

## Old Testament Enemies of Israel

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### MIDIANITES

[MID ee un ites]-a nomadic people who were enemies of the Israelites in Old Testament times. The Midianites were distantly related to the Israelites, since they sprang from MIDIAN, one of the sons of Abraham. But they usually were foes rather than friends of the Hebrew people. Abraham sent the children of Midian "to the country of the east" (Gen 25:6) which probably included the desert fringes of Moab, Edom, and perhaps parts of the Sinai Peninsula. They are known thereafter in the Old Testament as one of the "people of the East" (Judg 6:3,33), or inhabitants of the desert regions of southern Syria and western Arabia.

The Midianites were at least loosely associated with others of this group, including the Ishmaelites (Gen 37:28; Judg 8:24). Midianite travelers bought Joseph from his brothers and resold him in Egypt (Gen 37:25-36). Moses married into a Midianite family (specifically an associated group known as the Kenites) in "the land of Midian" (Ex 2:15). His wife Zipporah and his father-in-law Jethro were Midianites (Ex 2:21; 3:1). But this was the last friendly connection the Israelites had with the Midianites.

After the time of Moses, the Midianites consistently opposed the Israelites. They joined with the Moabites, in whose territory they had partly settled, in hiring the prophet-magician Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22:4,7). At Moab, just before the conquest of Canaan, the Midianites were among those who practiced sexual immorality as part of the ritual of their idolatrous religion. They involved some of the Israelites in this idolatry, causing God's judgment to come upon His people (Num 25:1-9). Because of this the Midianites were singled out for destruction (Num 25:16-18).

Perhaps the most serious Midianite threat to Israel came during the days of the judges, about 1100 B.C., when Midianite warriors invaded Palestine. They came on camels, never before used in combat. The Israelites were driven into the hill country as the Midianites and other easterners raided their territory, plundering crops and cattle for seven years (Judg 6:1-6). Then God raised up Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites. He and the Ephraimites drove off the Midianites, capturing Oreb and Zeeb, two of their princes (Judg 7:24-25), and pursuing escapees across the Jordan River to the desert fringes where their kings Zebah and Zalmunna were captured (Judg 8:10-12). Gideon's great victory was mentioned in several later Old Testament passages as an example of God's deliverance of his people from oppression (Ps 83:9,11; Isa 9:4; 10:26)

### MOAB & MOABITES

[MOE abb] (perhaps of my father)-the name of a man and a nation (see Map 2, C-1) in the Old Testament:

1. A son of Lot by an incestuous union with his older daughter (Gen 19:37). Moab became an ancestor of the MOABITES.
2. A neighboring nation whose history was closely linked to the fortunes of the Hebrew people. Moab was situated along the eastern border of the Dead Sea, on the plateau between the Dead Sea and the Arabian desert. It was about 57 kilometers (35 miles) long and 40 kilometers (25 miles) wide. Although it was

primarily a high plateau, Moab also had mountainous areas and deep gorges. It was a fertile area for crops and herds. To the south and west of Moab was the nation of Edom; to the north was Ammon. After the Israelites invaded the land, the tribe of Reuben displaced the Moabites from the northern part of their territory and the tribe of Gad pushed the Ammonites eastward into the desert.

General History. Moab was inhabited from prehistoric times. The KING'S HIGHWAY, a major trade route from Syria to the Gulf of Aqabah, brought wealth and culture to Moab as early as 2500 B.C. Some time during the 15th century B.C., as the nomadic population settled down, the kingdom of Moab arose, along with the other kingdoms east of the Jordan River, such as Edom and Ammon. The Moabites built fortifications throughout their territory, especially on the south and east. Not long before the conquest of the region by the Hebrew people, Sihon, king of the Amorites, invaded Moab from the north and added much of Moab to his kingdom (Num 21:27-30).

The Israelite tribes of Reuben and Gad settled the northern part of the territory of Moab. During most of Israel's history, the Moabites were Israel's enemies. In the late eighth century B.C. Moab became subject to Assyria, like many other nations in the region. When the Assyrian Empire fell in 609 B.C., Arab invasions intensified, and the kingdom of Moab was taken. Thereafter Moab was occupied increasingly by nomadic Arabs, until the NABATEANS established a settled culture from the first century B.C. to A.D. 106. After that, the entire region was made into a Roman province.

Connections with Israel. Moab, founder of the Moabites, was a son of Lot by incest (Gen 19:30-38). Although the Moabites were of mixed ethnic stock, the influence of Moab's descendants among them was great enough to give the country its ancient name. The story in Gen 14 of the raid of Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and his fellow kings records the conquest of most of Moab about 2000 B.C.-1900 B.C.

Sihon's Amorite kingdom annexed much of Moab shortly before the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Num 21:17-29). After the Israelites defeated Sihon, Balak, the king of the relatively weak Moabites, joined with the Midianites in hiring the prophet-magician Balaam to curse Israel so the Israelites could be defeated (Num 22:1-20). Balaam's mission failed, but when the Israelites camped in Moab just before crossing the Jordan River, the women of Moab enticed the Israelites into a form of idolatry that involved ritual sexual immorality. This resulted in God's judgment against Israel (Num 25:1-9).

Moses saw the Promised Land from Moab's Mount Nebo (Num 27:12-23). Here he was buried after his death (Deut 34:6). From the region of Acacia Grove in northwest Moab, the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land (Josh 3:1). The tribes of Reuben and Gad actually settled in northern Moab (Num 32:1-37).

The nation of Israel was relatively weak during the period of the judges, after the conquest. Eglon, a king of Moab, began to oppress Israel, capturing territory east of the Jordan River as far as Jericho. Ehud the judge delivered Israel from Eglon (Judg 3:12-30). The events of the Book of Ruth occurred during this

same general period. Ruth, a Moabite woman, became an ancestor of King David and therefore of Jesus himself (Ruth 2:6; 4:13-22; Matt 1:5-16).

The Moabites also threatened Israel in the days of Israel's first king, Saul, who was apparently successful against them (1 Sam 14:47). Although David had some early friendships among the Moabites (1 Sam 22:3-4), he eventually conquered Moab (2 Sam 8:2). The Moabites remained subject to Israel until after Solomon's death.

Omri, king of Israel (885-874 B.C.), kept Moab under his control, as did his son Ahab (874-853 B.C.), until Ahab was so occupied with wars against Syria and Assyria that Moab broke free. This was described by King Mesha of Moab in his monument, the MOABITE STONE. King Jehoram of Israel, King Jehoshaphat of Judah, and the king of Edom joined forces to attack Moab about 849 B.C. But they failed to conquer the Moabites because of a superstitious lack of faith when the king of Moab sacrificed his own son to show how deeply he believed in his cause (2 Kings 3).

On another occasion, a coalition of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites invaded Judah, but they were destroyed by God (2 Chron 20:1-30). The Moabites apparently raided Israelite territory during the eighth century B.C. (2 Kings 13:20).

The Assyrians conquered Moab about 735 B.C. and invading Arabs conquered it about 650 B.C. The prophet Isaiah lamented over Moab's defeat (Isa 15-16), and Jeremiah predicted Moab's death at the end of the seventh century B.C. (Jer 48). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C., some of the Jews fled to Moab to escape being taken into captivity (Jer 40:11-12).

### AMMONITES

[AM muhn ites]-a nomadic race descended from AMMON, Lot's son, who became enemies of the people of Israel during their later history. During the days of the Exodus, the Israelites were instructed by God not to associate with the Ammonites (Deut 23:3). No reason is given in the Bible for such hostility, but the rift between the two peoples continued across several centuries. In the days of the judges, Eglon, king of Moab, enlisted the aid of the Ammonites in taking Jericho from the Hebrew people (Judg 3:13). In Saul's time, Nahash, the Ammonite king, attacked Jabesh Gilead. Saul responded to the call for help and saved the people of Jabesh Gilead from being captured by Nahash (1 Sam 11:1-11).

Later in the history of the Israelites, Ammonites were among the armies allied against King Jehoshaphat; God caused confusion among them, and they destroyed themselves (2 Chron 20:1-23).

The prophets of the Old Testament often pronounced God's judgment against the Ammonites (Jer 9:26; Amos 1:13-15). Archaeological evidence suggests that Ammonite civilization continued from about 1200 B.C. to 600 B.C.

### CANAANITES

[KANE un ites]-an ancient tribe that lived in the land of Palestine before they were displaced by the nation of Israel. The Canaanites along with the Amorites, settled the land well before 2000 B.C. Archaeological exploration of their native land and adjacent territories has provided information on many aspects of their culture. Among the numerous sites excavated in ancient Canaan, or the present-day Holy Land, are Hazor, Megiddo, Beth Shan, Jericho, Jebus (Jerusalem), Debir, Lachish, and Arad. Sites in the northern part of ancient Canaan include Byblos and

Ras Shamra (Ugarit) along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and Hamath on the Orontes River.

Although both Canaanites and Amorites were established in Canaan before 2000 B.C., the Canaanites established their civilization as dominant from 2100 to 1550 B.C. Their society had several classes, ranging from the ruling nobility to the peasants. The Canaanites used a particular CUNEIFORM language, featuring a wedge-shaped alphabet. Their land was also dotted with walled cities. Several of these served as the centers of city-states, each having its own king, or mayor, and army.

The Canaanites, therefore, were a highly civilized people in many ways when Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River to conquer the people and settle the land. Canaanite history ended with the Israelite conquest. But certain segments of Canaanite culture remained to make both positive and negative impacts on the life of God's Covenant People.

Canaanite Language and Literature. Knowledge of Canaanite language and literature was enhanced by the discovery of the Ugaritic Texts at Ras Shamra, an ancient site along the Mediterranean coast in modern Syria. Accidental discovery of a vaulted room by a farmer while plowing his field on the top of Ras Shamra led to several full-scale excavations by Claude F. A. Schaeffer, the first in 1929. These excavations resulted in the recovery of a store of religious texts and other documents on clay tablets. These writings have yielded a great deal of knowledge about Canaanite life, particularly their form of religion.

The Canaanite language in written form, as revealed by the Ugaritic Texts of Ras Shamra, is an alphabetic cuneiform (wedge-shaped) type of writing. This form contrasts markedly with the syllabic cuneiform of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian languages. It does have many similarities to other ancient languages of the Middle Eastern world during this period, but it also has many significant differences. These differences are so significant that archaeologists can say with certainty that the Canaanites developed a language all their own. The Ugaritic Texts from Ras Shamra are by far the most significant literary sources of the Canaanite language in the alphabetic cuneiform script. These texts go back to the 14th century B.C. or earlier. Most of them are of a religious nature, providing valuable details on both the literature and the religion of the Canaanites. These texts have also given Bible scholars a better understanding of Old Testament writings and background. The texts of greatest importance for giving details on Canaanite religion are three mythologies: (1) The Baal Epic, an account of the activities of Baal, including his building of a temple; (2) the Legend of Aqhat, the only son of an ancient Canaanite king; and (3) the Legend of King Keret of Hubur who suffered the loss of his family and who later obtained another wife by conquest. In doing so, however, he displeased the gods.

Comparative studies between these texts and Old Testament writings, particularly early Hebrew poems and the Psalms, show how the Old Testament has been influenced by its ancient setting. But they also show that the Hebrews' faith in their one Redeemer God was a dramatic contrast to the pagan religion of the Canaanites.

Canaanite Religion. The Canaanite religion featured many gods. These gods were worshiped with elaborate ritual. Various kinds of cultic personnel, or priests, officiated at these pagan ceremonies. Their religious system also featured many different

places of worship, varying from simple outdoor altars to massive stone temples.

The Old Testament refers frequently to Baal (Num 22:41), Baals (Hos 2:13,17), or a Baal of a particular place, such as Baal of Peor (Num 25:3,5). The Old Testament also refers to Asherah (1 Kings 18:19), Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:5,33), and the Ashtoreths (Judg 2:13). References to these Canaanite gods always carry strong denunciations by the biblical writers. But these names mentioned in the Old Testament are only a few of the many additional names for Canaanite gods that appear in the Ugaritic Texts.

The highest of all the Canaanite gods was El, as shown clearly by the Ugaritic Texts. But El chose to remain in the background, conferring power and authority upon his brood of gods and goddesses. The main goddess by whom El fathered children was Asherah. She and El were the parents of more than 70 other deities. The Baal mentioned frequently in the Old Testament was lord among the gods because of authority granted by El. Baal was known chiefly as the god of fertility and as god of the storm. Temples were built in his name at a number of sites in the Palestine region, including one at Ugarit.

Three Canaanite goddesses mentioned frequently in the Ugaritic Texts are Anath (Judg 3:31), Asherah, and Astarte (Ashtoreth of the Old Testament). Among the many other deities of the Canaanites were Resheph, god of pestilence, and Mot, god of drought and death.

Canaanite religion had a number of features that were similar to certain practices of the religious system of the Israelites. Like the Hebrews, the Canaanites offered various kinds of offerings to their gods. Animals offered included sheep, cattle, and certain wild animals. A high priest among the Canaanites served as the head of 12 priestly families. Other important worship leaders who served in the Canaanite temples included singers, who used liturgy or a form of psalmody; consecrated persons-in effect, male and female prostitutes; vestment makers and sculptors; and priest-scribes, who were responsible for preserving important literary traditions. Like the Hebrew feasts and festivals, the celebrations of the Canaanites also paralleled the seasons or cycles of the agricultural year.

But in other important ways, Canaanite and Hebrew religion were poles apart. The religion of these pagan people was basically a fertility cult. At temples scattered throughout their land, Canaanite worshipers actually participated in lewd, immoral acts with "sacred" prostitutes. Theirs was a depraved form of worship that appealed to the base instincts of man's animal nature. In contrast, the Hebrews worshiped a holy God who insisted on purity and righteousness among His people. Although the Hebrews were called to a high ethical plane in their worship, at times the sensual appeal of the Canaanite cults enticed them into sin and idolatry. This explains the strong appeal which Joshua made to the people of Israel in his farewell speech. Joshua had led the Hebrews to take the land, but many of the Canaanites still remained. The aging warrior knew their form of pagan worship would be a strong temptation to the people. Thus he declared, "Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel" (Josh 24:23).

## **AMORITES**

[AM oh rites] (Westerners)-the inhabitants of the land west of the Euphrates River, which included Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria (see Map 1, C-2). The Amorites were one of the major

tribes, or national groups, living in Canaan. The Old Testament frequently uses "Amorites" as a synonym for Canaanites in general. The Book of Genesis cites Canaan as the ancestor of the Amorites (Gen 10:16).

Shortly before 2000 B.C., the Amorites lived in the wilderness regions of what today is western Saudi Arabia and southern Syria. In the court records of ACCAD and SUMER they were known as barbarians, or uncivilized people. Beginning about 2000 B.C., Amorites migrated eastward to Babylon in large numbers. There they captured major cities and regions from the native Mesopotamians.

Throughout Old Testament times, other Amorites remained in Syria, Phoenicia, and the desert regions to the south (Josh 13:4). A significant number, however, settled in the land of Palestine itself, eventually occupying large areas both east and west of the Jordan River (Judg 11:19-22). These Amorites spoke a dialect which was closely related to Canaanite and Hebrew.

Occasionally, the Amorites were identified as a Canaanite tribe (Gen 10:16). At other times they were called the people of Canaan (Deut 1:27).

When Israel invaded Canaan under Joshua, the first Israelite victories came against the Amorite kings Sihon and Og, who ruled much of the Promised Land east of the Jordan River (Josh 12:1-6). Various cities west of the Jordan-Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon-also were called "Amorite" cities (Josh 10:5), even though Jerusalem was also known as a Jebusite city.

While conquering Canaan, the Israelites frequently fought with the Amorites. After the Israelites prevailed, the Amorites who had not been killed remained in Canaan and became servants to the Israelites (1 Kings 9:20-21).

Much of our knowledge about the Amorites and their culture comes from clay tablets discovered at MARI, a major Amorite city situated on the Euphrates River in western Mesopotamia.

## **EDOMITES**

[EE dum ites]-descendants of Edom, or ESAU-an ancient people who were enemies of the Israelites. During the days of Abraham, the region which later became the home of the Edomites was occupied by more than one tribe of non-Israelite peoples. When Esau moved to this region with his family and possessions, the HORITES already lived in the land (Gen 36:20).

Edom and Israel after Kadesh Barnea. After the years of wilderness wandering, Moses wanted to lead Israel northward to Canaan across Edom into Moab. The king of Edom, however, refused them passage (Num 20:14-21), forcing them to bypass Edom and Moab through the desert to the east (Judg 11:17,18). Later in the journey northward to Abel Acacia Grove in the plains of Moab across from Jericho (Num 33:48-49), Balaam prophesied that Israel would one day possess Edom (Num 24:18).

From the Conquest Until the Division. In dividing the land of Canaan after the conquest, Joshua established Judah's border to the west of the Dead Sea and to the border of Edom (Josh 15:1,21). During the reign of Saul, Israel fought against Edom (1 Sam 14:47). But Edomites at times served in Saul's army (1 Sam 21:7; 22:9). David conquered Edom, along with a number of other adjacent countries, and stationed troops in the land (2 Sam 8:13-14). In later years, Solomon promoted the building of a port on the northern coast of the Red Sea in Edomite territory. He also built a smeltery nearby as a significant part of his developing copper industry (1 Kin. 9:26-29).

After the Division. During the time of the Divided Kingdom, a number of hostile encounters occurred between the nations of Judah or Israel and Edom. During Jehoshaphat's reign, Edomites raided Judah but were turned back (2 Chron 20:1,8). An attempt to reopen the port at Ezion Geber failed (1 Kings 22:48); and the Edomites joined forces with those of Judah in Jehoshaphat's move to put down the rebellion of Mesha of Moab (2 Kings 3:4-5). During the reign of Joram, Edom freed herself of Judah's control (2 Kings 8:20-22), but again came under Judah's control when Amaziah assaulted and captured Sela, their capital city. Edom became a vassal state of Assyria, beginning about 736 B.C.

Edom the Place of the Nabateans. After the downfall of Judah in 586 B.C., Edom rejoiced (Ps 137:7). Edomites settled in southern Judah as far north as Hebron. Nabateans occupied old Edom beginning in the third century B.C., continuing their civilization well into the first century A.D. During the period from about 400-100 B.C., Judas Maccabeus subdued the Edomites and John Hyrcanus forced them to be circumcised and then made them a part of the Jewish people. The Herod family of New Testament times was of Edomite stock.

Since no written Edomite records have been found, knowledge of the Edomites comes mainly from the Bible, archaeological excavations of their ancient cities, and references to Edom in Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian sources.

#### **ISHMAEL**

[IHSH may ell] (God hears)-the name of six men in the Old Testament:

The first son of Abraham, by his wife's Egyptian maid servant, Hagar. Although God had promised Abraham an heir (Gen 15:4), Abraham's wife, Sarah, had been unable to bear a child. When Abraham was 85, Sarah offered her maid to him in order to help fulfill God's promise (Gen 16:1-2).

After Hagar learned that she was pregnant, she grew proud and began to despise Sarah. Sarah complained to Abraham, who allowed her to discipline Hagar. Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar caused her to flee into the wilderness. There she met the angel of God, who told her to return to Sarah and submit to her authority. As an encouragement, the angel promised Hagar that her son, who would be named Ishmael, would have uncounted descendants. Hagar then returned to Abraham and Sarah and bore her son (Gen 16:4-15).

When Ishmael was 13, God appeared to Abraham to tell him that Ishmael was not the promised heir. God made a covenant with

Abraham that was to be passed down to the descendants of Isaac-a son who would be conceived by Sarah the following year. Because Abraham loved Ishmael, God promised to bless Ishmael and make him a great nation (Gen 17:19-20).

At the customary feast to celebrate Isaac's weaning, Sarah saw 16-year-old Ishmael making fun of Isaac. She was furious and demanded that Abraham disown Ishmael and his mother so Ishmael could not share Isaac's inheritance. Abraham was reluctant to cast out Ishmael and Hagar, but he did so when instructed by God (Gen 21:8-13).

Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. When their water was gone and Ishmael grew weary, Hagar placed him under a shrub to await death. The angel of God again contacted Hagar and showed her a well. After drawing water, she returned to Ishmael. Ishmael grew up in the wilderness of Paran and gained fame as an archer. Hagar arranged his marriage to an Egyptian wife (Gen 21:14-21).

When Abraham died, Ishmael returned from exile to help Isaac with the burial (Gen 25:9). As God promised, Ishmael became the father of 12 princes (Gen 25:16), as well as a daughter, Mahalath, who later married Esau, son of Isaac (Gen 28:9). Ishmael died at the age of 137 (Gen 25:17).

Ishmael was the father of the ISHMAELITES, a nomadic nation which lived in northern Arabia. Modern-day Arabs claim descent from Ishmael.

#### **ISHMAELITES**

[ISH may el ites]-descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's first son. His mother was Sarah's Egyptian servant, HAGAR (Gen 16; 1 Chron 1:28). The Ishmaelites, like the Israelites (Abraham's children through Sarah), were divided into 12 tribes (Gen 25:16). Out of respect for Abraham, God made a great nation of the Ishmaelites, even though Ishmael was not Abraham's promised son (Gen 21:12-13). Ishmael's 12 sons had many descendants who lived as nomads in the deserts of northern Arabia. The Old Testament eventually used the term Ishmaelite in a broader sense, referring to all the Arabian merchants (Isa 13:20; Ezek 27:20,21). Any wild and war-like peoples of the desert could claim to be descendants of Ishmael (Gen 16:12). This wider use of Ishmaelites is illustrated by an event in the life of Joseph. His older brothers sold him to some caravan traders who were called "a company of Ishmaelites" (Gen 37:25) as well as "Midianite" traders (37:28). They were probably a minor clan of the larger Ishmaelite tribe. Mohammed claimed Ishmael as his ancestor, as do most Arabs