

Tolerance toward Gentiles

Avner Ramu



Caleb, Achsah and Othniel. By Caroline Innis. Watercolor on paper. 1827.

In the Book of Genesis we read:

ביום ההוא כרת יהוה את-אברם-ברית לאמר: לזרעך נתתי את-הארץ הזאת, מנהר מצרים
עד-הנהר הגדל נהר-פרת.
את-הקיני, ואת-הקנזי, ואת הקדמני.
ואת-החתי ואת-הפרזי, ואת-הרפאים.
ואת-האמרי, ואת-הכנעני, ואת-הגרגשי, ואת-היבוסי.

“In that day *YHWH* made a covenant with Abram, saying: To your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates;
The Kenite, and the Kenizzite, and the Kadmonite;
And the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Rephaim;
And the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Girgashite, and the Jebusite” (Gen 15:18-21).

Now we read in the Book of Numbers:

וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר.
אלה שמות האנשים אשר-ינחלו לכם את-הארץ: אלעזר הכהן, ויהושע בן-נון.
ונשיא אחד נשיא אחד ממטה-תקחו לנחל את-הארץ.

ואלה שמות האנשים: למטה יהודה, כלב בן-יפנה.

“And *YHWH* spoke to Moses, saying:

These are the names of the men that shall take possession of the land for you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun.

And you shall take one prince of every tribe, to take possession of the land.

And these are the names of the men: of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh” (Num 34:16-19).

Yet two chapters earlier we read: הקנזי, כלב בן-יפנה, - “Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite” (Num 32:12; see also: Jos 14:6, 14).

It seems rather remarkable that a person from the Kenizzite people (whose land was given by God to Abraham progeny) became the prince of Judah, a major tribe of Israel.

Furthermore, we read in the Book of Joshua:

ולכלב בן-יפנה נתן חלק בתוך בני-יהודה, אל-פי יהוה ליהושע-את-קרית ארבע אבי הענק, היא חברון.

וירש משם כלב את-שלושה בני הענק-את-ששי ואת-אחימן ואת-תלמי, ילידי הענק.

“And to Caleb the son of Jephunneh he gave a portion among the children of Judah, according to the commandment of *YHWH* to Joshua, even Kiriath-arba, which Arba was the father of Anak--the same is Hebron.

And Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, the children of Anak” (Jos 15:13-14).

If Caleb the son of Jephunneh was a genuine member of the tribe of Judah the remark that he received a portion “among the children of Judah” would have been peculiar. However, if Caleb was indeed a Kenizzite, this remark is explanatory.

It appears that Caleb was also a strong man who could drive away the giants that resided in Hebron. It seems that this trait was shared by his family as we read about the town of Debir (later named: Kiriath-sepher): וילכדה עתניאל בן-קנז, אחי כלב, - “And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it” (Jos 15:17; see also: Jud 1:13).

Furthermore, we read:

ויחר-אף יהוה בישראל, וימכרם ביד כושן רשעתים, מלך ארם נהרים; ויעבדו בני-ישראל את-כושן רשעתים שמנה שנים.

ויזעקו בני-ישראל אל-יהוה, ויקם יהוה מושיע לבני ישראל וישיעם-את עתניאל בן-קנז, אחי כלב הקטן ממנו.

ותהי עליו רוח-יהוה, וישפט את-ישראל, ויצא למלחמה, ויתן יהוה בידו את-כושן רשעתים מלך ארם; ותעז ידו על כושן רשעתים.

ותשקט הארץ ארבעים שנה;

“And the anger of *YHWH* was kindled against Israel, and He gave them over into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram-naharaim; and the children of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

And when the children of Israel cried to *YHWH*, *YHWH* raised up a savior to the children of Israel, who saved them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

And the spirit of YHWH came upon him, and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and YHWH delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Aram into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Cushan-rishathaim.

And the land had rest forty years” (Jud 3:8-11).

In the Book of Genesis we read: **ואנכי פניתי הבית** - **“I have cleared the house”** (Gen 24:31), and this suggests that **כלב בן-יפנה** - **“Caleb the son of Jephunneh”** actually means: “Caleb the son of a man that was removed (from the Kenizzite land). In the Book of Amos we read: **והנעוטי בכל-הגוים את-בית ישראל** - **“I will winnow the house of Israel among all the nations”** (Am 9:9), which suggests that Caleb’s brother name: **עתניאל** - **“Othniel”** means: “God had winnowed me (from the Kenizzite land).” Alternatively, the name **עתניאל** (*a’thniel*) could be a letter-deletion error of **עתקני-אל** (*a’thqaniel*) - “God had dislodged me” (e.g. Job 14:18; 18:4).

These names suggest that the Biblical writers did not shy away from the fact the Caleb and his brother were Kenizzites and not of the children of Israel.

It appears quite remarkable that from a people that their land was taken away by the Israelites came a person that was appointed the prince of the tribe of Judah and another one who was a savior judge,