

Who were the Moabites?

The Moabites were a tribe descended from Moab, the son of Lot, born of an incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). From Zoar, the cradle of this tribe, on the southeastern border of the Dead Sea, they gradually spread over the region on the east of Jordan. Shortly before the Exodus, the warlike Amorites crossed the Jordan under Sihon their king and drove the Moabites out of the region between the Arnon River Valley and the Jabbok River, and occupied it, making Heshbon their capital. The Moabites were then confined to the territory to the south of the Arnon Valley (Numbers 21:26-30).

During the Exodus the Israelites did not pass through Moab, but through the “wilderness” to the east, eventually reaching the country to the north of Arnon. The Moabites were alarmed, and their king, Balak, sought aid from the Midianites (Numbers 22:2-4). This was the occasion when the visit of Balaam to Balak took place (Numbers 22:2-6).

In the Plains of Moab, which was in the possession of the Amorites, the children of Israel had their last encampment before they entered the land of Canaan (Numbers 22:1; Joshua 13:32). If we had nothing else to interest us in the land of Moab, it was from the top of Pisgah that Moses, the mightiest of prophets, looked upon the Promised Land; it was here on Nebo that he died his solitary death; it was here in the valley over against Beth-peor where he was buried (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

A basalt stone, bearing an inscription by King Mesha, was discovered at Dibon by Klein, a German missionary at Jerusalem, in 1868, consisting of thirty-four lines written in Hebrew-Phoenician characters. The stone was set up by Mesha about 900 BC as a record and memorial of his victories. It records Mesha's wars with Omri, his public buildings, and

his wars against Horonaim. This inscription supplements and corroborates the history of King Mesha recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27. It is the oldest inscription written in alphabetic characters and, in addition to its value in the domain of Hebrew antiquities, is of great linguistic importance.

Perhaps the most significant Bible character to come from Moab was Ruth, who was “of the women of Moab” but was genetically linked to Israel through Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Genesis 11:31). Ruth is an example of how God can change a life and take it in a direction He has foreordained, and we see God working out His perfect plan in Ruth’s life, just as He does with all His children (Romans 8:28). Although she came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, Ruth became a living testimony to Him by faith. Ruth, the Moabitess, is one of the few women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).