

Two-part article

Kenezites and Kenites (1)*

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This two-part article looks at two nations descended from Abraham that had a long association with the children of Israel. From them came Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, Caleb, the faithful spy, together with his brother Othniel and his daughter Achsah, and the churlish Nabal, who refused to help David. By careful examination of the genealogies in Chronicles and the account of the tribal inheritances in Joshua the article shows where these nations lived, and provides links between them and the tribe of Judah.

THE KENEZITES were an Arabian¹ tribe descended from Esau through his first-born son, Eliphaz, and his grandson, Kenaz, from whom the tribe took its name (Gen. 36:11,15). Apart from their mention in Genesis 15:18-21 (see below) they are represented in Scripture only through individual Kenezites: Caleb the faithful spy; Achsah his daughter; Othniel his brother,² who became the first judge of Israel; and Nabal the Calebite.

The three nations mentioned in Genesis 15:19, the Kenites (of Midian), the Kenezites (of Esau) and the Kadmonites (of Ishmael), were all descended from Abraham (see [genealogy](#)).³ Thus they were aware of each other in exile from the Land of Promise and were historically and culturally connected. In the case of the Kenites and Kenezites, in particular, it appears that they also retained elements of the Abrahamic faith, for these tribes produced Jethro and his faithful family, and Caleb, Othniel and Achsah, all of whom were examples to Israel in the era of the Exodus and Conquest.

Ancestral territory

The ancestral territory of the Kenites, and hence that of the Kenezites, can be surmised by combining Scriptural references with a geographical study of the local regions. At the time of the Exodus and Conquest the Kenites lived beyond the territory of the Amalekites, as viewed from Balaam's prophetic vantage on Mount Nebo,

from whence he appears to view the local nations and their territories in a 'near-to-far' order (Num. 24:20,21). Amalek occupied the Northern Negev to the southwest of Moab (Gen. 14:7; Num. 13:29). This region, which is essentially the Nahal⁴ Besor catchment area, comprises the Beersheva and Arad basins, the adjoining plains approaching the Mediterranean coast near Gaza (southern Philistia) as far south as Kadesh-Barnea, and the foothills of the Negev Heights rising to the southeast ([see map overleaf](#)).

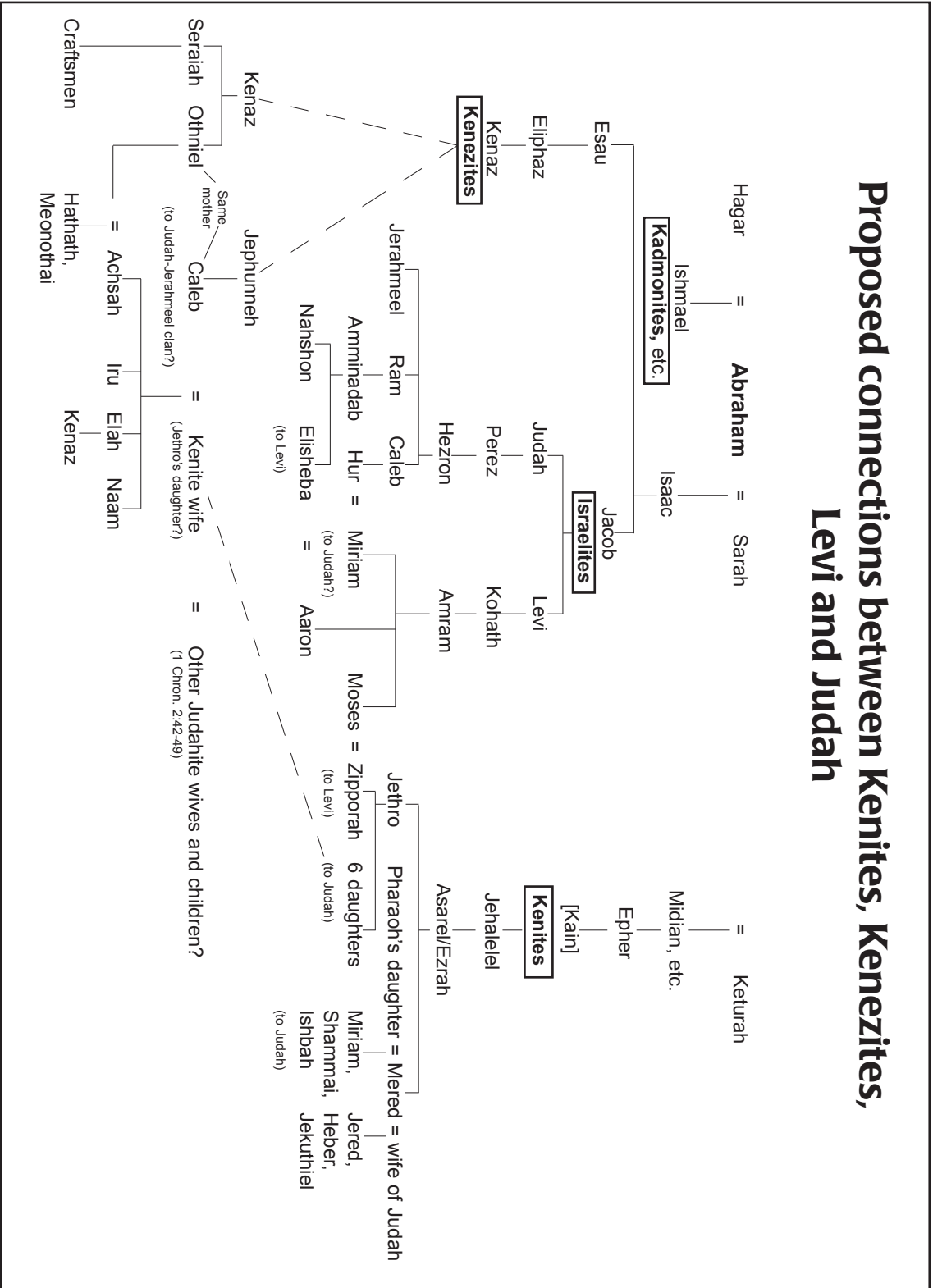
The Kenites, therefore, living beyond the Amalekites to the south, inhabited the Central Negev heights and the broad plains of the Southern Negev ([see map](#)). This is supported by Balaam's parable upon the Kenites: "Enduring is your dwelling place, and your nest is set in the rock" (24:21). The jumbled peaks, erratic wadis, gaping canyons and rolling ridges of the Central Negev were impenetrable to all but the most organised explorers, and only experienced desert-dwellers were able to survive in the region.

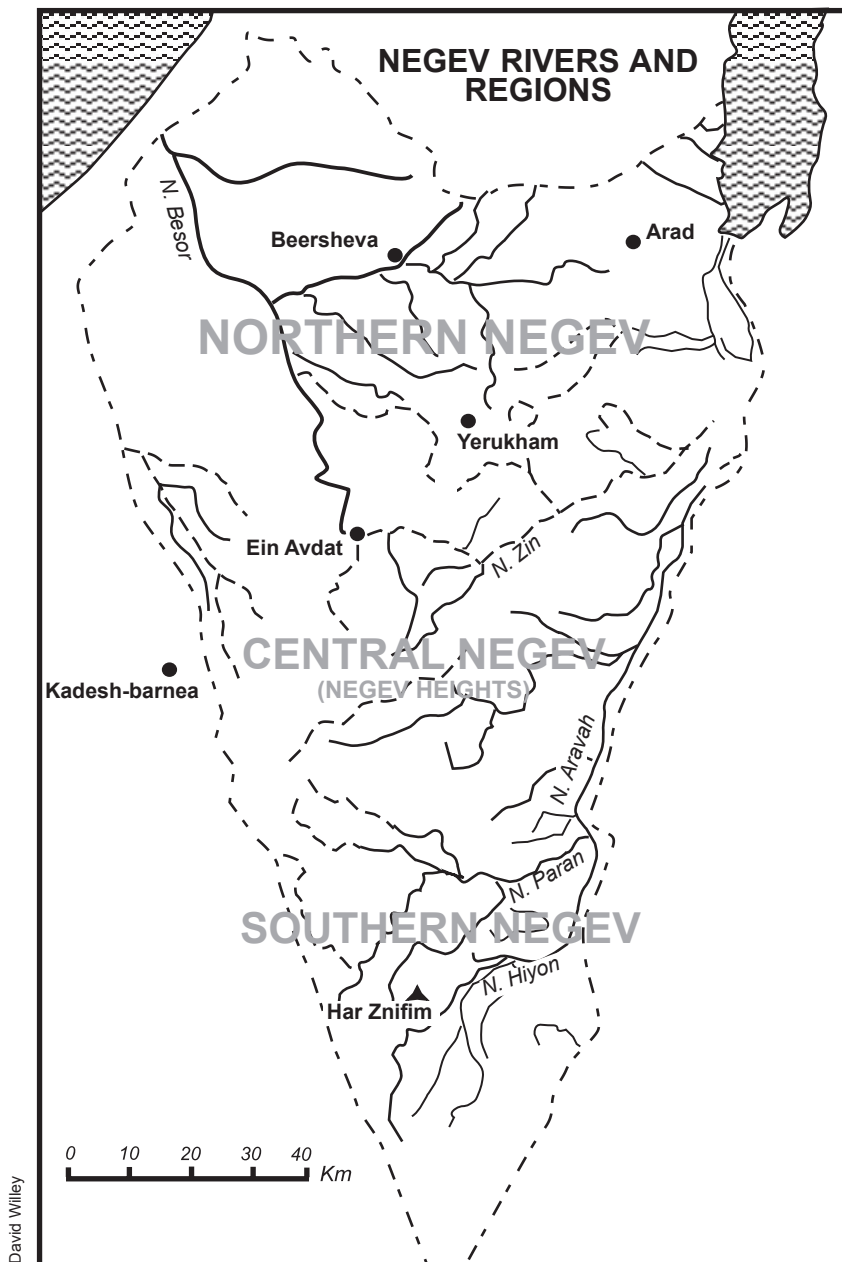
The ancient pastoral nomads of the region made seasonal migrations between the river basins of the Southern Negev and the mountains of

* 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.

1. Most Arabian nations had their origins in the blending of various branches of Shem and Ham, and it seems that the term '*arav*' ('to mingle' and even 'to darken') refers specifically to this genetic combination.
2. Alternatively, this could be nephew, as will be explained when we come to deal with Othniel in [Part 2](#).
3. The list of tribal names in Genesis 15 is partly anachronistic, for at this time Ishmael, Esau and Midian, from whom the first three nations were descended, had not been born, so neither had their descendants from whom the tribes derived their names. The names reflect the situation in Moses' time, as narrator of the patriarchal history.
4. *Nahal* is Hebrew for 'river'. The rivers of the Negev are dry 'wadis' for most of the year.

Proposed connections between Kenites, Kenezites, Levi and Judah





the Central Negev, for the pastures (and temperatures) were better at lower elevations in the winter and at higher elevations in the summer. Thus the Kenites, the adopted 'sons of Judah', were familiar with the 'unnavigable' Central Negev, its seasons and its water-sources. They were able to share vital desert-dwelling skills with their new brethren, the Israelites, who subsequently passed the forty years' wandering camping and grazing their flocks in this very region.

borne out in Joseph's time, where we find Midianite traders selling him to Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:28), who are themselves later called 'Medanites' (v. 36, Hebrew).⁶

How a Kenezite became an Israelite

It is not recorded how Caleb, a descendent of Esau, came to be among the Israelites of the Exodus. Jacob had gone to lengths to avoid contact with Esau after his return to Canaan from Haran,

A connection between the Kenites and the Kenezites first appears in the list of names associated with the covenant with Abraham, in which they appear to have adjoining territories (Gen. 15:19). The tribal regions, as promised to his descendants, are listed in an anticlockwise sweep as he viewed them with the eye of the spirit from his southern location. To the south is the territory of the Kenites, and this, together with the order given in Balaam's prophecy ([see above](#)), locates them in the far Negev. The land of the Kenezites is placed between the Kenites and Kadmonites,⁵ and thereafter follow the seven Canaanite districts to the north. The home of the Kenezites, therefore, was probably centred on the catchment basin of Nahal Hiyon and its tributaries (in the area labelled 'Southern Negev' on the map).

The Kenite and Kenezite shepherds would therefore have been familiar with each other's grazing and migration patterns, and alliance and intermarriage among these Arabian 'sons of Abraham' is likely to have been common. This is

and his older sons, the fathers of the migrating Hebrew tribes, were exclusive and aggressive (Gen. 34). Neither Esau's son Eliphaz nor his grandson Kenaz could have entered Egypt with Jacob's family, for they were both "chiefs" in Edom and dwelt "in the land of their possession" (36:15,16,43). Such a notable inclusion from Esau's line would surely have warranted a mention, and yet no alien males are named in the migration census (ch. 46). To this may be added the observation that Caleb would not have been designated a Kenezite in Numbers 32:12 if his family had affiliated and integrated with Judah over four generations.

For Caleb to have participated in the Exodus, his father Jephunneh⁷ and family must have migrated to Goshen during the latter years of Israelite captivity and become slaves to Pharaoh. One must ask why an Edomite family would travel from freedom to slavery. Even if they sought the God of Abraham, the Israelites no longer knew who He was (Ex. 3:13) and were serving the gods of Egypt (Josh. 24:14; Ezek. 20:7,8). Certainly, in times of drought, nomads crossed the Sinai and sojourned in the eastern delta, but, as individuals and small groups, it was possible to leave undetected, as did Aaron (Ex. 4:14), and thus they could not easily be enslaved. Moreover, if a Kenezite family migrated to Goshen during the pre-Exodus generation and joined Israel in captivity, there was no mechanism for one of their number to become a prince in Judah. It is more likely that such an Arabian family would be tolerated along with the "mixed multitude" but not fully accepted for at least two generations (cf. Num. 12:1).

Alternatively, it is possible that some Kenezites joined the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, along with Jethro's family, the Kenites. As shown above, the Kenites and Kenezites inhabited adjoining territories in the Southern Negev and, as will be shown in [Part 2](#), also inhabited adjoining territories in Canaan after the Conquest. An association between Caleb and the Kenite tribe may have come about by him marrying one of Jethro's daughters. If so, he was Moses' young brother-in-law, featuring in Moses' life towards the end of his forty years' sojourn in Midian.

When Moses fled to Midian at forty years of age, he met all seven of Jethro's daughters at a well (Ex. 2:16). These, being old enough to be out all day with the sheep and yet young enough to be unmarried, would therefore have been between the ages of, say, five and thirty-five years. The local shepherds of the time were habitually

ill-mannered (vv. 17,18), so that Jethro would have been pleased to marry his eldest daughter to a brave and chivalrous Hebrew-Egyptian prince, although he was fugitive.

I speculate that Caleb, who was forty years old at the time when he spied out the Land (Josh. 14:7), was born to a neighbouring Kenezite clan around the time of Moses' arrival in Midian, and grew to become a faithful and courageous young man. Moses, who relieved the girls of the care of Jethro's flocks (Ex. 3:1), and by this means became acquainted with the local shepherds, may have known and even recommended Caleb for marriage. In Semitic culture of patriarchal times, the tasks of an older 'brother' included finding suitable partners for his sisters and helping to negotiate the marriage contracts (cf. Gen. 24:50,55; 34:13-16).

When the Kenites joined the nation of Israel at Sinai, it is remarkable that Moses did not attach them to his own tribe of Levi though they were his relatives by marriage. Instead they were adopted into Judah, the tribe that led the marches of the Exodus through the wildernesses of the Sinai, Negev and Transjordan. This choice was no doubt for practical reasons, for the Kenites were experienced desert-dwellers with extensive knowledge of the region. Their fathers had roamed in semi-arid lands since their ancestor Abraham sent the sons of his concubines away. Thus they knew how to encamp in the wilderness and served as "eyes" to the Israelites in their wanderings (Num. 10:31).

Here, then, is a proposed explanation for why Caleb the Kenezite was a prince in Judah at the time of the selection of the spies. When Jethro declined to join Israel and returned from Mount Sinai to his own country, Caleb joined Israel as

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5. The Kadmonites were the 'Sons of the East', Hebrew *bne kedem* (Gen. 25:6,13-18) who inhabited land in the Transjordan. The title, though possibly originating with the descendants of Ishmael's youngest son, Kedemah (v. 15), designates all the eastern tribes who inhabited the Arabian peninsula (29:1; Judg. 6:3,33; 7:12; 8:10; 1 Kgs. 4:30; Job 1:3; Isa. 11:14; Jer. 49:28; Ezek. 25:4,10). Whereas Ishmael himself dwelt in the Wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:21), his sons and their descendants roamed "from Havilah to Shur", that is, the Arabian 'deserts' between Assyria and Egypt (25:18).
 6. Medan was also a son of Keturah (Gen. 25:2).
 7. The name 'Jephunneh' does not occur other than as the name of Caleb's father and seems to have Edomite derivation—compare Pinon (1 Chron. 1:52) and Punon (Num. 33:42).

Pharaoh's daughter and the Kenites*

"The sons of Jehalelel: Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel [possibly Ezra]. The sons of Ezra: Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon. These are the sons of Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered married; and she conceived and bore Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah, the father of *Eshtemoa*. And his Jewish wife bore Jered the father of *Gedor*, Heber the father of *Soco*, and Jekuthiel the father of *Zanoah* [*Zanoah-ha-Kain*, Josh. 15:56,57 LXX]" (1 Chron. 4:16-18).

From this fragment of the tribal genealogy of Judah we see that a certain Mered, brother to Jether (or Jethro), married "the daughter of Pharaoh" and begat three sons. Mered also took a wife of Judah (the NIV has "Judean wife") and begat three sons more, all of whom founded southern towns (shown in italics in the above quotation) close to or within the Kenezite inheritance, which was part of the territory allocated to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:48-57). Is it just a coincidence that "*the* daughter of Pharaoh" married a man of Judah and named one of her sons *Miriam*? Under what circumstances would Egyptian royalty be associated with the Hebrews of the Exodus? This suggests the intriguing possibility that Moses' royal adoptive mother left Egypt and married into Jethro's family. Was she exiled in the aftermath of Moses' disgrace? Or did Moses send for her when he was established in Midian?

It is popularly supposed that Moses' Egyptian patroness adopted a Hebrew baby because she was childless. In the common but often significant phrase, "and she conceived and bore", there is perhaps a hint of barrenness reversed. The princess would certainly have been of a similar age to Jethro and his brother Mered, and the concept that she was accepted and married into the Kenite clan resonates with the redemption and blessing of the Gentile Ruth, as arranged by Naomi: "My daughter, should I not seek a home for you, that it may be well with you?" (Ruth 3:1).

The daughter of Pharaoh went by the Hebrew name Bithiah (Bat-yah), meaning 'daughter of Yahweh' (1 Chron. 4:17). She may have changed her name to reflect her new life and faith. The Jews commonly refer to Moses' royal adoptive mother as Bithiah. She named her first son Miriam out of respect and affection for the vigilant little girl who held the key to Moses' identity, by which she found salvation.

Mered presumably took his (no doubt younger) Judahite wife after the Kenites joined themselves to Israel at Sinai/Horeb, by which time Pharaoh's daughter may well have died, though not necessarily so. If this fragment of genealogy is indeed a Kenite one, it is significant that it appears among the genealogies of Jabez the Kenite (vv. 9,10; cf. 2:55) and the Kenite men of Rechab (4:11,12, LXX). The insertion of Jethro's descent immediately after Caleb's emphasises the Kenite-Kenezite connection (vv. 13-17).

We may assume that Abraham's son Midian had a grandson called Kain or Kinah who was the progenitor of the Kenites. Thus a proposed genealogy for Jethro, through Keturah the Cushite slave-wife, is Abraham-Midian-Epher-[Kain]-Jehalelel-Asarel/Ezrah-Jethro. (Epher is a Midianite family name which not only appears in 1 Chronicles 1:33 as a son of Midian but also in 4:17 as a brother of Jether/Jethro.) This correlates with the genealogy of Moses through Sarah: Abraham-Isaac-Jacob-Levi-Kohath-Amram-Moses, there being seven names in each. Moses was younger than Jethro, due to Isaac, Jacob and Amram all begetting sons late in life.

Later in Israel's history another daughter of Pharaoh married into the tribe of Judah, to become Solomon's wife (1 Kgs. 3:1). Psalm 45 seems to have been composed in her honour, and is an exhortation to all who are adopted and integrated into Israel: "Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house [cf. Ruth 2:11; 3:1] . . . Instead of your fathers shall be your sons . . . I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you for ever and ever" (vv. 10,16,17).—*D.H.*

* Quotations from the RSV unless indicated otherwise. With acknowledgements to Sister Cindy Higgs.

new 'chief' of the Kenite clan (Ex. 18:27; cf. Judg. 1:16). As brother-in-law and protégé of Moses he was appointed to march at the head of the nation from Sinai to Kadesh as principal scout. Upon his adoption into Judah he was respected and promoted because of his connections with Moses, his skills as a guide and his faith and enthusiasm for the inheritance.

Caleb the prince of Israel

In such a position of influence and native experience, Caleb was the obvious choice to lead the other spies on their long and dangerous tour from Kadesh northwards into Canaan (Num. 13:6). The names of the "leader[s]" (or princes; Heb. *nasi'im*—v. 2) or "heads" (Heb. *roshim*—v. 3) among Israel who were chosen as spies are all different from the tribal chiefs listed in Numbers 1, 2, 7 and 10. Thus Caleb was a *nasiy* or *rosh* in Judah at the same time that Nahshon son of Aminadab was *rosh* and *nasiy* of the whole tribe. It is clear that these titles served for heads of clans as well, and by this means Caleb, the leader and spokesman of the Kenite-Kenezite clan, was eligible for selection.

Caleb's type as an 'adopted' son of Israel is consistent with the proposal that he joined Israel after the redemptive events of the Passover week. Caleb symbolises the Gentile believers who have joined themselves to the Hope of Israel in the era since Christ's sacrifice and resurrection but before the Kingdom. Rahab and her family, on the other hand, symbolise those of the nations who willingly submit to the rule of Christ and the saints after they enter the Promised Land.

One writer has remarked of Caleb:

"Caleb's argument was especially persuasive in light of his personal status as outsider . . . The Kennizites, like the Kenites, were people that joined with the Jews during their sojourn in the desert. These 'fellow travellers' . . . shared the fate of the Jewish people and facilitated their subsequent conquest of Canaan . . . Moreover, speaking as an outsider, Caleb could properly criticise his new-found brethren in ways that Moses and Joshua could not".⁸

For his outstanding faith and courage in the incident of spying out the Land, Caleb the son of

Jephunneh the Kenezite was awarded a portion among the children of Judah (Num. 14:24; Josh. 15:13). Whereas the Israelites of his generation continued to complain and rebel (and perish), Caleb maintained his spiritual (and physical) vigour throughout the Wanderings and Conquest. Without demur he could recount and reclaim his original unique distinction, that he had "wholly followed the LORD, the God of Israel" (14:14). This accolade to Caleb, appearing five times in all, highlights a rare quality, a courageous and unreserved dedication to pursuing the inheritance through a godly life.

Ancestry

There is much confusion over the genealogy of Caleb, for there are several 'Calebs' in the Chronicles listings for Judah. Besides Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenezite (1 Chron. 4:15) there is also Caleb (Chelubai or Carmi⁹) son of Hezron (2:18,9; 4:1), Caleb the brother of Jerahmeel (2:42), Caleb the son of Hur and grandson of Hezron (2:50, AV) and Chelub the brother of Shuhah (4:11). Many difficulties arise in either distinguishing or connecting them, for the records are fragmentary. The sons of Hezron referred to in 2:9—Jerahmeel, Ram and Chelubai/Caleb—predated Caleb the Kenezite by some three generations. Hezron went into Egypt with Jacob and his sons (Gen. 46:12), and his great-great-grandson Bezaleel was a contemporary of Caleb the spy (1 Chron. 2:18-20; Ex. 31:2). Thus Caleb the son of Hezron was certainly dead by the time of the Exodus.

One suggestion which may help resolve the confusion over the identities and descendants of the Kenezites and Hezronites is that at the time when Caleb was allocated to the tribe of Judah and the leading clan, Hezron, he affiliated with the family of the first-born, Jerahmeel. Thus there were two notable Calebs in the same clan separated by some three generations.

(To be concluded)

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8. *Shelach: A Case Study in Jewish Leadership*, Bayme S., 23 Jun. 2003, WHF Electronic Beit Midrash, www.wexnerheritage.org.
 9. This is an error of transcription, *lamed* and *beyt* have been confused with *resh* and *mem*.

"When we feel that life in the Truth is drudgery and our brethren are hopelessly unspiritual, we should think about Joshua and Caleb who bore both with the unspirituality of their brethren and with its consequences. God recognised and rewarded their spirit . . . Caleb [inherited] the land over which he . . . had walked" (M. Beale, *Joshua*, p. 14).