

Jews and Arabs Descended from Canaanites

DNA analysis, from bodies found at several sites, explains more than half of ancestry

[Jonathan Laden](#) [Biblical Archeology Review](#) June 10, 2020



After examining the DNA of 93 bodies recovered from archaeological sites around the southern Levant, the land of Canaan in the Bible, researchers have concluded that modern populations of the region are descendants of the ancient Canaanites. Most modern Jewish groups and the Arabic-speaking groups from the region show at least half of their ancestry as Canaanite.

In [the study](#), published in *Cell*, the researchers explain that they used existing DNA analysis of 20 individuals, from sites in Israel and Lebanon, and then added 73 more, taking DNA from the bones of individuals found at Tel Megiddo, Tel Abel Beth Maacah and Tel Hazor (Northern Israel), Yehud (central Israel) and Baq'ah (central Jordan). By first eliminating individuals closely related to other individuals in the sample, then comparing the remaining 62 DNA samples against a dataset of 1,663 modern individuals, they were able to establish the genetic link to the modern populations. The ethnic groups either still living where Canaan once dominated, or from that area prior to moving elsewhere, are largely descended from the Canaanites.



Canaanite relief in basalt depicting a lion and a lioness at play, 14th century BC, from Beit She'an, Israel Museum, Jerusalem (Wikimedia commons)

Canaanite culture was dominant in the Southern Levant during the Bronze Age (3,500-1,200 B.C.E.) As Iron Age I began, the Canaanite city-states faded. The Israelites self-identified as a separate group. As Volkmar Fritz speculates in [Israelites and Canaanites](#), the Israelites may have formed distinct living arrangements, establishing small villages on peripheral land not previously settled and living mostly in four-room houses. Ultimately, the Israelites formed the states of Israel and Judah, while other biblical states, Ammon, Moab, Aram-Damascus, and Phoenician city-states, emerged. Today, the region consists of Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and southwest Syria.

The study in Cell not only establishes that the ancient Israelites were descended from the Canaanites, but also establishes that the Canaanite people across the separate city-states of the southern Levant, and over a period of 1,500 years, were a genetically cohesive people.