

## ACHSAH'S STORY: A METAPHOR FOR SOCIETAL TRANSITION

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### *Introduction*

The story of Achsah is found in two parallel passages, Josh 15:13-19 and Judg 1:10-15. The story is brief with abrupt narrational transitions and only the most essential details. Nonetheless, the plot is straightforward: Achsah's father, Caleb, after successfully capturing Hebron, issues a challenge that whoever can take nearby Debir will be rewarded with the hand in marriage of his daughter Achsah. The challenge is accepted and fulfilled by Othniel, a relative of Caleb.<sup>1</sup> On arrival at her new home, she requests that Othniel ask her father for a field. The text then abruptly changes scenes with Achsah presumably returning to her father's home and making a further request for springs of water. This request is likewise granted.

Achsah's role has not made her one of the most renowned women of the OT. Aside from her name, genealogy, and the brief details of these two narratives, nothing else is known. Her name is derived from the noun *עֲבָ* meaning "an anklet, bangle" or "ornament"<sup>2</sup> that connects her with the ideal of beauty according to rabbinic tradition. For instance, a comment in the

<sup>1</sup>The phrase "Othniel son of Kenaz brother of Caleb" is ambiguous. Does "brother of Caleb" refer to Kenaz or Othniel? Is Othniel Caleb's brother or his nephew? Tradition is divided. The MT gives the appellative "younger brother of Caleb," but the LXX (A) is in favor of the former, while the Peshitta, Vulgate, and LXX (B) favor the latter. Caleb is listed as the son of Hezron (1 Chron 2:28, 42) and as the son of Jephunneh (Josh 15:13). Rabbinic legend resolves this discrepancy by explaining that Kenaz was Caleb's stepfather. He was called the son of Jephunneh because he deviated from the evil counsel of the spies (connecting the name Jephunneh with the root *פָּנָה* ["to turn aside"]) and did not slander the Holy Land (BT Sanhedrin 69b; Sotah 11b). Caleb had two to three brothers: Jerahmeel (1 Chron 2:18, 43), Ram (1 Chron 2:18), and possibly Othniel. Othniel's connection with Caleb, however, is questionable for in Othniel's genealogy (1 Chron 4:13) only Othniel and Seraiah are listed as the sons of Kenaz, and Othniel is not included in Caleb's genealogies. The only connection between them appears in Josh 14:8: "Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." Whether this Kenaz is the same as Othniel's father is unclear. Perhaps both derived from a much earlier eponymous ancestor, Kenaz. Or perhaps, as the Rabbis believed, Kenaz was Caleb's stepfather. This questionable relationship has led Boling to suggest that "brother" should be understood in the sense of a "military confederate" as it frequently does in the Mari usage of *ḫa* ("brother") (Robert G. Boling, *Judges 6A*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1975]: 56).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Isa 3:18, where *עֲבָ* is used to denote "an ornament" for the body.

Babylonian Talmud (Temurah 16a) states: "Why was her name Achsah? Because whosoever saw her was angry with his wife." The rabbis derived her name by metathesis from the root כעס meaning "to anger." Presumably, Achsah was so beautiful that any man who looked upon her would be angry with his own wife for being less beautiful!

In spite of Achsah's alleged beauty, past scholarship has deemed the story important due to certain narrative details rather than for the part that she played.<sup>3</sup> Achsah has simply been overlooked. With this in mind, the present article is, first, a retrospective analysis of certain narrative details. Second, a multidisciplinary approach that will include an evaluation of the socioeconomic background in which Achsah lived and an examination of the usage of verbal repetition in the narrative. This reevaluation will illuminate Achsah's story as a metaphor used by the biblical writer(s) to represent societal transition from Wandering to Conquest to Settlement.

### *Narrative Details*

While the plots of the two narratives are parallel, textually the passages are not identical. In Josh 15:13-14, it is recorded that Caleb received Hebron as his inheritance. From Hebron, Caleb drove out the three sons of Anak. Judges 1:10 attributes this conquest to the tribe of Judah with no mention of Caleb or his inheritance. The remainder of the storyline varies in minor details, with the Judges text being more explicit in the repetition of proper names and direct objects.<sup>4</sup>

More significant is the specific function of each passage. Joshua 15:13-19 is part of a larger framework of narratives extending from Josh 13 through 19 that detail the division of the land in the days of the conquest. These materials have long been recognized as valuable not only for the historical traditions they preserve, but for the "basic onomasticon of

<sup>3</sup>For example, Alice Ogden Bellis, ed., *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994); J. Andrew Dearman, *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992); Peggy L. Day, ed., *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989); Eric M. Meyers and James F. Strange, *Archaeology, the Rabbis and Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); Ken Stone, "Sexual Power and Political Prestige," *Bible Review* 10, no. 4 (1994): 28-31, 52-54; and esp. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Josh 15:7 reads וְעָלָה; Judg 1:11 reads וַיִּלֶךְ; Judg 1:13 describes Othniel as Caleb's younger brother; Judg 1:14 reads "the field," Josh 15:18 "a field"; Josh 15:19 reads תְּהַדְדִי, while Judg 1:15 reads וַיִּתְּמַר לוֹ הַקְּהֵלִי; Josh 15:19 reads וַיִּתְּרֵלָהּ, while Judg 1:15 reads וַיִּתְּרֵלָהּ קְלֵב; Judg 1:15 treats the adjective as a substantive and reads with a feminine singular as the nomen rectum of a construct chain (וַיִּתְּרֵלָהּ וַיִּתְּרֵלָהּ וַיִּתְּרֵלָהּ).

Palestine in the pre-exilic era."<sup>5</sup> This passage belongs to the southern-town lists of Benjamin (Josh 18:21-28), Dan (Josh 19:41-46), Judah (Josh 15:20-62), and Simeon (Josh 19:2-7). It is situated between a tribal boundary description of Judah (Josh 15:1-12) and a town list (Josh 15:20-62).<sup>6</sup> The narrative represents the fulfillment of the Lord's promise to Caleb (Num 14:24; cf. Deut 1:36) that he would inherit a portion of the promised land as a reward for being one of the spies, along with Joshua, to report favorably of the land of Canaan (Num 14:7-10).

Judges's version of Achsah's story serves a function distinct from its Joshua counterpart. It is part of a string of sixteen occupation annals "that tell of the military-political struggle of individual tribes to gain control of the western hill country."<sup>7</sup> It has long been noted that these annals present a different perspective from Josh 13-19 regarding the invasion and division of the land of Canaan.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Judges serves the purpose of introducing the reader to Othniel, who became the first judge of Israel.

The narrative is significant because it preserves valuable information on customs related to marriage and inheritance. The practice of giving a bride-price, dowry, and possibly a groom's gift are all represented within the span of six to seven verses. The מָהָר ("bride-price") was "given by the bridegroom to the bride's father, probably as compensation for the work which otherwise the daughter would have continued to contribute to her parent's household."<sup>9</sup> In this passage, the bride-price is not satisfied by a monetary exchange, but by the bridegroom's fulfilling a specific task, the capture of Debir. While such substitution is rare, it is not unique to this narrative. Jacob's marriages to Leah and Rachel provide a similar example of a task satisfying the bride-price; Jacob performed seven years of service to Laban for each daughter (Gen 29).<sup>10</sup> Emerson notes that Caleb's

<sup>5</sup>F. M. Cross and G. E. Wright, "The Boundary and Province Lists of the Kingdom of Judah," *JBL* 75 (1956): 202.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Richard S. Hess, "A Typology of West Semitic Place Names Lists with Special Reference to Joshua 13-21," *BA* 59, no. 3 (1996): 160-170.

<sup>7</sup>Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible—A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985): 236; cf. N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979): 163-166.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., N. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, 236; and John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller, eds., *Israelite and Judaeon History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 280.

<sup>9</sup>G. I. Emerson, "Women in Ancient Israel," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 383.

<sup>10</sup>On the institution of the "mohar" in ancient Israel, cf. M. Burrows, *The Basis of Israelite Marriage* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1938); G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 106-114; Roland de Vaux,

action also illustrates “the full extent of a father’s authority” in his ability to “give his daughter as a reward for military success.”<sup>11</sup>

The form of Achsah’s dowry is rare, but not unique. In most cases, the dowry (the money, goods, or property provided by a father for a daughter on entering into a marriage contract) took the form of silver, gold, or other valuable commodities.<sup>12</sup> In this narrative, a field in the Negeb served as the dowry. A similar dowry for Pharaoh’s daughter upon her betrothal to Solomon is found in 1 Kgs 9:16. The Ugaritic myth “Nikkal and the Moon” provides another example of a field being given as a dowry.<sup>13</sup>

Past scholarship has not focused so much on the form of the dowry, as on who made the formal request and the semantics of the verb used in procuring this request. Ambiguity exists among the versions as to who made the request. The LXX translates Josh 15:18 as “and it came to pass as she went out *she* counseled him, saying *I* will ask of my father a field” (emphasis supplied). In the LXX and Vg of Judg 1:14, an interesting twist is accorded the story. It is Othniel who “urges” (LXX) or “admonishes” (Vg) Achsah to request this field. The Vg at Josh 15:18 circumvents matters further by stating “*she* was moved *by her husband* to ask a field of her father” (emphasis supplied). The MT text of Josh 15:18 and Judg 1:14 reads: “When she came [to her husband’s house], *she* urged him to ask for a field from her father” (emphasis supplied). The word translated “urged” in Hebrew comes from the root טו meaning “to incite, allure, instigate.” This verb, at times, has a negative connotation,<sup>14</sup> leading some modern commentators to translate it in a negative sense.<sup>15</sup>

The final detail involving marriage-related customs falls within the realm of inheritance laws. The text of Josh 15:17-19 and Judg 1:14-15 preserves Achsah’s request for water: “As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to him, ‘Give me a blessing [בְּרָכָה]; since you have set me in the land of the Negeb, give me

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*Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1:26-29.

<sup>11</sup>Emmerson, 384.

<sup>12</sup>The dowry remained the woman’s even if she were widowed or divorced; see, e.g., John J. Collins, “Marriage, Divorce, and Family in Second Temple Judaism, in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Joseph Blenkinsopp, John J. Collins, and Carol Meyers (Nashville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 113-115.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea 24*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 272-273.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. 2 Sam 24:1, where the Lord was angry with Israel and incited David against them, and Job 2:3, where Satan incited God against Job.

<sup>15</sup>Boling, 56-67; R. Boling and G. E. Wright, *Joshua*, AB 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 373-374.

springs of water as well.' So Caleb gave her her heart's desire [Judg 1:5] the upper springs and the lower springs" (Josh 15:17-19; Judg 1:14-15).

The Hebrew term בְּרָכָה, used by Achsah to refer to the springs, has been interpreted in various ways. Generally, it is most often used in biblical Hebrew to denote a "blessing." It may be a blessing a parent bestows on a child, of God on Israel, or a blessing extended to one special individual. On rare occasions, its meaning is extended to denote the concrete realization of a blessing—a gift, which in this case was springs of water.<sup>16</sup>

F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman have suggested, however, that the word is a technical term for the groom's gift to the bride that is distinct from the dowry and bride-price.<sup>17</sup> While the custom of a groom's gift is attested to in Scripture,<sup>18</sup> it would be an unparalleled and peculiar example of a father-in-law providing the "goods or substances" of the groom's gift. Paula Hiebert, by contrast, suggests that the gift of springs should be understood simply as part of the dowry, in the traditional sense of a gift given to the bride by her father.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the springs could be viewed as a gift from her father to accompany the dowry of land. By asking for a gift, she circumvented the perception of making further demands on her father's (and brothers') inheritance.<sup>20</sup>

Rabbinic literature imputes another significance to her bold request for a בְּרָכָה. In the Babylonian Talmud (Temurah 16a), Achsah makes this request because her husband's house was empty of everything: "His only

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Gen 33:11; 1 Sam 25:27; 30:26; 2 Kgs 5:15; see also Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 139b, s.v. *brkh*.

<sup>17</sup>Andersen and Freedman, 274. Note, however, that they suggest the gift referred to is the field, not the springs.

<sup>18</sup>See, e.g., Gen 34:12 where Abraham sent gifts of jewels and garments for Rebekah as well as presents for her parents, when marriage arrangements between Isaac and Rebekah had been agreed upon; cf. R. de Vaux, 27-29.

<sup>19</sup>Paula S. Hiebert, "Whence Shall Help Come to Me?' The Biblical Widow," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 136.

<sup>20</sup>Consider the example of Abraham's giving of "gifts" to the sons of his concubines (Gen 25:6), while leaving "all which he had to Isaac" (Gen 25:5). Though the term מַתָּנָה ("gifts") is used instead of בְּרָכָה, as in our present passage, the significance is that "gifts" could be given without violation of the laws of inheritance (e.g., Deut 21:15-17). See also R. de Vaux's discussion of inheritance (*Ancient Israel*, vol. 1, *Social Institutions* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965], 53-55; also see n. 26 of this article). Perhaps Achsah's use of בְּרָכָה ("blessing") was meant as a double *entendre*, for in biblical Hebrew it also means "pool"; *contra* Andersen and Freedman, 274, who pointedly note that "pool" is not intended here; however, a word play is always a point of interest whether or not it is explicitly intended; cf. B. Lindars, *Judges 1-5: A New Translation and Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 31.

possession was the knowledge of the Torah.<sup>21</sup> Othniel's possession of a great knowledge of the law is derived by the rabbis from their interpretation of ancient Debir = Kiriath-sepher as "the city of the book." When Othniel took this city, he won back the store of traditional teachings that had been lost to Israel during their mourning period for Moses. The rabbis taught that Othniel's dedication to and brilliance in the study of the law was to such an extent that he neglected the earthly essentials.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of Achsah's request becomes apparent when the location of the field in the Negeb is considered. Although Caleb's task called for his future son-in-law to take Debir, located in the Judean hills along with Hebron,<sup>23</sup> this does not mean the young couple's field would be located in this rich, fertile region. Rather the text specifically states: "You have set me in the land of the Negeb." The Negeb terrain can range from the fertile, hilly terrain in the northern fringe to the dry, arid climate of the Negeb proper that would not support vegetation without water, much less allow for a successful agricultural endeavor.<sup>24</sup> The land that is referred to in the narratives would fall in what is commonly known as "Hebron's Southland," the hills falling away to the desert

<sup>21</sup>Cf. L. Ginzberg for his paraphrase of rabbinic literature dealing with Achsah and Othniel (*The Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia: JPS, 1913], 29).

<sup>22</sup>Due to this and his later military feats, Othniel was not held accountable for the backsliding of Israel.

<sup>23</sup>Debir is most often connected with Tell Beit-Mirsim, a site made famous by the excavations of W. F. Albright, from whom resulted the standard typology of Palestinian ceramics; cf. Keith Schoville, *Biblical Archaeology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 323-327. Another alternative identification is Debir = Khirbet Rabud located in the hill country rather than the Shephelah; cf. M. Kochavi, "Khirbet Rabud = Debir," *Tel Aviv* 1 (1974): 2-33; also David Merling, Sr., who reviews the various candidates for the biblical Debir. He concludes that "Debir's identity is uncertain with no site providing any specific clues for its identity" (*The Book of Joshua: Its Theme and Role in Archaeological Discussions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 23 [Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1997], 139). On excavations at Hebron (= Jebel er-Rumeide), see P. C. Hammond, "Hebron," *RB* 72 (1965): 267-270; idem., "Hebron," *RB* 73 (1966): 566-569. Excavations at Hebron indicate little evidence of occupation between the Middle Bronze and Late Iron I, whereas Debir presents a picture of a relatively large and fortified city during the Late Bronze period with occupation until the Iron I period.

<sup>24</sup>Y. Aharoni differentiates between the eastern and western parts of the Negeb: "The eastern part of the Negeb is a continuation of the central mountain range. As in the west, its border is clearly defined by climatic conditions. About 15 miles south of Hebron the level of the terrain declines quite abruptly to only c. 1,500-1,800 feet. From this line begins the typical semi-arid climate of the Negeb, the rainfall diminishing quickly as one goes south. In spite of the relative height, the loess-covered area is generally level, similar to the extensive plains of the western Negeb. However, even small differences in temperature and moisture increase the possibilities of agriculture and pasturage" (*The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, 2d ed. [London: Burns & Oates, 1979], 31).

fringe. The climate here, however, would be close to, if not identical with, the true Negeb farther south.<sup>25</sup>

The bequest of lands in the Negeb would appear to have been a harsh token of affection. However, the city of Debir, with its pasturelands and the city of Hebron, was given to the Levites (Josh 21:15) with only the surrounding villages and pasturelands of Hebron belonging to the Calebites. Thus, Caleb may not have had much fertile land at his disposal, making the field and springs a generous gift considering his own reduced holdings. Gunn and Fewell note that Achshah

asks for life itself—and receives it in double measure. Caleb gives not one spring but two. Unlike Caleb, perhaps, she knows that the two of them cannot live fruitfully on their own. They need that gift. And Caleb, asked, immediately recognizes this truth and blesses them with a gift that goes beyond the asking. Caleb's gift overflows.<sup>26</sup>

It is a gift that could have been challenged as violating the laws of inheritance. In the OT, the laws of inheritance dictate that a father's holdings are passed on to his son(s), with the eldest generally receiving the largest share.<sup>27</sup> Exceptions, however, could and did occur, as in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad—a father with no male heirs. The situation was resolved by permitting the daughters to inherit his share of the tribal holdings (Num 27:1-11). Later, this ruling is amended with the added stipulation that they could inherit their father's land, but they were required to marry within their own tribe, thereby maintaining the tribal allotment originally established by law (Num 36:1-9).

The story of Achshah presents another unique situation regarding inheritance. Although Caleb has fifteen male heirs,<sup>28</sup> no concern is presented in the text regarding inheritance. What is unusual about the gift of water is that a daughter asks for a gift that in effect is part of her brothers' inheritances and her father Caleb agrees. Thus, the story of Achshah demonstrates that a daughter's inheritance was limited to her dowry, but could also be procured under the guise of a gift. Whether the presence of this story indicates that such a practice commonly occurred in ancient Israel is uncertain. But in Achshah's case, as with the

<sup>25</sup>Boling and Wright, 375.

<sup>26</sup>David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 161.

<sup>27</sup>See, e.g., Deut 21:17; 2 Kgs 2:9; see also de Vaux, 41-42, 53-55.

<sup>28</sup>Caleb had three sons by his first wife Azubah (1 Chron 2:18), one by his wife Ephrath (2 Chron 2:18), one by Achshah's mother, seven more by his concubines Ephah and Maacah (1 Chron 2:49), and three more by an unnamed wife (1 Chron 4:15).

daughters of Zelophehad, inheritance remained within the tribe.<sup>29</sup>

The precise function of each event associated with Achsah's marriage is by no means uniformly agreed upon. The most likely association is that Othniel's successful taking of Debir represents a bride-price; the field in the Negeb represents her dowry; while the acquisition of springs represents a father's gift to his daughter, born out of affection and the desire to see his daughter and her new household survive in the promised land.<sup>30</sup>

### *Socioeconomic Background*

The details discussed thus far are a review and clarification of the narrative details. However, information may also be gleaned from new approaches to the text. Particular models from sociology and anthropology, in conjunction with genealogical details, can provide the socioeconomic background of Achsah's story.

Current sociological models reveal three levels of social organization in ancient Israel: the tribe, the clan or family, and the household.<sup>31</sup> The preeminence of each level varied at different times in Israel's history. During patriarchal times, the clan or family was the focus of society. During the Exodus, Wandering, and Conquest, the tribe gained ascendancy. At the time of Settlement (our concern here), the tribe was the least significant for social interaction. The clan determined the land apportionment and provided the problem-solving component, while the household defined daily patterns of life and the roles its members would play. Thus while the details of Achsah's marriage were handled by her father and husband-to-be at the clan level, her daily existence would revolve around the activities of her household. The household to which

<sup>29</sup>While the text does not specifically state that this offer was only made to Caleb's tribe, the manner of conquest could suggest as much. While genealogies are not always clear, that Caleb and Othniel are connected to or part of the tribe of Judah is suggested (Num 13:6; 1 Chron 2:18 [Caleb son of Hezron, son of Perez, son of Judah]; 1 Chron 4:15; and "the sons of Kenaz, Othniel and Seraiah" are also mentioned among the genealogy of Judah in 1 Chron 4). Although Judg 1 records that Judah went up against the Canaanites (albeit Simeon is mentioned as participating in Judg 1:3 and 1:17), the narrative suggests that the taking of Debir involved Judah alone. Thus, Caleb's offer would have been extended to those of his own tribe. Whether this was a conscious plan of Caleb—to preserve tribal holding—is in the realm of speculation (and does not figure in this equation). Perhaps because the taking of this city involved his tribe (among whom the Kenazzites, i.e., Othniel, were included) that Caleb offered such a unique bride-price.

<sup>30</sup>That Caleb was motivated by affection and the desire for his daughter's family success, though unstated, would seem to be in the spirit of biblical promises, extended first to Abraham, with an emphasis not only on the Promised Land but on progeny. The success of Achsah would promote a legacy of Caleb through her progeny.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Meyers, 124.

Achshah belonged was not the nuclear family typical of modern society—father, mother, siblings—but rather it was both variable and flexible in order to adapt to the subsistence patterns and political demands prevalent in her time.<sup>32</sup>

With the conquest of Canaan in progress, Achshah would have witnessed a major upheaval in both the family and sociopolitical spheres. Not only would she be leaving her father's household and joining her husband's, as was the custom of the day, but the social and political spheres of her life were being completely altered. The tribes were now settled and did not lead a seminomadic existence and, as a result, they no longer recognized a central political authority as they had under the leadership of Joshua.<sup>33</sup> With conquest and subsequent settlement, subsistence now changed to an agrarian pattern (both terrace farming and animal husbandry) with the household as the most significant social level.<sup>34</sup>

This was the premonarchic period in ancient Israel. Carol Meyers notes that villages were isolated and small, while households were nearly self-sufficient "arenas" for human activity.<sup>35</sup> The household was important for most economic, social, political, and cultural aspects. The premonarchic Israelite household would be a type of residential

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 124-142. Meyers, while acknowledging "that these levels [tribe, clan, and family] defy exact delineation" (124), convincingly defines each term and its function.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Deut 34:9 (Israelites obey Joshua on death of Moses); Josh 1 (Joshua given charge, commands officers to deliver orders to people [v. 11]; warriors concur [v. 16]); Josh 24:29 and Judg 1:1; 2:6-8 (death of Joshua and implied death of elders who outlived Joshua—none were replaced). The book of Judges then turns to a pattern of temporary judges who rise up to deliver Israel from oppressors, who, in turn, rise up in response to Israel's disobedience.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. D. Hopkins, "The Dynamics of Agriculture in Monarchic Israel," in *SBLSP*, ed., K. H. Richards (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 177-202; and D. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Meyers, 139; see esp. chap. 6, "Eve's World: The Family Household." Concerning the "size, shape and location and interrelationship of domestic buildings" that provided the basic information about household structure, see Meyers, 132-133, who cites excavation finds from <sup>6</sup>Ai (et-Tell) and Raddana, excavated by Callaway and, later, Callaway and Cooley in the late 1960s and 1970s—two sites in the Judean hills north of Jerusalem. In the northern Negeb, the excavations from Masos (Khirbet-el-Meshash), excavated by Kempinski and Fritz in the 1970s, support her model. Both reveal Iron I household groupings; cf. J. A. Callaway, "The 1966 <sup>6</sup>Ai (et-Tell) Excavations," *BASOR* 196 (1969):2-16; *idem.*, "The 1968-1969 <sup>6</sup>Ai (et-Tell) Excavations" *BASOR* 198 (1970): 7-31; *idem.*, "A Visit with Ahilud" *BAR* 9 (1983):42-53; J. A. Callaway and R. S. Cooley, "A Salvage Excavation at Raddana in Bireh" *BASOR* 201 (1971): 9-19; A. Kempinski and V. Fritz, "Excavations at Tell Masos (Khirbet el-Meshash), Preliminary Report on the Third Season" *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 136-158; Frank S. Frick, "Ecology, Agriculture and Patterns of Settlement," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives: Essays by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 67-93; and L. A. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-36.

compound that would include two to three conjugal units comprised of a married couple or widowed person with children who would share a common courtyard with certain domestic facilities and technological features. These units were considered the rule rather than the exception in premonarchic times.<sup>36</sup>

The conjugal units were also essential in a labor-intensive agrarian society with a requisite large workforce, high infant mortality, shorter lifespans, and an ecology involving crop selection and terracing in the hill country that would need greater family size at certain times, while reduced activity would call for a smaller family unit at others.<sup>37</sup> The household was responsible for producing and processing nearly everything it needed for survival; these tasks could not have been accomplished without the involvement of all members. The household, then, was not just a dwelling and reproductive unit, but also an economic one.<sup>38</sup>

Given the nature of the times in which Achsah lived—Wandering to Conquest to Settlement—her circumstances cannot be expected to correspond closely with Meyer's premonarchic model, a model based on archaeological evidence from the time of settlement. Biblical genealogies, while possibly derived from a later period than Achsah's story, may nonetheless preserve data that can help to recreate the type of household from which Achsah came and to which she went.

The household that Achsah grew up in during the period of Wandering would have consisted of not only her unnamed mother and her brother, but also her father's other wives, concubines, and sons. It is also possible that Caleb had other daughters. To this, wives of any brothers of marriageable age and their offspring might also have been added. Thus, Achsah's maiden household may have contained several women intimate with Caleb, fifteen sons with wives and offspring, and herself and any other unmarried (and unmentioned) daughters, for a total of at least twenty-one to possibly fifty members. This is clearly a model of a polygamous clan centered on the figure of Caleb. Following Meyer's model, as the secondary conjugal units of brother-wife-offspring grew, there would have been a breakdown of the original patriarchal structure and the creation of residential compounds, comprised of two to three conjugal units.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>These multiple-family households containing a number of brothers and their families could easily turn into extended family households if cousins, aunts, uncles, grandchildren, or parents of either spouse were added to the household (Meyers, 132-135).

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 133-134, who describes the reconfiguration of residential compounds and the genealogical references to Caleb's wives, concubines, sons, daughter, grandsons, and great-

This model, however, must also be tempered with the probability that all of Caleb's wives were not coterminous. For instance, the biblical text mentions the death of Azubah, Caleb's first wife (1 Chron 2:19).<sup>40</sup>

In reference to genealogies, then, Achsah probably left her father's large patriarchal dynasty for a much smaller family unit. Her new household might have included her husband Othniel and their future children, Hathah and Meonothai (if the children of Othniel listed in 1 Chron 4:13 are Achsah's) and possibly a brother-in-law Seraiah, his wife, and their son Joab (1 Chron 4:13-14).<sup>41</sup> Any daughters are again unmentioned. Achsah's household would be a smaller version of Meyer's residential compound, perhaps a "transitional phase" to a residential compound might be more accurate.<sup>42</sup> Her father-in-law Kenaz and his wife would not be a part of this household, for being of Moses' generation they would not have been permitted to enter Canaan, instead perishing in the wilderness.<sup>43</sup>

In setting up a household in the Negeb, the field and springs were not simply a dowry and a gift to be added to a previously established Kenizzite household. This new household's subsistence would depend on the yield of this field irrigated by the springs. Their livestock would also be watered from this source. The many roles and chores accorded to each member of this new household would be intimately connected with the agricultural cycle involving their field.<sup>44</sup> If the land did not give yield, the family would have nothing to take to market.

With the period of Settlement, then, came a change in the social and marriage structures. The tribe was no longer the main social unit; instead, the focus was on the household.<sup>45</sup> The tribes were called upon in times of external threat throughout the period of the Judges, but everyday life revolved around the household unit.<sup>46</sup> Achsah had the foresight to realize

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to great-great-great-great grandsons in 1 Chron 2:18-50; 4:15.

<sup>40</sup>Rabbinic legend also mentions the existence of two earlier wives: Miriam, Moses' sister by which he became the progenitor of the house of David (Sot 11b,12a) and Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter who had rebelled against her father's idolatry just as Caleb had rebelled against the spies (Lev. R. 1:3).

<sup>41</sup>Compare genealogical references for Caleb (n. 39) and those of Othniel and his brother Seraiah in 1 Chron 4:13-14.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Meyers, 133, for discussion of residential compounds.

<sup>43</sup>Cf., e.g., Num 14:22-24, 26-35; Deut 1:34-40.

<sup>44</sup>On household functions and women's (and men's) roles in it, see Meyers, esp. chaps. 7 ("Household Functions and Female Roles") and 8 ("Reconstructing Gender Relationships").

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 127-128.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 127.

what her household would need to survive this change in times.<sup>47</sup>

### *Verbal Repetition as a Literary Device*

The seven repetitions of the root נתן ("to give," Josh 15:13, 16, 17, 19),<sup>48</sup> interrupted by the root שרף ("to dispossess") and the root בוא ("to go"), carry the narrative from beginning to end. Thus, a literary critic might find the sequence of verbal actions to be an aesthetic device emphasizing societal transition. The fulfillment of God's pronouncement of land to Caleb (Josh 15:13) signaled the period of settlement, but it also recalled the time of Wandering when the promise was first made to Caleb. Caleb's dispossession of the sons of Anak from Hebron signified that the official move from Wandering to Conquest had occurred (Josh 15:14). Additionally, Caleb's offer of his daughter as a reward to the one who captured Debir also signified that the period of Wandering was moving to Conquest and Settlement. Othniel accepted the challenge and Caleb gave Achsah to him. This progression is reinforced by the imagery of movement in Josh 15:18—Achsah comes to Othniel's house. The verbal action of "giving" climaxes in Josh 15:19 with four repetitions of the root נתן.

### *Conclusion*

Achsah's existence is intertwined with Caleb's and then Othniel's. Caleb represents the old ways of society and marriage—the patriarchal dynasty, the time of Wandering and Conquest; Othniel represents Conquest to Settlement—the new ways of society and marriage. Achsah's passage from Caleb's household to Othniel's may metaphorically represent the progression of society from Wandering to Conquest to Settlement. Thus, Achsah's story may serve as a metaphor and case study for societal transition, emphasized through the aesthetic device of verbal repetition, thereby adding another dimension to this multifunctional historical narrative.

<sup>47</sup>Gunn and Fewell, 161-162, see in Achsah a boldness in "asking for water in the dry land." In this spring, Achsah sees life and "she acts."

<sup>48</sup>See Andersen and Freedman, 274, who similarly acknowledge the prominence of the root נתן in this text, Hos 2, and the Ugaritic myth "Nikkal and the Moon."