

Moabites

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The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Moab being the son of Lot and his older daughter.

[Ammon was the son of Lot with his younger daughter, thus the Ammonites. The Edomites were descended from Esau, the son of Isaac. The Amalekites were descended from Eliphaz, a son of Esau.]

Geography of Moab The territory of Moab is usually described in three parts:

- The *field of Moab*, enclosed by natural fortifications. This portion was bounded on the north by the gorge of the Arnon river; on the west by the Dead Sea cliffs; on the south and east by a circle of hills which have no natural opening except for the flow of the Arnon.
- The *land of Moab* was the more open country from the Arnon north to the hills of Gilead.
- The *plains of Moab* was the district in the low, tropical depths of the valley of the Jordan River.

When the Israelites came up from Egypt, they approached Moab from the southeast, outside the bordering circle of hills. They were forbidden to disturb the Moabites in their enjoyment of the land which they had taken from the Emim. Deut. 2:9-11

Therefore, they applied for permission to pass through the territory of Moab. This was refused, so they went around its borders.

History of Moab Although the Moabites refused passage to the Israelites, Moab did not fight against Israel while they were neighbors for more

than 300 years. In fact, Deut. 2:29 makes no complaint about hostility either of Edom or Moab, only mentioning that Moab lacked hospitality and hired Balaam to curse Israel.

There is no hint that either nation hindered Israel in its passage along the borders, although Edom did stand ready to fight should its territory be encroached upon. Deut. 2:29 indicates that trade was carried on.

The Moabites were much too friendly, in fact, sending their daughters to cultivate friendly relations with Israelite men and to entice them into idolatry. Num. 25:2 (note feminine of verb)

The Moabites peaceful character and their many possessions may account for the terror of Moabite King Balak at the approach of the Israelites. He took rather special means to guard against them. Instead of sending his army out, he first consulted with the leaders of Midian. Moab and Midian were kin by virtue of their common descent from Terah, Moab through Lot from Haran, and Midian from Abraham by Keturah. Gen. 11:27; 19:37; 25:2

The result of this conference was that the two nations united in sending for the prophet Balaam. Num. 25

The Exclusion of Moab The exclusion of Moabites and Ammonites from the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation was not on account of hostility but because of their lack of hospitality and the hiring of Balaam. Deut. 23:4 There is no direct prohibition of marriage with Moabites. These rules were made against *Canaanites*.

The Time of the Judges After the conquest of Canaan, Moab oppressed Israel for 18 years. It is significant, however, that *“The Lord strengthened Eglon, the King of Moab, against Israel ... and he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek and went out and smote Israel”* (Judges 3:12,13). The Moabite conquest ended with the assassination of Eglon by the judge Ehud.

The Time of the Kingdom We read that Saul fought against Moab, 1 Sam. 14:47.

Early relations seemed fairly friendly, however, as we see in Ruth.

David, when being pressed by Saul, entrusted the safe keeping of his father and mother to the king of Moab. But, twenty years later, for some reason, he treated the Moabites hard and took spoil from them for the treasure of the temple, 2 Sam. 8:2. The Moabites became tributary to David. Later they again sent their daughters, this time to Saul to lead him astray.

The Moabites were still paying tribute in the days of Ahab, 2 Kings 3:4,5. After Ahab, they revolted. They collected an army (2 Chron. 20) of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, and attacked Judah, then ruled by Jehoshaphat. Judah met them with prayer and praise of God. God caused dissension to break out in the camp of the enemy. The Moabites and Ammonites first slaughtered the Edomites, then each other, and Israel gathered the spoil.

Moabites continued to appear in Bible accounts and in historical accounts. [See Unger’s Bible Handbook] Josephus described Moab as still a great nation in Roman times. The name “Moab” remained in history until about 380 AD in the time of Eusebius.

The language of Moab was a dialect of Hebrew, differing from Biblical Hebrew only in some small details.

THE RELIGION OF MOAB Chemosh (ke-mosh) was the national deity of Moab. This god was honored with cruel and perverse practices including child sacrifices like those of Molech. The account on the Moabite Stone (see below) states that “the anger of Chemosh” is the reason for Israel’s subjugation of Moab.

Solomon made a fatal mistake of rearing an altar to Chemosh in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7, and this

abomination was not destroyed until almost 300 years later during the purge carried out by Josiah (2 Kings 23:13).

THE MOABITE STONE The Moabite Stone is an important memorial of alphabetic writing. Erected by Mesha, king of Moab, to record his successful revolt against Israel and to give honor to the god Chemosh for his victory. The stone was set up about 850 BC

The stone was discovered in 1868 by a German missionary, Klein. He was on a visit to Moab and was told by an Arab sheik that there was an inscribed stone lying at the town of Dhiban, the ancient city of Dibon. On examining the stone he found it to be a stele of black basalt, round at the top and nearly four feet in length and two in width. There were thirty-four lines of inscription using the Phoenician alphabet.

Klein was not fully aware of the importance of his find. He returned to Jerusalem and informed the Prussian consulate of the discovery. The Prussians made plans to obtain the stone.

The next year, a member of the French consulate, M. Clearmont-Ganneau, heard that the stone was still lying in the open, exposed to the weather. He determined to get possession of it for France. He sent Arab natives to get “squeezes” made and to arrange the purchase of the stone.

These Arabs quarreled in the presence of some of the inhabitants of Dhiban, but an impression was made and delivered to the French consulate.

But the bidding for the stone, the arguments, and the rivalry between the Prussians and the French aroused in both Moabite and Turkish officials a good idea of the stone’s value. So the governor of the province naturally demanded the prize for himself. The Arabs of Dhiban, rather than lose the stone for nothing to the governor of their province, lighted a fire under it, and when it was very hot, poured cold water on it and shivered it into pieces.

The pieces of the Moabite stone were distributed to various families in the area to put into their corn granaries as charms to protect from corn blight. A considerable number of these fragments have since been recovered, but without the squeeze which was taken when the stone was intact, it would have been impossible to fit many of them together.

The writing on the stone was deciphered in 1886 by two German professors who worked for weeks

in the Louvre, where the squeeze may still be seen. The inscription on the stone supplements and corroborates the history of King Mesha of Moab as recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27. The inscription is proof that the Moabites were akin to Israelites in lan-

guage as well as in race. The likeness between the languages of Moab and Israel extends beyond grammar and syntax. It is a likeness which exists also in thought.