

Who were the Geshurites?

The Geshurites were a tribe east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The people of Geshur are absent from the list of nations mentioned in God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21), but they are mentioned in the list of people groups that the Israelites, after the conquest of Canaan, still needed to defeat (Joshua 13:2). Unfortunately, the Israelites were unable to completely drive out the Geshurites (Joshua 13:13).

The Geshurites resided in the area known as Geshur, which is now called the Golan Heights. It was situated east of the Upper Jordan in Syria. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Geshurites may have worshiped a bull-shaped moon god and were also influenced by Egyptian and even Israelite cultures. The name Geshur meant "stronghold or fortress," and its capital was located at Bethsaida.

During the reign of King David, the Geshurites existed as an independent kingdom alongside Israel. David conducted raids into their territory while he was hiding from Saul in Ziklag (1 Samuel 27:6-8). After becoming king, David married Maakah, a Geshuri princess and Absalom's mother (2 Samuel 3:3). When Absalom killed his half-brother Amnon, he absconded to Geshur where he stayed for three years with his maternal grandfather (2 Samuel 13:37-38).

Scholars debate whether the Geshurites were affiliated with the Arameans or the Israelites. It is likely that they had connections to both groups. Before Joshua's conquest, they were probably predominantly Aramean. However, during the time of Israel's dominance, many Geshurites likely assimilated with Israel.

After David's time, the Bible does not mention Geshur or the Geshurites. The possible exception is the New Testament's mention of Bethsaida, where Jesus performed many miracles (Matthew 11:22; Mark 6:45; 8:22; Luke 9:10). The nation of Geshur faded from history in ninth century BC.