

CALEB THE GENTILE?

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There are some who teach that Caleb was a Gentile. They base it on Caleb being ‘the son of *Jephunneh the Kenizzite*’ and link ‘Kenizzite’ to Genesis 15:19, where it speaks of the Kenizzites who were contemporaries of Abraham, but obviously not Hebrews.¹ Their teaching, of course, hinges on the term *Kenizzite*² that is attached to Caleb’s³ father’s name, which is found three times in Scripture:

In Numbers 32:12 ‘the Kenizzite’ is spelled in Hebrew as ...הַקְּנִיזִי

In Joshua 14:6 it’s.....הַקְּנִיזִי

In Joshua 14:14 it’s.....הַקְּנִיזִי

All three places it’s spelled the exact same way הַקְּנִיזִי *haKenizi*, which comes into English as ‘the Kenizzite.’ It’ll also be seen as a name, *Kenaz*, without the article (*ha* for ‘the’) and the dropping of the *yod* (י), which doesn’t effect the meaning of the word.

The term Kenizzite is also seen in the plural form as *the Kenizzites* listed in Genesis 15:19, and it’s the same Hebrew spelling that is used of Caleb’s father הַקְּנִיזִי *haKenizi*. Genesis 15:19 speaks of the ten different ethnic groups of people in Canaan that the Hebrews were to dispossess when God would bring Israel out of Egypt four hundred years later. Genesis 15 records the covenant that God made with Abram (Gen. 17; Abraham), which gave him and his descendants, through Isaac and Jacob, the land of Canaan.

Different English Bibles spell the Hebrew word differently, which is not unusual, but so you’ll know that it’s the same Hebrew word with English variations of ‘Kene’ or ‘Keni,’ or one ‘z’ or two, I’ve listed some English Bibles with their variant spellings. Underlining signifies the same spelling:

Citation	NKJV	NIV	NASB	KJV
Gen. 15:19	Kenezzites	<u>Kenizzites</u>	Kenizzite	<u>Kenizzites</u>
Num. 32:12	<u>Kenizzite</u>	<u>Kenizzite</u>	Kenizzite	Kenezite
Josh. 14:6	<u>Kenizzite</u>	<u>Kenizzite</u>	Kenizzite	Kenezite
Josh. 14:14	<u>Kenizzite</u>	<u>Kenizzite</u>	Kenizzite	Kenezite

Did Caleb’s father, spoken of as *the Kenizzite*, come from the Kenizzite people of Gen. 15:19? It seems like a match—the words are identical. If so, then Caleb’s father would have been a Gentile and not have natural lineage from the Seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It could be said, then, that a Gentile became a Hebrew, with the subsequent position that Gentile believers in Messiah Yeshua become Hebrews in the Commonwealth of Israel. In other words, the Gentile would no longer be a Gentile, but a Hebrew and a natural Seed Israeli.

There is a span of time of about 400 years (Gen. 19:13) between the Kenizzites listed in Gen. 15:19 and

¹ Abraham is seen as the Father of the Hebrews because the word *Hebrew* means ‘to pass over.’ In Abraham’s case the term refers to the moniker given to him by the Canaanites because it refers to Abraham *passing over* the Euphrates River to get to Canaan (Gen. 14:13).

² Kenizzite is not to be confused with Kenite, another ethnic group because Kenite in Hebrew is spelled differently (i.e. it’s a different name).

³ Caleb is mentioned 33 times in the Tanach.

Caleb's father, Jephunneh the Kenizzite, who lived in the generation before the Exodus. One question that might be asked is, 'If Caleb's father was a Gentile from the lineage of the Kenizzite people of Gen. 15:19, when did he (Jephunneh) come into the people of Israel?' He's obviously not mentioned 'going down' into Egypt with Jacob and his family (Gen. 46:8-26), as he wouldn't have been born yet, but there's no mention of any male Gentile or Kenizzite going down into Egypt with Jacob that could have been his ancestor. One would be hard pressed to believe that Jephunneh or his father came to Egypt and attached himself to the Hebrews when they were slaves to the Egyptians. The answer to this dilemma seems to revolve around the meaning of the name *Kenizzite*.

The name *Kenizzite* (Hebrew *Kenizi*) is also seen in its base form as *Kenaz*⁴ in Gen. 36:11 where it's the name of Eliphaz's fifth son:

“And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and *Kenaz*.” (Genesis 36:11)

Kenaz is 'just' a proper name in Gen. 36:11, but obviously, it doesn't have a direct tie into the lineage of the Kenizzites of Gen. 15:19 because *Kenaz* is the son of Eliphaz, who was the son of Esau (Gen. 36:10), and Esau was the twin brother of Jacob (Gen. 25:20-26). Jacob's father and grandfather were not Kenizzites. So, this *Kenaz* of Eliphaz, even though the name is the same as the Kenizzites of Gen. 15:19, has no genealogical lineage to them. Eliphaz liked the name *Kenaz* and gave it to his son because of its meaning, which we'll see in a moment is most likely why Jephunneh came to be called the Kenizzite.

Someone might say that Esau, the father of Eliphaz, married into the Kenizzites, but Esau's wife Adah was a daughter of Elon the Hittite, who obviously wasn't a Kenizzite (Gen. 36:2). As for the wife of Eliphaz who bore *Kenaz* to him, Scripture is silent.⁵

The name *Kenaz* (the base of *Kenizi*) is a proper name and is used for three people in Scripture:

1. *Kenaz* is the name of Eliphaz's fifth son and is listed in five places.⁶
2. *Kenaz* is used for Othniel's father in five places. Of course, Othniel is Caleb's younger brother (Josh. 1:13; Judg. 3:9), so it speaks of the same person, their father Jephunneh. It's interesting to note that Scripture calls Caleb's father *haKenizi* all three times that it speaks of Jephunneh, while all five times when it speaks of Othniel's father, who we know has to be Jephunneh, it doesn't speak of him as Jephunneh, but calls him *Kenaz*.⁷
 - a. *Kenaz* is seen as *Kenizzite* (*Kenizi* in Hebrew) in reference to Caleb's father, Jephunneh the Kenizzite or Jephunneh the *Kenizi*.⁸
3. *Kenaz* is also seen as a proper name for one of Caleb's grandsons (1st Chron. 4:15).

In eight places the Scriptures speak of the father of Caleb and Othniel as either *Kenaz* or *the Kenizi*. It

⁴ “קנזי,” Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, authors; M. Richardson, translator, *The Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Accordance Bible Software; Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2011), p. 3:1114. The Hebrew for Kenizzite is *Kenizi*, while the gentilic form is *Kenaz*. It's the same name.

⁵ Although Eliphaz's wife isn't mentioned in Scripture his concubine is. She was Timna and she's mentioned because she gave birth to Amalek (Gen. 36:12) whose descendants would become the mortal enemy of Israel (Exodus 17:1f; Dt. 25:17-19) even though they were literally cousins of Israel.

⁶ Gen. 36:11, 15, 42; 1st Chron. 1:36, 53.

⁷ In Joshua 15:17; Judges 1:13; 3:9, 11 it speaks of 'Othniel the son of *Kenaz*,' using *Kenaz* instead of the name of Jephunneh, while in 1st Chron. 4:13 it says, 'The sons of *Kenaz* were Othniel...'

⁸ Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6, 14. The difference between *Kenaz* and *Kenizi* is about the same as saying that 'John is a Jew,' or that 'John is Jewish.'

can't be proven from Scripture, though, that Caleb was a descendent of the Kenizzites of Genesis 15:19 because *Kenaz* can be just a name for a person with no lineage to the Kenizzites, as *Kenaz*, the son of Eliphaz reveals. Caleb and Othniel are mentioned 38 times in Scripture, but there's no lineage before their father Jephunneh,⁹ so it's not possible from that vantage point to determine who Jephunneh's father or grandfather, etc., were, which means that there is no Scripture to support a lineage from Caleb to the Kenizzites of Gen. 15:19.

Jephunneh *the Kenizzite* (*haKenizi*) seems to be a description of *who* Jephunneh was rather than a tie-in to the ethnic group called the Kenizzites (Gen. 15:19). *Easton's Bible Dictionary* says that *kenaz* means 'hunter.'¹⁰ The *NIV Bible Dictionary* and *Nave's Topical Bible*¹¹ state that *kenaz* means 'hunting.' Therefore, it seems that the designation of Jephunneh 'the Kenizzite' (*haKenizi*) means that he was given the appellation of 'the hunter.' That's also most likely why Eliphaz named his son *Kenaz* (hunter). This doesn't link Jephunneh to the ethnic group called the Kenizzites anymore than *Kenaz*, the son of Eliphaz, could be said to come from the ethnic group of the Kenizzites. In other words, the term is a description, title or a name that anyone could have apart from that ethnic group.

Caleb's father, having the term 'the hunter' as part of who he was known as, cannot be used to link him to the ethnic group called the Kenizzites (which means 'hunters') anymore than one can say that King David and King Louis the VIII of France (1223-1226) came from the same lineage because both are called *kings*, or that Joe Louis and Muhammed Ali came from the same lineage because both were heavyweight *boxing* champions, or that Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays came from the same lineage because both were famous American *baseball* players.

There isn't a single Scripture to support a lineage of Jephunneh to the ethnic group called the Kenizzites in Gen. 15:19, and since the appellation of *the Kenizzite* for Jephunneh's father simply means 'the hunter,' it should not be used to link Jephunneh to the ethnic group called the Kenizzites. Also, there is not a single Scripture that speaks of Caleb as a Gentile, or having come from Gentile lineage, but there is Scripture that speaks of Caleb as a Hebrew, a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah. Therefore, one cannot use Caleb as an example of a Gentile losing his ethnicity and becoming a Hebrew.¹² Caleb, was from the lineage and Tribe of Judah, as Scripture speaks of:

'from the Tribe of *Judah*, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.' (Numbers 13:6)

"Then the *Sons of Judah* drew near to Joshua in Gilgal, and *Caleb*, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, said to him, 'You know the word which Yahveh spoke to Moses, the man of God, concerning you and me in Kadesh-barnea.' (Joshua 14:6)

⁹ In 1st Chron. 2:18 Caleb's father is listed as Hezron. This is very interesting because we know his father was Jephunneh, but it may give some insight into Caleb's ancestry because sometimes Scripture skips over a father or two and doesn't list them. If that's the case, then this is just another confirmation that Caleb and Othniel weren't of Gentile stock, but of Hebrew lineage because Hezron is a Hebrew name (Gen. 46:9) and it's seen as a grandson of Judah, the son of Jacob (Gen. 46:12; Ruth 4:18; 1st Chron. 2:18). This would confirm the Scriptures that state that Caleb was of the Tribe of Judah (Num. 13:6; Josh. 14:6) and also give us his Hebrew lineage.

¹⁰ "Kenaz," *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, n.p.

¹¹ John R. Kohlenberger, ed., *The NIV Compact Nave's Topical Bible* (Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), n.p.

¹² This article completes a series on the Gentile believer *remaining* a Gentile in the Kingdom of Yeshua:

1. *Gentile Circumcision?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Gentile-Circumcision.pdf>;
2. *Is the Gentile Now a Jew?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Is-the-Gentile-Now-a-Jew.pdf> and,
3. *Luke the Jew?* at <http://seedofabraham.net/Luke-the-Jew.pdf>.

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