

Who were the Perizzites in the Bible?

The Perizzites were one of several groups of people occupying the land of Canaan as early as the time of Abraham: “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites’” (Genesis 15:18-21).

Mention of the Perizzites in the Bible takes place in 21 of 27 lists of nations that occupied Canaan before Israel’s conquest of the land. The name Perizzites means “villagers” and denoted those who lived out in the open country, rather than in larger, walled cities. The Perizzites dwelt in the region south and southwest of Mt. Carmel, in the fertile central portion of Canaan.

In Genesis 13:7, Abram’s and Lot’s herdsmen argued over the territory where the Perizzites were living. The land could not support both of their large flocks and herds, so Abram entreated Lot for a peaceful resolution. Lot chose to move his family and livestock to the Jordan Valley, while Abram settled in Canaan.

When God spoke to Moses in the burning bush, He detailed His plan to deliver the people from slavery in Egypt to a land of promise. The Lord mentioned the Perizzites among the six nations living in the “good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8, 17).

In Exodus 23:23-24, God commanded the destruction of the Perizzites along with five other nations. These pagan nations occupying Canaan were enemies of God. The Lord wanted Israel to expel them from the land. He gave the people of Israel these instructions:

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons” (Deuteronomy 7:1-3).

When Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua, the Perizzites were living in the forested hill country (Joshua 11:3) in territories that would be assigned to Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah (Joshua 17:15).

Later, in the books of Judges and Ezra, we read that the people of Israel had not completely driven out and destroyed the Perizzite nation. Instead, God’s people had intermarried with the Perizzites and other inhabitants of Canaan, in disobedience to God’s command (Judges 3:5-6; Ezra 9:1-2). The Israelites worshiped the gods of Canaan and allowed themselves to be morally polluted by these pagan peoples.

During the reign of King Solomon, the remaining non-integrated Perizzites were forced to serve as slave laborers (1 Kings 9:20-21).