

Judges 1:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

Analysis

And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife.

Caleb's offer of his daughter Achsah as reward for conquering Debir follows ancient Near Eastern patterns where military prowess demonstrated worthiness for marriage into elite families. Similar examples include Saul's offer of his daughter to whoever killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:25) and David's seven-year military service for Rachel (Genesis 29:18-20, though this was bride-price rather than military conquest). The Hebrew *lakach le'ishah* (לָקַח לְאִשָּׁה, "take to wife") is standard marriage terminology, emphasizing formal covenant relationship, not mere physical union.

This practice raises modern ethical questions about women as prizes or property. However, Scripture's descriptive narratives shouldn't be confused with prescriptive commands. The text describes cultural practices without necessarily endorsing them. Importantly, Achsah demonstrates agency and wisdom (verses 14-15), negotiating for land and resources, showing she wasn't treated as passive property. Ancient marriage customs emphasized clan alliances and property rights more than modern romantic individualism, yet biblical marriage always involved covenant commitment, mutual responsibility, and dignity for both parties (Genesis 2:23-24, Ephesians 5:25-33).

Caleb's offer also demonstrates strategic leadership—motivating warriors by

offering significant reward. The parallel account (Joshua 15:16) is identical, confirming accuracy. Theologically, this pictures how Christ offers the ultimate reward—union with Himself as His bride—to those who overcome through faith (Revelation 19:7-9, 21:2). The church is Christ's bride, secured through His victorious conquest over sin, death, and Satan (Ephesians 5:25-27). While human marriage involves imperfect people and sometimes questionable customs, Christ's marriage to His church perfectly fulfills God's design: sacrificial love, covenantal faithfulness, and eternal joy.

Historical Context

Marriage customs in the ancient Near East varied by culture, class, and period, but generally involved extended family negotiation, bride-price (mohar), and covenant ceremony. The bride-price compensated the bride's family for losing a worker and forged economic alliance between clans. Marriages served political-economic functions, cementing tribal alliances, consolidating property, and producing heirs. Love wasn't irrelevant but wasn't the primary criterion for marriage as in modern Western culture.

Elite families offering daughters to military champions appears in ancient Near Eastern literature. The Epic of Gilgamesh, Ugaritic texts, and Egyptian records describe kings rewarding heroic warriors with land, titles, and marriage to royal daughters. Such practices strengthened loyalty, provided tested warriors for the king's family line, and ensured military prowess passed to the next generation. Caleb's offer fits this cultural pattern while also demonstrating faith that Debir could be conquered.

Caleb himself was a Kenizzite (Numbers 32:12, Joshua 14:6, 14), descended from Kenaz, possibly integrated into Judah through intermarriage or adoption. His full incorporation into Israel and subsequent prominence demonstrates that covenant inclusion transcended ethnic boundaries—a preview of Gentile inclusion in the New Covenant (Ephesians 2:11-22). Caleb's faith, demonstrated by spying faithfully forty years earlier (Numbers 13-14) and now conquering his inheritance at age 85, qualified him for covenant blessing regardless of ethnic origin.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Achsah's agency in negotiating for land challenge assumptions about women's status in biblical cultures?
2. In what ways does Caleb's offer of his daughter to the victorious warrior typologically point to Christ presenting His bride, the church, to Himself?
3. What does this passage teach about the relationship between spiritual victory and covenant blessing?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	כָּלֵב בֶּן־יִפְתָּח	אֲשֶׁר	יָכֹחַ	אֶת־	קִרְיַת־סֶפֶר	
said	And Caleb	H834	He that smiteth	H853	H0	Kirjathsepher
H559	H3612		H5221			H7158
וְלָקַחְהָ	וְנָתַתִּי	לָאִשָּׁה:	אֶת־	עַכְסָה	בְּתִי	
and taketh	it to him will I give	H0	H853	Achsah	my daughter	to wife
H3920	H5414			H5915	H1323	H802

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