

Who was Gad in the Bible?

Two people bear the name Gad in the Bible. The first is Jacob's seventh-born son and forefather of the tribe of Gad, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The second is a prophet in the time of King David.

Jacob had four wives: Rachel, Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah. Gad's mother was Zilpah, Leah's maidservant. Zilpah was also the mother of Asher. When Gad was born, Leah chose his name, which means "good fortune" in Hebrew: "Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, 'What good fortune!' So she named him Gad" (Genesis 30:10-11).

Little is written about Jacob's son Gad in the Bible. He traveled with his family from Padan Aram to Canaan and would have been part of the fraternal conspiracy to kill the youngest brother Joseph. Later, Gad traveled with his brothers to Egypt to buy food during the famine. The brothers were recognized by Joseph, who was now vizier over all the land in Egypt. Joseph saved his family, forgave his brothers, and brought them back to live in Egypt. The Bible tells us that Gad fathered seven sons: Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli (Genesis 46:16).

Before Jacob's death, the patriarch gathered his twelve sons to pronounce blessings on them. To the tribe of Gad, Jacob delivered a prophecy that included an interesting play on words involving the name Gad. Jacob praised Gad, predicting the tribe would contain brave troops that would drive off raiders and victoriously pursue Israel's enemies: "Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels" (Genesis 49:19). In Hebrew, the pronunciation of Gad sounds much like the pronunciation of the words translated "attack" and "band of raiders."

At the end of Israel's 40-year wilderness wandering, as the people prepared to enter the Promised Land, Gad's tribe asked to settle east of the Jordan River along with Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These tribes owned a substantial amount of livestock, and the territory east of the Jordan was desirable for raising herds. Dwelling in a bordering position east of the Jordan, it was particularly important for Gad to fulfill Jacob's prophecy and be brave and strong. Otherwise, Israel would be vulnerable to sudden enemy attacks.

Before Moses died, he also blessed the tribes of Israel. He compared Gad to a lion and celebrated the Lord's goodness in enlarging Gad's territory: "Blessed is he who enlarges Gad's domain! Gad lives there like a lion, tearing at arm or head" (Deuteronomy 33:20).

Shortly after the Exodus, Gad numbered 45,650 (Numbers 2: 14-15). By the time of the second census in the plains of Moab, the number had decreased to 40,500 (Numbers 26:18).

Another man named Gad in the Bible appeared as a contemporary of King David. He was a prophet and seer who counseled David. When David fled from Saul, Gad advised him to return to the land of Judah (1 Samuel 22:5). After David sinned by taking a census, Gad rebuked him and offered a choice of punishments, and David chose a plague (2 Samuel 24:11-14). Gad advised King David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite on the day the plague ended (2 Samuel 24:18-19). Gad also aided in the arrangement of Levitical music (2 Chronicles 29:25). In 1 Chronicles 29:29, Gad is said to have written a part of the history of the life of King David.

One final Gad, a Canaanite god of fortune, is mentioned in some translations as an idol Israel worshiped. Isaiah 65:11 addresses "those forsaking Jehovah, Who are forgetting My

holy mountain, Who are setting in array for Gad a table, And who are filling for Meni a mixture" (YLT), and verse 12 predicts their judgment. Most other translations put "Fortune" for "Gad" in this passage.