

III.

MOAB AND ISRAEL.

MOAB and Israel were neighbours and kinsfolk; they had probably migrated together from the East; they occupied adjoining territories; they spoke dialects of the same language, and had much in common in their political, social, and religious life.

The patriarchal narratives in *Genesis* preserve a tradition, which may be unhesitatingly accepted as historical, to the effect that Moab was very closely akin to Israel, and that up to a certain point the history of Israel is also the history of Moab. Moab is the son of Lot, and Lot is the nephew of Abraham, and accompanies him

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in his migrations from Ur to Haran, and from Haran to Palestine. In other words, Moab, Ammon, Edom, etc., together with Israel, once¹ formed a loose confederation of kindred tribes under the common name *Hebrews*; and this confederation migrated from Mesopotamia westwards, and led a nomad life in and about Palestine. Moab abandoned the nomad life much earlier than Israel, and settled down to cultivate the soil and live in towns and villages in the territories to the east of the Dead Sea and the southern end of the Jordan, with Edom to the south and Ammon and the nomad tribes of the desert to the east. Their northern neighbours were at first the Amorites and then the eastern tribes of Israel. The territory which is marked as "Reuben" on the ordinary maps was for the most part occupied by Moab both before and after the Israelite conquest of Canaan.

¹ More accurately, certain tribes which were the ancestors of Israel.

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Thus Moab was a nation with a local habitation and a name long before the Exodus; the name *Muab* occurs in the lists of the conquests of Ramses II.¹ in Syria.

According to the narratives² in *Exodus*, Moab had suffered serious reverses shortly before the appearance of Israel in Eastern Palestine. An Amorite king Sihon had deprived Moab of its northern territory. When Israel came upon the scene, Sihon was overthrown, and the newcomers occupied his dominions, including the lands north of the Arnon which had once belonged to Moab.

It is difficult to determine the relations of Israel to Moab at this time, the data are meagre, and ambiguous, and inconsistent; but might perhaps be explained

¹ *Circa* 1300 B.C. Ramses II. is often styled the Pharaoh of the Oppression; but this is merely one among many conflicting theories.

² Some hold that the passages on which this paragraph is based are not historically accurate, but are a corrupt account of events which really happened much later.

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by supposing that at first Moab welcomed Israel as an ally against Sihon, but became hostile when it appeared that Israel did not intend to reinstate Moab in its ancient territories.¹

Henceforth the lands north of the Arnon were debatable ground between Moab and Israel. Apparently at some early period the tribe of Reuben was practically destroyed and their country occupied by the Moabites; and at one time Moab under Eglon pushed its outposts to the west of Jordan, but were speedily driven back across the river. Doubtless also Moab was often engaged in contests with Edom to the south.²

Under Saul and David the Israelite tribes were consolidated into a compact military state, and waged successful wars

¹ The chief incidents in which Moab figures at this point are the worship of the Moabite deity Baal-peor by the Israelites, Num. 25¹⁻⁵, and the episode of Balak and Balaam (Num. 22-24).

² See *D.B.* p. 410^b.

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against Moab, until the latter became tributary to David.¹ How long Moab remained tributary we do not know; probably it regained its independence under Solomon or soon after his death. It seems to have been independent in the time of Omri, for the Moabite Stone² speaks of that king "oppressing," *i.e.* "subjugating," Moab. As our monument deals with relations between Israel and Moab in the reigns of Omri, Ahab, and Jehoram, we will give this period a section to itself.

A few lines may be devoted to the later history of Moab. It seems probable that Jeroboam II. renewed the ancient suzerainty of Israel over Moab, but only for a brief space, for Moab must have again become independent when Israel was overwhelmed by Assyria. Later references in the Old Testament and the inscriptions mention Moab as the tributary first of Assyria, then of Babylon. Moab was usually hostile

¹ 2 Sam. 8².

² Lines, 4, 5, 7; cf. p. 17.

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to Judah, but the two were sometimes associated in revolts against the suzerain power.

Moab disappears from history after the Exile ; we do not know how or why.