

Who was Barzillai in the Bible?

Barzillai the Gileadite is mentioned ten times in the Old Testament. (Two other men named Barzillai are also mentioned, one in 2 Samuel 21:8 and the other in Ezra 2:61 and Nehemiah 7:63). Barzillai is described as a wealthy man from Rogelim in Gilead who lived during the time of King David (2 Samuel 17:27). He is best known for his loyal service to David when David was forced to flee Jerusalem during a revolt by his son Absalom.

During David's brief time of exile, Barzillai was one of several key people who provided for the needs of David's household (2 Samuel 17:27-29; 19:32). When the rebellion ended, Barzillai accompanied David and his people to the shore of the Jordan River where they would cross back into Judah on their way to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19:31). At the time, Barzillai was 80 years old. David offered for Barzillai to return to Jerusalem with him so he could return his kindness and care for his needs.

Barzillai respectfully turned down David's offer, seeking to live out the rest of his days in his own land instead. However, Barzillai asked for his servant Kimham to cross over instead: "But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever you wish" (2 Samuel 19:37). David granted his request and kissed and blessed Barzillai when they parted. Even in his final moments with David, Barzillai sought the welfare of others, this time offering a better life for his own servant.

Barzillai is mentioned three times in Scripture after his death. In Ezra 2:61 and Nehemiah 7:63 he is noted in a list of Jewish descendants. In both passages, Barzillai is called "the Gileadite" because another man with the same name had married one of Barzillai's daughters. Barzillai's name was clearly of great reputation if his

son-in-law wanted to be known by the same name.

The other mention of Barzillai after his death is by King David. When David gives instructions to his son Solomon as he transitions the kingdom to him, David states, “But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead and let them be among those who eat at your table. They stood by me when I fled from your brother Absalom” (1 Kings 2:7). Barzillai’s kindness was remembered long after his death, being mentioned by the greatest king of Israel.

Despite his strange name, Barzillai was a man with a great reputation for loyalty to God and to his king and kindness to those under his care. Despite being a man of wealth, he used his influence for the benefit of others and lived a simple life. He offers a powerful example of the legacy one person can have through loving God and serving others during difficult times.