

Who were the Kenizzites in the Bible?

The Kenizzites (or Kenezites) were a group of people during the time of Abraham. They are mentioned in Genesis 15:19 as one of the groups living in the land God promised to Abraham's descendants. Not much is known about this people group or where exactly they lived. Some scholars believe the Kenizzites lived in Arabia, while others hold that the Kenizzites eventually intermingled with the people of Canaan and lost their identity as a people group. These commentators see evidence of the Kenizzites assimilating with the Canaanites in the fact that their name is missing from the list of people living in the Promised Land during the time of Joshua's conquest (Joshua 3:10).

It could be that some of the Kenizzites integrated with Israel before the conquest of Canaan, joining God's people during the exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 12:37-38). It's also possible that the Kenizzites were associated with Israel earlier, and that they had gone to Egypt with Jacob and his family to escape the famine in Canaan (Genesis 46).

In Numbers 32:12, Caleb is mentioned as the "son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." Other passages also name Caleb as related to the Kenizzites through his father Jephunneh (Joshua 14:6, 14). It seems clear from this that some of the Kenizzites must have joined Israel as proselytes at some point. Significantly, Caleb's relation to the Kenizzites demonstrates how believing Gentiles were at times integrated into Israel and, in the case of Jephunneh, into the tribe of Judah (Numbers 13:6). Despite his Kenizzite heritage, Caleb is included in the genealogical listing of Judah in 1 Chronicles 4:15. It is likely that Caleb's mother was of the tribe of Judah.

Some commentators have connected the Kenizzites to Edom because the Bible mentions Kenaz as a ruler of Edom (Genesis 36:40-43; 1 Chronicles 1:53). Caleb's brother is named Kenaz

(Joshua 15:17), the father of Othniel, the first judge of Israel (Joshua 15:17; Judges 3:9).