

Kenites

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The Kenites (named after their eponym Cain) in the HB/OT designate a non-Israelite tribe or clan located in southern Judah during pre- and early-Monarchic times that was friendly towards Israel. Due to the fragmentary and divergent evidence available, which is (almost completely) restricted to the HB/OT, any historical conclusions require great caution.

According to biblical narrative, the Kenites never appear later than in the Davidic period. Their main territory lies in the Negev south of the Judean hill country (Gen 15:19; Josh 15:57; 1 Sam 27:10; 30:29; see Judg 1:16–17 [area south to Arad], and also the city *Qyn[h]* – possibly *Khirbet Ghazze* – near Arad [Arad-Ostr. 24.12, cf. Renz: 391 and Josh 15:22]; see also 1 Chr 2:55 [Kenites in Jabez]; Num 24:21 [“rock-nest” perhaps pointing to the Aravah]). A second (sub-)group is attested in the Jezreel valley (Judg 4:11, 17; 5:24: Heber the Kenite dwelling in Zaananim near Kedesh). Historically, these biblical attestations can be best explained by connecting them by way of their affinity to metallurgy which was common to both branches, i.e., a functional relationship explained genealogically (see also the etiology in Gen 4, esp. v.22: *Qayin*: “smith” [Aram. *gyn*: “smith” rather than Heb. **qayin* I: “lance, spear”]). Besides the semi-nomadic lifestyle generally acknowledged on the basis of the HB/OT, this connection to metalwork is the most characteristic feature of the Kenites and is in perfect accord with semi-nomads, i.e., “itinerant copper-smiths” (see differently Kalimi: 387–89). From this point of view, it seems likely that at least the southern branch was involved with copper mining in the Aravah region (esp. in Timna; see also the iconographic depictions from MB-Beni Hasan [Staubli: 31–35 and ill. 15]), which suffered a massive set-

back during the 11th century and resulted in migratory movements of groups such as the Kenites. This would explain the disparate settlements mentioned in the HB. In any case, the southern branch of the Kenites seems to have assimilated within Judah at a relatively early point in the (post-Davidic) period. Despite their assimilation, the HB/OT has retained a positive image of them.

An analysis of religious- and theological-historical dimensions of the Kenites with their Israelite-friendly image allows their most important trait to come to the forefront. Besides 1 Sam 15:6 (see also Num 24:21) it is also attested in Judg 1:16; 4:11 (see 4:17; 5:24; Num 10:29–32) that Moses' father-in-law was identified as a Kenite (instead of Midianite). This is presumably, however, a secondary development, nostrifying the Midianite inheritance at a point when anti-Midianite sentiment became prevalent. Originally though, the Midianites had a close and friendly relationship to the Israelites (Exod 2:15–3:1 etc.) and probably played a crucial role in connecting the oldest reference to YHWH with Moses and Israel. This very convincing claim is the so-called Kenite (cf. Mondriaan) or Midianite hypothesis (see also “Midian, Midianites”).

Bibliography: ■ Kalimi, I., “Three Assumptions About the Kenites,” ZAW 100 (1988) 386–93. ■ Knauf, E. A., *Midian* (ADPV 10; Wiesbaden 1988). ■ Mondriaan, M. E., “Who Were the Kenites?” OTE 24 (2011) 414–30. ■ Renz, J./W. Röellig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik: Die althebräischen Inschriften* (Darmstadt 1995). ■ Staubli, T., *Das Image der Nomaden im Alten Israel und in der Ikonographie seiner sesshaften Nachbarn* (OBO 107; Fribourg/Göttingen 1991).

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