

Judges 1:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when she came to him, that she moved him to ask of her father a field: and she lighted from off her ass; and Caleb said unto her, What wilt thou?

Analysis

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Achsah demonstrates remarkable agency and wisdom in this narrative. The Hebrew *vattsitehu* (וַתִּסֵּיתְהוּ, "she moved him") suggests she persuaded or incited Othniel to request additional land from Caleb. This wasn't manipulation but legitimate advocacy within family relationships. Her dismounting from the donkey (*vatitzanach me'al hachamor*, וַתִּצְנַח מֵעַל הַחֲמֹר) was a deliberate act signaling respect and petitionary intent—standing before her father to make a formal request rather than calling out while riding past.

Caleb's response, "What wilt thou?" (*mah-lach*, מַה־לָּךְ), shows openness to hear her petition. The phrase occurs in various biblical contexts (Genesis 21:17, Judges 18:23, 1 Samuel 11:5) as invitation to explain one's distress or desire. Far from treating Achsah as silent property transferred from father to husband, Caleb engages her as a person with legitimate voice in family decisions. This challenges caricatures of biblical patriarchy as absolute male dominance with complete female subordination. While Scripture describes patriarchal structures, it also shows women exercising considerable influence, wisdom, and agency within those structures (Proverbs 31:10-31, Acts 18:26).

Theologically, Achsah models appropriate boldness in petitioning authority figures. She doesn't demand or manipulate but respectfully requests. Similarly, believers are encouraged to approach God's throne boldly yet reverently (Hebrews 4:16), presenting requests with thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6). The parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) commends persistent prayer, while passages like James 4:2-3 warn against wrong motives. Achsah's example shows how to advocate for legitimate needs within proper relationships and structures.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern women's status varied significantly by culture, class, and context. While patriarchal structures dominated, women weren't uniformly powerless. Property laws, marriage customs, and social expectations limited women's independence, yet exceptional women could wield considerable influence. The Code of Hammurabi (18th century BCE) granted women certain property rights, including inheritance in the absence of sons and rights to manage estates. Egyptian women could own property, conduct business, and initiate divorce. Biblical law similarly protected women's rights in inheritance (Numbers 27:1-11, 36:1-12), marriage (Exodus 21:7-11), and worship (Deuteronomy 12:12, 16:11).

Achsah's petition for land with water sources reveals practical wisdom. The Negev's arid climate (4-8 inches annual rainfall) made water access essential for agriculture and survival. Springs (gulloth mayim, גְּלוֹת מַיִם) provided year-round water for irrigation, dramatically increasing land value and productivity. Caleb's grant of upper and lower springs (verse 15) shows generosity—providing prime agricultural land to ensure his daughter's security. This demonstrates that biblical inheritance practices, while patriarchal, included provisions ensuring daughters' welfare.

The parallel account (Joshua 15:18-19) preserves identical details, confirming historical reliability. Achsah's negotiation occurred at a transitional moment—leaving her father's house to join her husband's household. Her request secured resources for her new household, demonstrating prudent planning. Proverbs 31 praises the excellent wife who considers fields and plants vineyards (Proverbs

31:16), showing active economic engagement. Achsah's example anticipates this ideal of wise, productive womanhood contributing to household flourishing.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does Achsah's example inform how Christian women can exercise agency and influence within biblical structures and relationships?
2. What does this passage teach about the proper balance between submission to authority and advocacy for legitimate needs?
3. In what ways does Achsah's bold yet respectful petition model how believers should approach God in prayer?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּהִי י' H1961	בָּבוֹאָהָ H935	וַתִּסֵּי הוּ H5496	לְשֹׂא ל' H7592	מָאת H853
And it came to pass when she came	to him that she moved	him to ask		
אָבִי יְהוָה H1	הַשָּׂדֶה H7704	וַתִּצְנֶה H6795	מֵעַל H5921	הַחֲמֹר H2543
of her father	a field	and she lighted	from off her ass	said
				H0
כָּל ב' H3612	מָה H4100	לָהּ: H0		
and Caleb				

