

# What is the significance of the land of Gilead in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/land-of-Gilead.html>

Gilead was a fertile, mountainous area east of the Jordan River. The name Gilead means “rocky region” or “hill country.” Solomon refers to goats “descending from Gilead” in Song of Solomon 6:5. To the north of Gilead was Bashan, and to the south were Moab and Ammon.

When the Promised Land was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh received territory to the east of the Jordan. Their inheritance was largely comprised of the land of Gilead (Joshua 13:24-31). Gad received “all the towns of Gilead” (verse 25), and, in some passages of Scripture, the terms Gilead and Gad are used interchangeably (see Judges 5:17). The Bible mentions several mountains of Gilead: Abarim, Pisgah, Nebo, and Peor.

Gilead was also the name of a great-grandson of Joseph through Joseph’s son Manasseh. Generations later, the tribe of Manasseh inherited a portion of the land of Gilead. It could very well be that some of the ancestral Gileadites lived in the land of Gilead after the conquest of Canaan.

The land of Gilead features in several incidents in the Old Testament. The city of Ramoth Gilead (meaning “heights of Gilead”) was a city of refuge (Joshua 20:8). The judge Jephthah lived and fought in Gilead, saving the Gileadites and all of Israel from the Ammonites (Judges 11). After King Saul’s death, the people of Gilead supported Ish-Bosheth as the heir to the throne (2 Samuel 2:9), but they later fully supported David. Absalom, David’s son who led a coup against his father, camped in Gilead (2

Samuel 17:24), and it was there that Absalom died (2 Samuel 18:6-15).

Later, Ramoth in Gilead fell into Syrian hands, and King Ahab attempted to retake the city for Israel, but he died in the attempt (1 Kings 22:1-36). King Jehoram later wrested the city from the Syrians, making it a possession of Israel once again. One of Jehoram's commanders, Jehu, was anointed as king of Israel in Ramoth (1 Kings 9:1-10). Finally, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser invaded Gilead and deported the inhabitants back to Assyria (2 Kings 15:29). But the Lord will never forsake His people, and He has promised to return the Israelites to Gilead some day: "Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me. They and their children will survive, and they will return. I will . . . gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead" (Zechariah 10:10).

The land of Gilead was known for its balm, a liquid rosin that flowed or dripped from certain trees such as pine, cedar, cypress, or terebinth. Gilead was most noted for the *Balsamodendron Gileadense*, a rosin-producing tree native to that area. Because of easy access to medicinal ingredients, many physicians made their homes in Gilead. This helps us understand Jeremiah 8:22, which says, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?" Jeremiah mourned for the desperate spiritual condition of Israel. They could cure physical ailments with their doctors and their medicines, but they could not cure the deeper disease of idolatry that was destroying them (Jeremiah 8:19; 46:11).

The land of Gilead is a reminder that the Lord provides all good things for our use (Deuteronomy 6:10-11; James 1:17). Yet we often forget Him and take pride in our abundance, making gods out of the gifts. Israel did that repeatedly. Although the land

of Gilead provided healing for many ailments, it could not provide the spiritual healing that comes only from obedience to God and His Word.