

Moabite

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Mo'abite (Heb. *Moibi'*, מואָבִי, a Gentile from *Moab*, [De 23:24](#); [Ne 13:1](#); femr. [2](#), מואָבִיָּת, [Ch 24:26](#); or מואָבִיָּה, [Ru 1:22](#), etc.; plur. מואָבִיּוֹת, [Ru 1:4](#); [1Ki 11:1](#), a *Moabites*, or "woman of Moab;" once rendered "Moabitish," [Ru 2:6](#)), the designation of a tribe endesced from Moab the son of Lot, and consequently related to the Hebrews ([Ge 19:37](#)). In the following account of them we treat the subject at large.

I. *Locality and 'Early History.* — Zoar was the cradle of the race of Lot. Although the exact position of this town has not been determined, there is no doubt that it was situated on the south-eastern border of the Dead Sea. From this centre the brother-tribes spread themselves. Ammon (q.v.), whose disposition seems throughout to have been more roving and unsettled, went to the northeast and took possession of the pastures and waste tracts which lay outside the district of the mountains; that which in earlier times seems to have been known as Ham, and inhabited by the Zuzim or Zamzummim ([Ge 14:5](#); [De 2:20](#)). The Moabites, whose habits were more settled and peaceful, remained nearer their original seat. The rich highlands which crown the eastern side of the chasm of the Dead Sea, and extend northwards as far as the foot of the mountains of Gilead, appear at that early date to have borne a name, which in its Hebrew form is presented to us as Shaveh-Kiriathaimn, and to have been inhabited by a branch of the great race of the Rephaim. Like the Horim before the descendants of Esau, the Avim before the Philistines, or the

indigenous races of the New World before the settlers from the West, this ancient people, the Emim, gradually became extinct before the Moabites, who thus obtained possession of the whole of the rich elevated tract referred to a district forty or fifty miles in length by ten or twelve in width, the celebrated Belka and Kerak of the modern Arabs, the most fertile on that side of Jordan, no less eminently fitted for pastoral pursuits than the maritime plains of Philistia and Sharon, on the west of Palestine, are for agriculture. With the highlands they occupied also the lowlands at their feet, the plain which intervenes between the slopes of the mountains and the one perennial stream of Palestine, and through which they were enabled to gain access at pleasure to the fords of the river, and thus to the country 'beyond it.' Of 'the valuable district of the highlands they were not allowed to retain entire possession. The warlike Amorites — either forced from their original seats on the west, or perhaps lured over by the increasing prosperity of the young nation — crossed the Jordan and overran the richer portion of the territory on the north, driving Moab back to his original position behind the natural bulwark of the Arnon. The plain of the Jordan valley, the hot and humid atmosphere of which had perhaps no attraction for the Amoritish mountaineers, appears to have remained in the power of Moab. When Israel reached the boundary of the country, this contest had only very recently occurred. Sihon, the Amoritish king under whose command Heshbon had been taken, was still reigning there the ballads commemorating the event were still fresh in the popular mouth (Nu 21:27-30).

Of these events, which extended over a period, according to the received Bible chronology, of not less than 500 years, from the destruction of Sodom to the arrival of Israel on the borders of the Promised Land, we obtain the above outline

only from the fragments of ancient documents, which are found embedded in the records of Numbers and Deuteronomy (Nu 21:26-30; De 2:10-11).

⇒ "Moabites." topical outline.

The position into which the Moabites were driven by the incursion of the Amorites was a very circumscribed one, in extent not so much as half that which they, had lost. But on the other hand its position was much more secure, and it was well suited for the occupation of a people whose disposition was not so warlike as that of their neighbors. It occupied the southern half of the high table-lands which rise above the eastern side of the Dead Sea. On every side it was strongly fortified by nature. On the north was the tremendous chasm of the Arnon. On the west it was limited by the precipices, or more accurately the cliffs, which descend almost perpendicularly to the shore of the lake, and are intersected only by one or two steep and narrow passes. Lastly, on the south and east it was protected by a halfcircle of hills, which open only to allow the passage of a branch of the Arnon and another of the torrents which descend to the Dead Sea.

It will be seen from the foregoing description that the territory occupied by Moab at the period of its greatest extent, before the invasion of the Amorites, divided itself naturally into three distinct and independent portions. Each of these portions appears to have had its name, by which it is almost invariably designated.

⇒ Bible concordance for MOABITES.

(1) The enclosed "corner" or canton south of the Arnon was the "field of Moab" (Ru 1:1-2,6, etc.).

(2) The more open rolling country north of the Arnon, opposite Jericho, and up to the hills of Gilead, was the "land of Moab" (De 1:5; De 32:49, etc.).

⇒ See also the [International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#).

(3) The sunk district in the tropical depths of the Jordan valley, taking its name from that of the great valley itself — the Arabah — was the Arboth- Moab, the dry regions in the A.V. very incorrectly rendered the "plains of Moab" ([Nu 22:1](#) etc.).

II. Connection with the Israelites. — Outside of the hills, which enclosed the "field of Moab," or Moab proper. on the south-east, and which are at present called the Jebel Uru-Karaiyeh and Jebel el-Tarfuyeh, lay the vast pasture-grounds of the waste, uncultivated country, or "Midbar," which is described as "facing Moab" on the east ([Nu 21:11](#)). Through this latter district Israel appears to have approached the Promised Land. Some communication had evidently taken place, though of what nature it is impossible clearly to ascertain. For while in [De 2:28-29](#) the attitude of the Moabites is mentioned as friendly, this seems to be contradicted by the statement of [De 23:4](#); while in [Jg 11:17](#), again, Israel is said to have sent from Kadesh asking permission to pass through Moab — a permission which, like Edom, Moab refused. At any rate, the attitude perpetuated by the provisions of [De 23:3](#) — a provision maintained in full force by the latest of the Old-Testament reformers ([Ne 13:2,23](#)) — is one of hostility. See Noldeke, *Die Amalekiten*, etc. (Gitt. 1864), page 3. 1. But whatever the communication may have been, the result was that Israel did not traverse Moab, but, turning to the right, passed outside the mountains through the "wilderness," by the east side of the territory above described ([De 2:8](#); [Jg 11:18](#)), and finally took up a position in the country north of the Arnon, from which Moab had so lately been ejected. Here the headquarters of the nation remained for a considerable time while the conquest of Bashan was taking effect. It was during this period that the visit of Balaam took place. The whole of the country east of the Jordan, with the exception of

the one little corner occupied by Moab, was in possession of the invaders, and although at the period in question the main body had descended from the upper level to the plains of Shittim, the Arboth-Moab, in the Jordan valley, yet a great number must have remained on the upper level, and the towns up to the very edge of the ravine of the Arnon were still occupied by their settlements (Nu 21:24; Jg 11:26). It was a situation full of alarm for a nation which had already suffered so severely. In his extremity the Moabitish king, Balak — whose father Zippor was doubtless the chieftain who had lost his life in the encounter with Sihon (Nu 21:26) appealed to the Midianites for aid (Nu 22:2-4). With a metaphor highly appropriate both to his mouth and to the ear of the pastoral tribe he was addressing, he exclaims that "this people will lick up all round about us as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." What relation existed between Moab and Midian we do not know, but there are various indications that it was a closer one than would arise. merely from their common descent from Terah. The tradition of the Jews (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Nu 22:41 is that up to this time the two had been one nation, with kings taken alternately from each, and that Balak was a Midianite. This, however, is in contradiction to the statements of Genesis as to the origin of each people. The whole story of Balaam's visit and of the subsequent events, both in the original narrative of Numbers and in the remarkable statement of Jephthah- whose words as addressed to Ammonites must be accepted as literally accurate bears out the inference already drawn from the earlier history as to the pacific character of Moab.

The account of the whole of these transactions in the book of Numbers, familiar as we are with its phrases, perhaps hardly conveys an adequate idea of the extremity in which Balak found himself in his unexpected encounter with the new

nation and their mighty Divinity. We may realize it better (and certainly with gratitude for the opportunity) if we consider what that last dreadful agony was in which a successor of Balak was placed, when, all hope of escape for himself and his people being cut off, the unhappy Mesha immolated his own son on the wall of Kir-haraseth; and then remember that Balak in his distress actually proposed the same awful sacrifice — "his first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul" ([Mic 6:7](#)) — a sacrifice from which he was restrained only by the wise, the almost Christian ([Mt 9:13](#); [Mt 12:7](#)) counsels of Balaam. This catastrophe will be noticed in its proper place.

The connection of Moab with Midian, and the comparatively inoffensive character of the former, are shown in the narrative of the events which followed the departure of Balaam. The women of Moab are indeed said ([Nu 25:1](#)) to have commenced the idolatrous fornication which proved so destructive to Israel, but it is plain that their share in it was insignificant compared with that of Midian. It was a Midianitish woman whose shameless act brought down the plague on the camp, the Midianitish women were especially devoted to destruction by Moses ([Nu 25:16-18](#); [Nu 31:16](#)), and it was upon Midian that the vengeance was taken. Except in the passage already mentioned, Moab is not once named in the whole transaction. The latest date at which the two names appear in conjunction is found in the notice of the defeat of Midian "in the field of Moab" by the Edomitish king Hadad ben-Bedad, which occurred five generations before the establishment of the monarchy of Israel ([Ge 36:35](#); [1Ch 1:46](#)). By the Jewish interpreters — e.g. Solomon Jarchi in his commentary on the passage — this is treated as implying, not alliance, but war between Moab and Midian (comp, [1Ch 4:22](#)).

It is remarkable that Moses should have taken his view of the

Promised Land from a Moabitish sanctuary, and been buried in the land of Moab. It is singular, too, that his resting-place is marked in the Hebrew records only by its proximity to the sanctuary of that deity to whom in his lifetime he had been such an enemy. He lies in a ravine in the land of Moab, facing BethPeor, i.e., the abode of Baal-Peor ([De 34:6](#)).

2. After the conquest of Canaan the relations of Moab with Israel were of a mixed character. With the tribe of Benjamin, whose possessions at their eastern end were separated from those of Moab only by the Jordan, they had at least one severe struggle, in union with their kindred the Ammonites, and also, for this time only, the wild Amalekites from the south ([Jg 3:12-30](#)). The Moabitish king, Eglon, actually ruled and received tribute in Jericho for eighteen years, but at the end of that time he was killed by the Benjamitish hero Ehud, and the return of the Moabites being intercepted at the fords, a large number were slaughtered, and a stop put to such incursions on their part for the future. A trace of this invasion is visible in the name of Chephar-ha Ammonai, the "hamlet of the Ammonites," one of the Benjamitish towns; and another is possibly preserved even to the present day in the name of Mukhmas, the modern representative of Michmash, which is by some scholars believed to have received its name from Chemosh, the Moabitish deity. The feud continued with true Oriental pertinacity to the time of Saul. Of his slaughter of the Ammonites we have full details in 1 Samuel 11, and among his other conquests Moab is especially mentioned ([1Sa 14:47](#)). There is not, however, as we should expect, any record of it during Ishbosheth's residence at Mahanaim, on the east of Jordan. But while such were their relations to the tribe of Benjamin, the story of Ruth, on the other hand, testifies to the existence of a friendly intercourse between Moab and Bethlehem, one of the towns of Judah. Jewish tradition

(Targum Jonathan on Ru 1:4) ascribes the death of Mahlon and Chilion to punishment for having broken the commandment of [De 23:3](#), but no trace of any feeling of the kind is visible in the book of Ruth itself- which not only seems to imply a considerable intercourse between the two nations, but also a complete ignorance or disregard of the precept in question, which was broken in the most flagrant manner when Ruth became the wife of Boaz. By his descent from Ruth, David may be said to have had Moabitish blood in his veins. The relationship was sufficient, especially when combined with the blood-feud between Moab and Benjamin, already alluded to, to warrant his visiting the land of his ancestress, and committing his parents to the protection of the king of Moab, when hard pressed by Saul ([1Sa 23:3-4](#)). But here all friendly relation stops forever. The next time the name is mentioned is in the account of David's war, at least twenty years after the last-mentioned event ([2Sa 8:2](#); [1Ch 18:2](#)). The abrupt manner in which this war is introduced into the history is no less remarkable than the brief and passing terms in which its horrors are recorded. The account occupies but a few words in either Samuel or Chronicles, and yet it must have been for the time little short of a virtual extirpation of the nation. Two thirds of the people were put to death, while the remainder became bondmen, and were subjected to a regular tribute. An incident of this war is probably recorded in [2Sa 23:20](#), and [1Ch 11:22](#). The spoils taken from the Moabitish cities and sanctuaries went to swell the treasure acquired from the enemies of Jehovah, which David was amassing for the future Temple ([2Sa 8:11-12](#); [1Ch 18:11](#)). It was the first time that the prophecy of Balaam had been fulfilled — "Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of Ar," that is of Moab. So signal a vengeance can only have been occasioned by some act of

perfidy or insult, like that which brought down a similar treatment on the Ammonites (2 Samuel 10). But as to any such act the narrative is absolutely silent. It has been conjectured that the king of Moab betrayed the trust which David reposed in him, and either himself killed Jesse and his wife, or surrendered them to Saul.' But this, though not improbable, is nothing more than conjecture.

It must have been a considerable time before Moab recovered from so severe a blow. Of this we have evidence in the fact of its not being mentioned in the account of the campaign in which the Ammonites were subdued, when it is not probable they would have refrained from assisting their relatives had they been in a condition to do so. Throughout the reign of Solomon they no doubt shared in the universal peace which surrounded Israel; and the only mention of the name occurs in the statement that there were Moabites among the foreign women in the royal harem, and, as a natural consequence, that the Moabitish worship was tolerated, or perhaps encouraged (1Ki 11:1,7,33). The high place for Chemosh, "the abomination of Moab," was consecrated "on the mount facing Jerusalem," where it remained till its "defilement" by Josiah (2Ki 23:13), nearly four centuries afterwards.

3. At the disruption of the kingdom, Moab seems to have fallen to the northern realm, probably for the same reason that has been already remarked in the case of Eglon and Ehud—that the fords of Jordan lay within the territory of Benjamin, who for some time after the separation clung to its ancient ally, the house of Ephraim. But, be this as it may, at the death of Ahab, eighty years later, we find Moab paying him the enormous tribute, apparently annual, of 100,000 rams, and the same number of wethers with their fleeces; an amount which testifies at once to the severity of the terms imposed by Israel, and to the remarkable vigor of character

and wealth of natural resources which could enable a little country to raise year by year this enormous impost, and, at the same time support its own people in prosperity and affluence. This affluence is shown by the treasures which they left on the field of Berachoth (2Ch 20:25), no less than by the general condition of the country, indicated in the narrative of Joram's invasion; and in the passages of Isaiah and Jeremiah which are cited further on in this article. It is not surprising that the Moabites should have seized the moment of Ahab's death to throw off so burdensome a yoke but it is surprising that, notwithstanding such a drain on their resources, they were ready to incur the risk and expense of a war with a state in every respect far their superior. Their first step, after asserting their independence, was to attack the kingdom of Judah in company with their kindred the Ammonites, and, as seems probable, the Mehunim, a roving semi- Edomitish people from the mountains in the south-east of Palestine (2 Chronicles 20). The army was a huge, heterogeneous horde of ill-assorted elements. The route chosen for the invasion was round the southern end of the Dead Sea, thence along the beach; and by the pass of En-gedi to the level of the upper country. But the expedition contained within itself the elements of its own destruction. Before they reached the enemy dissensions arose between the heathen strangers and the children of Lot; distrust followed, and finally panic; and when the army of Jehoshaphat came in sight of them they found that they had nothing to do but to watch the extermination of one half the huge host by the other half, and to seize the prodigious booty which was left on the field. Disastrous as was this proceeding, that which followed was even still more so. As a natural consequence of the late events, Israel, Judah, and Edom united in an attack on Moab. For reasons which are not stated, but one of which we may

reasonably conjecture was to avoid the passage of the savage Edomites through Judah, the three confederate armies approached, not, as usual, by the north, but round the southern end of the Dead Sea, through the parched valleys of Upper Edom. As the host came near, the king of Moab, doubtless the same Mesha who threw off the yoke of Ahab, assembled the whole of his people, from the youngest who were of age to bear the sword-girdle ([2Ki 3:21](#)), on the boundary of his territory, probably on- the outer slopes of the line of hills which encircles the lower portion of Moab, overlooking the waste which extended below them towards the east (comp. [Nu 21:11](#) — "towards the sun-rising"). There they remained all night on the watch. With the approach of morning the sun rose suddenly above the horizon of the rolling plain, and as his level beams burst through the night-mists they revealed no masses of the enemy, but shone with a blood-red glare on a multitude of pools in the bed of the wady at their feet. They did not know that these pools had been sunk during the night by the order of a mighty prophet who was with the host of Israel, and that they had been filled by the sudden flow of water rushing from the distant highlands of Edom. To them the conclusion was inevitable: the army had, like their own on the late occasion, fallen out in the night; these red pools were the blood of the slain; those who were not killed had fled, and nothing stood between them and the pillage of the camp. The cry of "Moab to the spoil!" was raised. Down the slopes they rushed in headlong disorder. But not, as they expected, to empty tents; they found an enemy ready prepared to reap the result of his ingenious stratagem. Then occurred one of those scenes of carnage which can happen but once or twice in the existence of a nation. The Moabites fled back in confusion, followed and cut down at every step by their enemies. Far inwards did the pursuit reach, among the

cities and farms and orchards of that rich district; nor when the slaughter was over was the horrid work of destruction done. The towns' both fortified and unfortified, were demolished, and the stones strewed over the carefully-tilled fields. The fountains of water, the life of an Eastern land, were choked, and all timber of any size or goodness felled. Nowhere else do we hear of such sweeping desolation; the very besom of destruction passed over the land. At last the struggle collected itself at Kir-haraseth, apparently a newly-constructed fortress, which, if the modern Kerak — and there is every probability that they are identical — may well have resisted all the efforts of the allied kings in its native impregnability. Here Mesha took refuge with his family and with the remnants of his army. The heights around, by which the town is entirely commanded, were covered with slingers, who armed partly with the ancient weapon of David and of the Benjamites, partly perhaps with the newly-invented machines shortly to be famous in Jerusalem ([2Ch 26:15](#)) — discharged their volleys of stones on the town. At length the annoyance could be borne no longer. Then Mesha, collecting round him a forlorn hope of 700 of his best warriors, made a desperate sally, with the intention of cutting his way through to his special foe, the king of Edom. But the enemy were too strong for him, and he was driven back. And then came a fitting crown to a tragedy already so terrible. An awful spectacle amazed and horrified the besiegers. The king and his eldest son, the heir to the throne, mounted the wall, and, in the sight of the thousands who covered the sides of that vast amphitheatre, the father killed and burned his child as a propitiatory sacrifice to the cruel gods of his country. It was the same dreadful act to which, as we have seen, Balak had been so nearly tempted in his extremity. But the danger, though perhaps not really greater than his, was more

imminent; and Mesha had no one like Balaam at hand to counsel patience and submission to a mightier Power than Chemosh or Baal-Peor. *SEE MESHA.*

Hitherto, though able and ready to fight when necessary, the Moabites do not appear to have been a fighting people; perhaps, as suggested elsewhere, the Ammonites were the warriors of the nation of Lot. But this disaster seems to have altered their disposition, at any rate for a time. Shortly after these events we hear of "bands" — that is, pillaging, marauding parties — of the Moabites making their incursions into Israel in the spring, as if to spoil the early corn before it was fit to cut ([2Ki 13:20](#)). With Edom there must have been many a contest. One of these marked by savage vengeance — recalling in some degree the tragedy of Kir-haraseth — is alluded to by Amos ([Am 2:1](#)), where a king of Edom seems to have been killed and burned by Moab. This may have been one of the incidents of the battle of Kir-haraseth itself, occurring perhaps after the Edomites had parted from Israel, and were overtaken on their road home by the furious king' of Moab (Gesenius, *Jesaja*, 1:504); or, according to the Jewish tradition (Jerome, on [Am 2:1](#)), it was a vengeance still more savage because more protracted, and lasting even beyond the death of the king, whose remains were torn from his tomb, and thus consumed.

In the "Burden of Moab" pronounced by Isaiah (chapters 15, 16) we possess a document full of interesting details as to the condition of the nation at the time of the death of Ahaz, king of Judah, B.C. 726. More than a century and a half had elapsed since the great calamity to which we have just referred. In that interval Moab has regained all, and more than all, of his former prosperity, and has besides extended himself over the district which he originally occupied in the youth of the nation, and which was left vacant when the

removal of Reuben to Assyria, which had been begun by Pul in B.C. 770, was completed by Tiglath-pileser about the year 740 (1Ch 5:25-26). This passage of Isaiah cannot be considered apart from that of Jeremiah, ch. 48. The latter was pronounced more than a century later, about the year B.C. 600, ten or twelve years before the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, by which Jerusalem was destroyed. In many respects it is identical with that of Isaiah, and both are believed by the best modern scholars, on account of the archaisms and other peculiarities of language which they contain, to be adopted from a common source—the work of some much more ancient prophet. Isaiah ends his denunciation by a prediction — in his own words — that within three years Moab should be greatly reduced. This was probably with a view to Shalmaneser, who destroyed Samaria, and no doubt overran the other side of the Jordan in B.C. 725, and again in 723 (2Ki 17:3; 2Ki 18:9). The only event of which we have a record to which it would seem possible that the passage, as originally uttered by the older prophet, applied, is the above invasion of Pul, who, in commencing the deportation of Reuben, very probably at the same time molested Moab. The difficulty of so many of the towns of Reuben being mentioned as at that early day already in the possession of Moab may perhaps be explained by remembering that the idolatry of the neighboring nations — and therefore of Moab — had been adopted by the trans-Jordanic tribes for some time previously to the final deportation by Tiglath-pileser (see 1Ch 5:25), and that many of the sanctuaries were probably, even at the date of the original delivery of the denunciation, in the hands of the priests of Chemosh and Milcom. If, as Ewald (*Geseh.* 3:588) with much probability infers, the Moabites, no less than the Ammonites, were under the protection of the powerful Uzziah

(2Ch 26:8), then the obscure expressions of the ancient seer as given in Isa 16:1-5, referring to a tribute of lambs (comp. 2Ki 3:4) sent from the wild pasture-grounds south of Moab to Zion, and to protection and relief from oppression afforded by the throne of David to the fugitives and outcasts of Moab, acquire an intelligible sense. On the other hand, the calamities which Jeremiah describes may, have been inflicted in any one of the numerous visitations from the Assyrian army, under which these unhappy countries suffered at the period of his prophecy in rapid succession.

But the uncertainty of the exact dates referred to in these several denunciations does not in the least affect the interest or the value of the allusions they contain to the condition of Moab. They bear the evident stamp of portraiture by artists who knew their subject thoroughly. The nation appears in them as high-spirited, wealthy, populous, and even to a certain extent civilized, enjoying a wide reputation and popularity. With a metaphor which well expresses at once the pastoral wealth of the country and its commanding, almost regal position, but which cannot be conveyed in a translation, Moab is depicted as the strong sceptre (Isa 16:6; Jer 48:29), the beautiful staff, whose fracture will be bewailed by all about him, and by all who know him. In his cities we discern a "great multitude" of people living in "glory," and in the enjoyment of great "treasure," crowding the public squares, the housetops, and the ascents and descents of the numerous high places and sanctuaries where the "priests and princes" of Chemosh or Baal-Peor minister to the anxious devotees. Outside the town lie the "plentiful fields," luxuriant as the renowned Carmel—the vineyards, and gardens of "summer fruits" — the harvest is in course of reaping, and the "hay is stored in its abundance," the vineyards and the presses are crowded with peasants, gathering and treading the grapes, the land resounds with the

clamor of the vintagers. These characteristics contrast very favorably with any traits recorded of Ammon, Edom, Midian, Amalek, the Philistines, or the Canaanitish tribes. And since the descriptions we are considering are adopted by certainly two, and probably three prophets — Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the older seer extending over a period of nearly 200 years, we may safely conclude that they are not merely temporary circumstances, but were the enduring characteristics of the people. In this case there can be no doubt that among the pastoral people of Syria, Moab stood next to Israel in all matters of material wealth and civilization.

It is very interesting to remark the feeling which actuates the prophets in these denunciations of a people who, though the enemies of Jehovah, were the blood relations of Israel. Half the allusions of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the passages referred to must forever remain obscure. We shall never know who the "lords of the heathen" were who, in that terrible night, laid waste and brought to silence the prosperous Ar-Moab and Kir-Moab; nor the occasion of that flight over the Arnon, when the Moabitish women were huddled together at the ford, like a flock of young birds, pressing to cross to the safe side of the stream — when the dwellers in Aroer stood by the side of the high-road which passed their town, and eagerly questioning the fugitives as they hurried up, "What is done?" — received but one answer from all alike — "All is lost! Moab is confounded and broken down!" Many expressions also, such as the "weeping of Jazer," the "heifer of three years old," the "shadow of Heshbon," the "lions," must remain obscure. But nothing can obscure or render obsolete the tone of tenderness and affection which makes itself felt in a hundred expressions throughout these precious documents. Ardently as the prophesying for the destruction of the enemy of his country and of Jehovah, and earnestly as he curses the man "that

doeth the work of Jehovah deceitfully, that keepeth back his sword from blood," yet he is constrained to bemoan and lament such dreadful calamities to a people so near him both in blood and locality. His heart mourns — it sounds like pipes — for the men of Kir-heres; his heart cries out, it sounds like a harp for Moab. Isaiah recurs to the subject in another passage of extraordinary force, and of fiercer character than before, viz. 25:10-12. Here the extermination, the utter annihilation of Moab is contemplated by the prophet with triumph, as one of the first results of the re-establishment of Jehovah on Mount Zion: "In this mountain shall the hand of Jehovah rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw-the straw of his own threshing-floors at Madmenaah is trodden down for the dunghill. And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them namely, of the Moabites — as one that swimmeth spreads forth his hands to swim, buffet following buffet, right and left, with terrible rapidity, as the strong swimmer urges his way forward; and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands. "And the fortress of Misgab-thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, and bring to the ground, to the dust." If, according to the custom of interpreters, this and the preceding chapter (24) are understood as referring to the destruction of Babylon, then this sudden burst of indignation towards Moab is extremely puzzling. But, if the passage is examined with that view, it will perhaps be found to contain some expressions which suggest the possibility of Moab having been at least within the ken of the prophet, even though not in the foreground of his vision, during a great part of the passage. The Hebrew words rendered "city" in 25:2 two entirely distinct terms are positively, with a slight variation, the names of the two chief Moabitish strongholds, the same which are mentioned in 15:1, and one of which is in the Pentateuch a synonym for the entire

nation of Moab. In this light verse 2 may be read as follows: "For thou, hast made of Ar a heap; of Kir the defenced a ruin; a palace of strangers no longer is Ar, it shall never be rebuilt." The same words are found in verses 10 and 12 of the preceding chapter, in company *with chutsoth* (A.Vers. "streets"), which we know from [Nu 22:39](#) to have been the name of a Moabite town. *SEE KIRJATH-HUZOTH*. A distinct echo of them is again heard in [Nu 25:3-4](#); and, finally, in [Nu 26:1,5](#) there seems to be yet another reference to the same two towns, acquiring new force from the denunciation which closes the preceding chapter: "Moab shall be brought down, the fortress and the walls of Misgab shall be laid low; but in the land of Judah this song shall be sung, 'Our Ar, our city, is strong... Trust in the Lord Jehovah, who bringeth down those that dwell on high: the lofty Kir, he layeth it low,'" etc. It is perhaps an additional corroboration of this view to notice that the remarkable expressions in [24:17](#), "Fear, and the pit, and the snare," etc., actually occur in Jeremiah ([Jer 48:43](#)), in his denunciation of Moab, embedded in the old prophecies out of which, like [Isa 15:9](#) this passage is compiled, and the rest of which had certainly, as originally uttered, a direct and even exclusive reference to Moab.

Between the time of Isaiah's denunciation and the destruction of Jerusalem we have hardly a reference to Moab. Zephaniah, writing in the reign of Josiah, reproaches them ([Zep 2:8-10](#)) for their taunts against the people of Jehovah, but no acts of hostility are recorded either on the one side or the other.

From one passage in Jeremiah ([Jer 25:9-11](#)), delivered in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, just before the first appearance of Nebuchadnezzar, it is apparent that it was the belief of the prophet that the nations surrounding Israel — and Moab among the rest — were on the eve of devastation by the Chaldaeans, and of a captivity for seventy years (see verse 11),

from which, however, they should eventually be restored to their own country (verse 12, and [Jer 48:47](#)). From another record of the events of the same period, or of one just subsequent ([2Ki 24:2](#)), it would appear, however, that Moab made terms with the Chaldeans, and for a time acted in concert with them in harassing and plundering the kingdom of Jehoiakim.

Four or five years later, in the first year of Zedekiah ([Jer 27:1](#)), these hostilities must have ceased, for there was then a regular intercourse between Moab and the court at Jerusalem (verse 3), possibly, as Bunsen suggests (*Bibelwerk, Propheten*, page 536), negotiating a combined resistance to the common enemy. The brunt of the storm must have fallen on Judah and Jerusalem. The neighboring nations, including Moab, when the danger actually arrived, probably adopted the advice of Jeremiah ([Jer 27:11](#)), and thus escaped, though not without much damage, yet without being carried away as the Jews were. That these nations did not suffer to the same extent as Judaea is evident from the fact that many of the Jews took refuge there when their own land was laid waste ([Jer 40:11](#)). Jeremiah expressly testifies that those who submitted themselves to the king of Babylon, though they would have to bear a severe yoke — so severe that their very wild animals would be enslaved yet: by such submission should purchase the privilege of remaining in their own country. The removal from home, so dreadful to the Shemitic mind, was to be the fate only of those who resisted ([Jer 27:10-11](#); [Jer 28:14](#)). This is also supported by the allusion of Ezekiel, a few years later, to the cities of Moab, cities formerly belonging to the Israelites, which, at the time when the prophet is speaking, were still flourishing, "the glory of the country," destined to become at a future day a prey to the Bene-kedem, the "men of the East" — the Bedouins of the great desert of the Euphrates

(Eze 25:8-11).

III. Later History. — After the return from the captivity, it was a Moabite, Sanballat of Horonaim, who took the chief part in annoying and endeavoring to hinder the operations of the rebuilders of Jerusalem (Ne 2:19; Ne 4:1; Ne 6:1; etc.). He confined himself, however, to the same weapons of ridicule and scurrility which we have already noticed Zephaniah resenting. From Sanballat's words (Ne 2:19) we should infer that he and his country were subject to "the king," that is the king of Babylon. During the interval since the return of the first caravan from Babylon the illegal practice of marriages between the Jews and the other people around, Moab among the rest, had become frequent. So far had this gone that the son of the high-priest was married to an Ammonitish woman. Even among the families of Israel who returned from the captivity was one bearing the name of PAHATH-MOAB (Ezr 2:6; Ezr 8:4; Ne 3:11; etc.), a name which must certainly denote a Moabitish connection, though to the nature of the connection no clue seems to have been yet discovered. By Ezra and Nehemiah the practice of foreign marriages was strongly repressed, and we never hear of it again becoming prevalent. In the book of Judith, the date of which is laid shortly after the return from the captivity (4:3), Moabites and Ammonites are represented as dwelling in their ancient seats, and as obeying the call of the Assyrian general. Their "princes" (ἄρχοντες) and "governors" (ἡγούμενοι) are mentioned (5:2; 7:8). The Maccabees, much as they ravaged the country of the Ammonites, do not appear to have molested Moab proper, nor is the name either of Moab or of any of the towns south of the Arnon mentioned throughout those books. Josephus not only speaks of the district in which Heshbon was situated as "Moabitis" (*Ant.* 13:15, 4; also *War*, 4:8, 2), but expressly says that even at the time he wrote they were a "very great

nation" (*Ant.* 1:11, 5). (See 5 Macc. 29:19.) Noldeke, in his recent work, *Ueber die Amalekiter und einige andere nachbar Silker der Israeliten* (Gottingen, 1864), page 3, insists that the final extinction of Ammonites and Moabites dates from the appearance of the Yemen tribes Salib and Gassan in the eastern districts of the Jordan. This would bring them down to about A.D. 200.

In the time of Eusebius (*Onomast.* Μωάβ), i.e., cir. A.D. 380, the name appears to have been attached to the district, as well as to the town of Rabbath-both of which were called Moab. It also lingered for some time in the name of the ancient Kir-Moab, which, as Charakmoba, is mentioned by Ptolemy (Reland, *Palest.* page 463), and as late as the Council of Jerusalem, A.D. 536, formed the see of a bishop under the same title (*ibid.* page 533). Since that time the modern name Kerak has superseded the older one, and no trace of Moab has been found either in records or in the country itself.

IV. Geography and Characteristics. — Like the other countries east of Jordan, Moab has until recently been very little visited by Europeans, and beyond its general characteristics hardly anything is known of it. Of the character of the face of the country travellers only give slight reports, and among these there is considerable variation even when the same district is referred to. Thus between Kerak and Rabba, Irby (page 141 *a*) found "a fine country," of great natural fertility, with "reapers at work and the corn luxuriant in all directions;" and the same district is described by Burckhardt as "very fertile, and large tracts cultivated" (*Syr.* July 15); while De Saulcy, on the other hand, pronounces that "from Shihan (six miles north of Rabba) to the Wady Kerak the country is perfectly bare, not a tree or a bush to be seen" (*Voyage*, 1:353); which, again, is contradicted by Seetzen, who not only found the soil very good, but

encumbered with wormwood and other shrubs (Seetzen, 1:410). These discrepancies are no doubt partly due to difference in the time of year and other temporary causes, but they are not essentially contradictory; for while the whole region has been denuded of all habitations and larger forms of vegetation, it is still a rich pasture-ground for the Bedouins who roam in every direction over it, and who likewise till its extensive fields of wheat and barley. In one thing all writers agree—the extraordinary number of ruins which are scattered over the country, and which, whatever the present condition of the soil, are a sure token of its wealth in former ages (Seetzen, 1:412). Some of the most remarkable of these have recently been described by Tristram. The whole country is undulating, and, after the general level of the plateau is reached, without any serious inequalities; and in this and the absence of conspicuous vegetation has a certain resemblance to the downs of the southern counties of England.

Of the *language* of the Moabites we know nothing, or next to nothing. In the few communications recorded as taking place between them and the Israelites no interpreter is mentioned (see Ruth; [1Sa 22:3-4](#); etc;). From the origin of the nation and other considerations we may perhaps conjecture that their language was more a dialect of Hebrew than a different tongue. This, indeed, would follow from the connection of Lot, their founder, with Abraham. It is likewise confirmed by the remarkable inscription recently discovered. *SEE MESHHA*. The narrative of Numbers 22-24 must be founded on a Moabitish chronicle, though in its present condition doubtless much altered from what it originally was before it came into the hands of the author of the book of Numbers. No attempt seems yet to have been made to execute the difficult but interesting task of examining the record with the view of restoring it to its pristine form. The following are the names of

Moabitish persons preserved in the Bible—probably Hebraized in their adoption into the Bible records; of such a transition we seem to have a trace in Shomer and Shimrith (see below): Zippor, Balak, Eglon, Ruth, Orpah (עֲרַפָּה), Mesha (מִישַׁע), Ithmah (1Ch 11:46), Shomer (2Ki 12:21), or Shimrith (2Ch 24:26), Sanballat. Add to these—Emim, the name by which they called the Rephaim who originally inhabited their country, and whom the Ammonites called Zamzummim or Zuzim; Chemosh, or Chemish (Jer 48:7), the deity of the nation. Of names of places the following may be mentioned: Moab, with its compounds, Sedd-Moab; the fields of Moab (A.V. "the country of Moab"); Arboth Moab, the deserts (A.V. "the plains") of Moab, that is, the part of the Arabah occupied by the Moabites; ham Mishor, the high undulating country of Moab proper (A.V. "the plain"); Ar, or Ar-Moab (אֲרָ) — this Gesenius conjectures to be a Moabitish form of the word which in Hebrew appears as Ir (עִיר, a city); Arnon the river (אֲרָנוֹ); Bamoth Baal, Beer Elim, Beth-diblathaim, Dibon or Dimon, Eglaim, or perhaps Eglath Shelishiyba (Isa 15:5), Horonaim, Kiriathaim, Kirjath: huzoth (Nu 33:39; comp. Isa 24:11), Kirharaseth, -haresh, -heres; Kir-Moab, Luhith, Medeba, Nimrim, or Nimrah, Nobah, or Nophah (Nu 21:30), hap-Pisgah, hap-Peor, Shaveh-Kariathaim (?), Zophim, Zoar. It should be noticed how large a proportion of these names end in *im*.

For the *religion* of the Moabites, *SEE CHEMOSH; SEE MOLECHI; SEE PEOR*.

Of their *habits* and customs we have hardly a trace. The gesture employed by Balak when he found that Balaam's interference was fruitless — "he smote his hands together" — is not mentioned again in the Bible, but it may not on that account have been peculiar to the Moabites. Their mode of mourning, viz., cutting off the hair at the back of the head and

cropping the beard ([Jer 48:37](#)), is one which they followed in common with the other non-Israelitish nations, and which was forbidden to the Israelites ([Le 21:5](#)), who indeed seem to have been accustomed rather to leave their hair and beard disordered and untrimmed when in grief (see [2Sa 19:24](#); [2Sa 14:2](#)).

V. Literature. — As above remarked, through fear of the predatory and mischievous Arabs that people it, few of the numerous travellers in Palestine have ventured to explore it (see Busching's *Asia*, pages 507, 508). Seetzen, who, in February and March, 1806, not without danger of losing his life, undertook a tour from Damascus down to the south of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and thence to Jerusalem, was the first to shed a new and altogether unexpected light upon the topography of this region. He found a multitude of places, or at least of ruins of places, still bearing the old names, and thus has set bounds to the perfectly arbitrary designations of them on the old charts (see U.I. Seetzen's *Reisen*, etc., von Prof. Kruse, etc., 1:405-26; 2:320-77; also the editor's notes thereon in volume 4). From June to September 1812, Burckhardt made the same tour from Damascus beyond the Jordan down to Kerak; whence he advanced over Wady Mousa, or the ancient Petra (which he was the first European traveller to visit), to the bay of Aila, and thence went to Cairo (*Travels in the Holy Land and Syria*, Lond. 1822; see also the notes of Gesenius to the German translation EWeimar, 1824], 2:1061-64). A party of English gentlemen — captains Irby and Mangles, Mr. Bankes and Mr. Legh — passed through the land of Moab in returning from Petra in 1818 (*Travels in Egypt*, etc. [1822, 8vo; 1847, 12mo], chapter 8; see also Legh's Supplement to Dr. Macmichael's *Journey from Moscow to Constantinople* [1819]). The northern parts of the country were visited by Mr. Buckingham, and more lately by Mr.

George Robinson and by lord Lindsay (see also the plates to Laborde's new work, *Voyage en Orient*). Kerak, the capital of the country, was penetrated by the party in command of Lieut. Lynch (*Expedition to the Dead Sea* [1849]); and the region was partially examined by M. De Saulcy, January 1851 (*Voyage autour de la Mer Morte*, Paris, 1853; also translated into English, Lond. and N. York, 1853). Tristram, however, was the first who really explored it accurately (*Land of Moab*, Lond. and N. York, 1873), and the American engineers of the Palestine Exploration Society have triangulated the northern portion of it. Several parties of tourists have also traversed it in various directions lately. See generally Gesenius, *Comment. on Isa. 15:16 Introduct.* translated by V.S. Tyler, with *Notes* by Moses Stuart, in *Biblical Repos.* for 1836, 7:107-124; Keith, *Evidence from Prophecy*, pages 153-165; and *Land of Israel*, pages 279-295; Kitto, *Pictorial Bible*, Notes to [De 2:2](#); Isa 16; Isa 17; Jer 43; H. Scharban, *Parerga philol. theol.* (Lubeck, 1723 sq.), part 3 and 4; G. Kohltreiff, *Gesch. d. Philist. u. Moab*, (atzeb. 1738). See also the *Quarterly Rev.* October 1873, art. 6; *Brit. and For. Ev. Rev.* January 1874. page 195; *Meth. Qu. Rev.* January 1874, page 174; *Luth. Ev. Rev.* January 1874, page 140. For a singular endeavor to identify the Moabites with the Druses, see Sir G.H. Rose's pamphlet, *The Afghans the Ten Tribes*, etc. (Lond. 1852); especially the statement therein of Mr. Wood, late British consul at Damascus (pages 154-157).