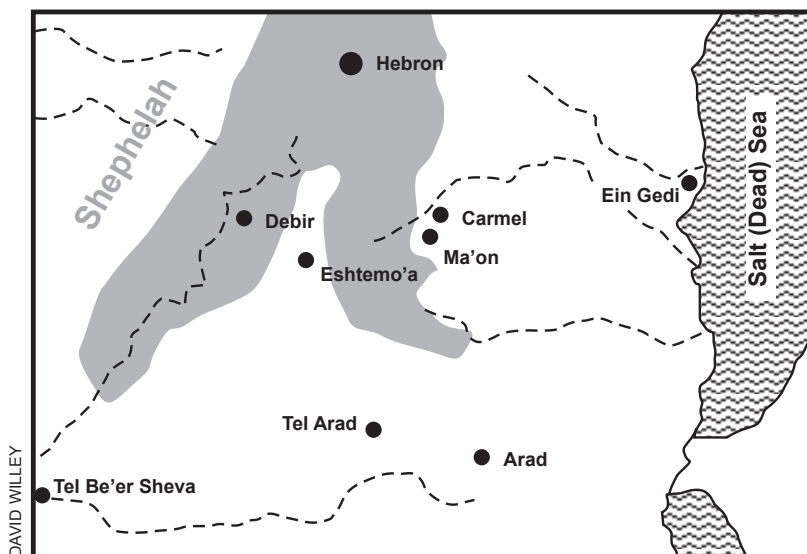
Achsah undertook to set things right herself, and travelled alone to make a respectful and reasonable request: "Give me a present; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me also springs of water" (v. 19). This was a determined woman, a little in fear of her father but clear on what she wanted. After decades of sojourning, she was eager to own the land from which she derived her livelihood. She desired to be independent of the tolerance of other landowners, no longer forced to live on the fringes of settled lands, watering her flocks from the wells of others.

The land Caleb gave them was some distance from Hebron, as shown by Achsah's riding an ass to visit her father. His abrupt, "*Ma lakh?*", is equivalent to our, 'What's up with you?'—a curt and suspicious enquiry without fatherly greeting, which signals that, despite his valour and faith, Caleb may not have been very approachable. This is also indicated by Othniel's reluctance to petition Caleb for land or water, and even provides a reason why he had not sought Achsah's hand before the opportunity at Debir.

As the city of Debir² is a dry site with cisterns, commentators assume that two sites some 2.5 kilometres to the north of Debir are the springs in question. I suggest that Achsah's and Othniel's pastoral inheritance lay somewhere between Debir and the Negev, for Achsah referred to Caleb's gift as "land of the Negeb", which is not strictly true of the Debir region. Like Nabal and Abigail, they may have lived in town for the summer and pastured their flocks in lower elevations during the winter. During that time they lived in close proximity to the Kenites, Achsah's kinsfolk, in the district of Arad. Here is another significant link between the Kenezites and the Kenites; their adjacent territories in Judah are described in consecutive verses (Judg. 1:14-16).

It is not recorded of Othniel that he took other wives, and Achsah bore him two sons, Hathath, meaning 'to cast down', and Meonothai, meaning 'my dwellings' (1 Chron. 4:13), which names seem

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1. We assume that faithful Caleb and Othniel later willingly relinquished the cities of Hebron and Debir to the sons of Aaron, retaining the villages and surrounding lands (Josh. 21:13-15).
 2. The Canaanite town of Debir (Kiriath-Sepher) has been identified with Khirbet [ruins of] Rabud, which lies about fifteen kilometres southwest of Hebron on the east side of the Hebron-Beersheva Highway. A modern village and nearby junction have been named after Othniel.



The Calebite inheritance. The shaded area marks the central ridge of hills.

to celebrate their victory over the Canaanites and then the joy of taking up their inheritance.

Nabal the Calebite

In 1 Samuel 25 we read of Nabal the Calebite (v. 3). He did not live up to the fine reputation of the Kenezites, although he lived in a Calebite town and pastured his many flocks in fields won for him by his faithful and courageous ancestor (v. 2). It did not occur to him that without their merciful adoption into the nation of Israel his people might still have been subsisting in the wadis of the southern Negev. Nabal was selfish with the fruits of his bountiful inheritance, and was quick to turn away his brethren, David and his men, who lacked the essentials of life, forgetting that generosity was commanded in the Law of Moses by which he was bound: "You shall give to him [a poor man] freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake . . . therefore I command you, You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" (Deut. 15:10,11).

Here, in a strange inversion, a 'Gentile' brother rejects and ridicules a true son of Judah, David, who seeks refuge and relief from the hardships of his sojourning life.³ This may be contrasted with the true sons of Judah who once welcomed Caleb the nomadic Gentile into their tribe and gave him a position of honour. David's men had

brought 'salvation' to Nabal's shepherds and livelihood, and now they sought a meal of fellowship and thanks.

Besides all these considerations, Nabal broke the first law of his own Arabian heritage—unconditional hospitality to strangers—and the simple universal concept of fair compensation for favours received. No doubt Nabal fancied himself as a worldly-wise, business-savvy man, but Scripture assures us that all who speak and act as he does are fools (1 Sam. 25:25; Prov. 17:12,13). 'Luckily' for Nabal (and all his household), he had a wise 'Bedouin' wife, who had forgotten none of the lessons of their miracu-

lous history and hospitable culture, and daily 'stood in awe' of the grace by which she and her people shared in Israel's inheritance and hope.

As well as Abigail of Carmel, David took a second 'desert' wife, Ahino'am of Jezreel (1 Sam. 25:43), this Jezreel being one of the ten towns south of Hebron which seem to have formed the Calebite inheritance ([see below](#)). As seasonal dwellers in Calebite towns, these women were probably Kenezites, and it is satisfying to suppose that they, along with Achsah, also had Kenite ancestry, like Ja'el (Judg. 4:17) and Zipporah.

The Calebite territory

The central watershed that runs from Jerusalem to Hebron divides into two ridges at Hebron. One of these ridges continues almost due south via Carmel and Ma'on and terminates near Arad. The other proceeds southwest past Debir and terminates near Beersheva. The Calebite towns are found within the triangle of land between these two ridges, with the Hebron district at the apex and the Negev at the base ([see map](#)).

On the west side of the Hebron-Beersheva ridge the hills slope down through the Shephelah (the western foothills of the hill-country of Judah)

3. The Ziphites, probably also Calebites like Nabal, twice tried to deliver David to Saul (1 Sam. 23:19-29; 26:1,2). Ziph is another of the ten towns along the Hebron-Arad ridge, close to Maon and Carmel.

to the coastal plain, and on the east side of the Hebron-Arad ridge the hills plunge towards the Salt Sea depression. The forested hill-country of the Calebites, therefore, was surrounded on its three sides with rocky slopes bearing aromatic shrubs and grasses on which their sheep and goats could thrive.

Nabal lived in Ma'on and was shearing his flocks in Carmel, two of the group of ten towns of Judah between Hebron and Arad (Josh. 15:55-57). Some of these towns are named after descendants of "Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel",⁴ but Timnah has an Edomite name (1 Chron. 1:51), and Kain, Zanoah and Eshtemoh have Kenite connections (Num. 24:22; 1 Chron. 4:15-18). Kain may have been named in honour of the progenitor of the Kenite tribe, probably grandson to Midian and grandfather to Jethro (Gen. 25:2,4). Here in the town-list of southern Judah is another link between the Kenites and Kenezites, who dwelt side by side both before and after the conquest of Canaan.

The centre of Judah's inheritance was to the north of this region, in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, between Jerusalem and Hebron. The descendants of Jerahmeel, first-born son of Hezron, were probably eligible for a wide inheritance in the hill-country of Judah, but none of the sons of Jerahmeel founded any towns.⁵ They returned to live in the Negev at the edge of the Wilderness of Zin, and were still there in David's time (1 Sam. 27:10). Neither did the three 'Kenezite' sons of Caleb, Iru, Elah and Na'am (1 Chron. 4:15), make their mark on the town-lists of Judah. Did some or all of them, like their sister Achsah, prefer a

pastoral life in the Negev with their Kenite kin and Jerahmeelite 'brethren'?

Over the centuries, Edom took advantage of the oppressions of Judah by other powers to expand beyond the Aravah into the eastern Negev, so occupying the Calebite territory; see, for example, 2 Chronicles 28:16,17. The Edomite expansion became increasingly intense during the Second Temple period, until finally, in the second century B.C. under Greek rule, the region was referred to as Idumea, the Greek form of Edom. The land of Idumea officially extended from the Hebron district to Beersheva, which was basically all the area of Caleb's inheritance, thus bringing to a sad end the temporal benefits of his courageous endeavour. His faithful vision for an eternal inheritance will still be realised, and for his encouraging example as an adopted son of Israel we have much to thank him.

The Kenites in Israel

"And the sons of the Kenite, the father-in-law of Moses, ascended from the city of palm-trees with the sons of Judah to the Wilderness of Judah which is in the Negev of Arad and went and dwelt with the people" (Judg. 1:16, Hebrew text).

Caleb formally inherited and perpetually inhabited his own portion of the Promised Land in the hill-country of Judah (Num. 14:24; Josh.

4. Compare the names in Joshua 15:55-57 with those in 1 Chronicles 2:42-50.
5. This is shown by the fact that none of the names of the Jerahmeelites in 1 Chronicles 2:25-33 appears in the list of the cities of Judah in Joshua 15:20-62.

Scene in the hill country of Judah with a watchtower in the centre.



14:9) and had the right to apportion it amongst his relatives. The Kenites, whether by choice or not, continued to live semi-nomadic lives and, with the shameful exception of Heber who went north to the Jezreel Valley and made alliance with Canaanites (Judg. 4:11), remained in the south (1:16).

Arad, its king and villages recently conquered (Num. 21:1-3; Josh. 12:14), was the southernmost fortified city in Canaan in the Early Bronze Age. After its destruction by Joshua it was never built again except for a series of small Iron Age fortresses in the upper city. Arad does not appear in the city-lists of Judah, therefore, except to mark the wilderness of Judah.

Although the Arad basin has no springs or wells, there was sufficient rainfall in ancient times to support year-round grazing. This region was claimed by the Kenites, who dwelt with the people but did not remain there permanently. By the time of King Saul they were found in south-western Judah among the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:6) and, during David's exile, in their 'own' wilderness near the Jerahmeelites (27:10)⁶ in the Central Negev foothills on the northern edge of the Wilderness of Zin, possibly in the region of Ein Avdat (near Sde Boker).

So, over time, the Kenites were 'going home' without actually leaving the boundaries of Judah. They may have felt more comfortable with the freedom and far horizons of wilderness life, for, unlike the children of the Exodus, they had never known anything else. They may also have been disappointed with Israel's faithless and idolatrous ways during the time of the Judges and, seeing these as confirmation of the corrupting influence of city life, sought to escape it.

The faithful Kenites of the household of Rechab remained in Judah throughout the time of the Judges and Kings, moving to Jerusalem when Babylon invaded the Land (1 Chron. 2:55; Jer. 35:1-11). They chose to preserve their faith, not by removing themselves from their brethren, but by maintaining their godly way of life as expressed in and supported by their father Jonadab's traditions. In this they became an example to all Judah and Jerusalem and were perpetually blessed (vv. 18,19).

(Concluded)

6. The Jerahmeelite name has been preserved in sites around the abundant waters of Bir Rekhme, now a reservoir and a town, Yerukham. See map in [Part 1](#)

Testimony Book Sale

Saturday 29 October 2005, God willing

Following the buildup of a large surplus of second-hand books, magazines and pamphlets, a sale has been arranged at Castle Bromwich Ecclesial Hall on Saturday 29 October 2005.

It is expected that the sale will commence around 10.30 in the morning and last until approximately 4 pm, with light refreshments available throughout the day. The books offered for sale, all at very low prices, will be categorised into sections, including:

- Dictionaries
- Commentaries
- Versions
- Books about the Bible
- History
- Archaeology
- Bound Magazines
- The Apostle Paul
- Jesus
- The New Testament
- The Old Testament
- The Papacy
- The Apocalypse
- Israel and the Jews

and a large section of Christadelphian authors on all subjects.

All brethren and sisters and young people are invited. With well over 1,000 books for sale, this represents a unique opportunity for young and old to add to their book collections. Sadly, due to the quantity of books, a list is not available. This book sale does not affect the regular monthly page in *The Testimony*.

Paul Hamnett