

## Who was Chemosh?

Chemosh was the god of the Moabites (Numbers 21:29; Jeremiah 48:7, 13, 46). Scripture calls him “the abomination of Moab” (1 Kings 11:7). Unfortunately, Chemosh-worship was introduced into Israelite culture by King Solomon, who had wives from other cultures who turned his heart to other gods (1 Kings 11:4-7). Chemosh was one of those gods worshiped by Solomon’s wives. The cult of Chemosh was eventually destroyed in Judah by King Josiah (2 Kings 23).

The meaning of the name Chemosh is not understood, though some scholars believe it may have meant “destroyer” or “subduer.” Chemosh was also seen as a fish-god. He was the national deity of the Moabites and the Ammonites, and, according to the Moabite Stone (the Mesha Stele), Chemosh was associated with the goddess Ashteroth, another false god worshiped by wayward Israelites. Chemosh is thought to have been a deity similar to Baal, and there is also evidence, both from the Moabite Stone and from Scripture, that Chemosh may have been the same deity as the Ammonite Moloch (1 Kings 11:7, 33). At least, Chemosh and Moloch were two manifestations of the same false god. King Solomon built “high places” to both gods in the same location, the mountain east of Jerusalem. The worship of Chemosh was truly an abomination. One place in Scripture records Chemosh demanding human sacrifice: in the days of Judah’s King Jehoram, the king of Moab faced military defeat, and the Moabite ruler “took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall” (2 Kings 3:27).

Chemosh also features in John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*. In a passage about false gods, Milton refers to Chemosh as a god whom the Israelites worshiped with “lustful orgies” and “wanton rites” and calls Chemosh “th’ obscene dread of Moab’s sons” (Book 1, line 406). Milton also mentions King Josiah, who “drove them thence to Hell” by

abolishing the practice of Chemosh-worship in Israel.