

Who were the Jebusites?

When God promised to give Abraham a land for his descendants, it was described as being inhabited by many tribes, including the Jebusites (Genesis 15:18-21). Who were these people, and where did they come from?

According to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, the Jebusites were descended from Noah's son Ham, through his son Canaan. They were one of the Amorite tribes who were placed under judgment by God for their wickedness (Genesis 15:16). God described their pagan worship as abominable practices (Deuteronomy 20:18), which may have included child sacrifice. As a result of that judgment, God told the Israelites to exterminate all of the Amorite tribes when they came into the land. The Israelites were also forbidden to intermarry with them, so the Jebusites would not pass on their pagan practices.

The Jebusites dwelt in the hill country, with Jerusalem as one of their key cities (Numbers 13:29; Judges 19:10-11). The Jebusites' name for "Jerusalem" was "Jebus," and it retained that name until the time of King David (1 Chronicles 11:4-5). During the time of Joshua, the Jebusite king Adoni-zedek joined with four other Amorite kings to attack the Israelites at Gibeon (Joshua 10:5), but he was defeated and put to death. Later, the Jebusites joined with Jabin, king of Hazor, in a pitched battle against the Israelites, but they were also defeated by Joshua's army (Joshua 11:3). Despite these defeats, the Jebusites continued to live in the hill country around Jerusalem for many generations. During the time of the judges, some Israelites began to intermarry with the Jebusites, causing God to bring judgment on the nation (Judges 3:5).

When David became king of Israel, he attacked the Jebusites of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6) and conquered the city, which then became known as the City of David. Apparently, David

granted terms of peace with the remaining Jebusites, because he made a friendly deal with Araunah the Jebusite to purchase land for building the temple (2 Samuel 24:18-25). The Jebusites remained subjugated to Israel and were part of the forced labor Solomon later used for his building projects.

Though they were allowed to live among the Israelites, the Jebusites and other Amorite tribes maintained their distinctive ways and thus became a continuing snare to the people of Israel. When Ezra the priest led a revival among the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity, he had to deal with the issue of intermarriage with Jebusites and others (Ezra 9:1). Ezra commanded the men of Israel to confess their sins and put away their pagan wives so that God would take away His wrath.

After this, the Jebusites disappear from history; likely, they were absorbed into the other Gentile peoples who lived in the land of Israel. An extra-biblical reference to the Jebusites may be contained in one of the tablets discovered at Mari, in modern-day Syria. One cuneiform tablet mentions a people called the “Yabusiim,” which could very well be a reference to the Jebusites.