

AMMON, AMMONITES

Judges

The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Ben-Ammi was the son of Abraham's nephew Lot and the younger of Lot's two daughters (Gen. 19:36–38). He is represented as the ancestor of the Ammonites, a Transjordanian people who were a perennial threat to Israel from the wilderness period through to David's reign.

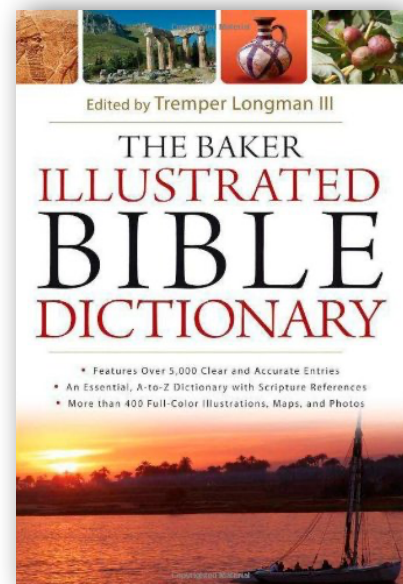
The nation of Ammon was located east of the Jordan, just north of the Dead Sea. Its capital was Rabbah, and it bordered Gad to the west, the half-tribe of Manasseh to the northwest, and Moab to the south (see also Deut. 3:16). Much of the source of their contention was over the fertile land of Gilead, which encompassed the Jordan River and bordered Ephraim, the western tribe of Manasseh, Benjamin, and Judah.

The exodus and the period of the judges. According to the biblical record, while moving to enter Canaan, Moses and the Israelites avoided Amman (Rabbah) and marched through Sihon instead (Num. 21:24–35). Later the Israelites were told explicitly not to attack the Ammonites, for that territory was given to the descendants of Lot (Deut. 2:19, 37).

The first conflict between the Ammonites and the Israelites is recorded in Judg. 3:13, where the Moabite king Eglon was allied with the Ammonites (and the Amalekites) against Ehud. In Judg. 10:6–7 the Israelites are punished for their idolatry by being put under the thumb of the Philistines and the Ammonites. Jephthah led the Gileadites against the Ammonites, who had provoked them to battle. This story is perhaps better known with respect to Jephthah's fateful oath to Yahweh to offer up as a burnt offering whatever came out of his door if Yahweh would give him victory over the Ammonites (Judg. 11). It was his daughter who came out to meet him. In Judg. 12 the Ephraimites voiced their displeasure at not having been asked to join in the battle, so they came to Jephthah, threatening to burn his house down. Jephthah responded that he did call but they did not come. A battle ensued between them, which sparked the famous *shibboleth/sibboleth* incident, in which Jephthah's forces could identify Ephraimite opponents by their inability to pronounce the *sh*.

The monarchy. During the early monarchic period, the Ammonite king Nahash besieged Jabesh of Gilead. Rather than negotiate, the Ammonites demanded that the right eye of every Jabeshite male be put out. They appealed to Saul for help, who came and slaughtered many and scattered the rest (1 Sam. 11:1–11). Saul's act was remembered kindly when, after his death at the hand of the Philistines, the men of Jabesh brought back the bodies of Saul and his sons, burned them, buried the remains, and fasted for seven days (31:11–13). In 1 Sam. 12:12 Samuel refers to the Nahash incident as the impetus for the Israelites' desire to be ruled by a king.

In 2 Sam. 10–12 David conquers the Ammonite capital of Rabbah, under the rule of Hanun son of Nahash (see also 1 Chron. 19:1–20:3). This is the context in which David's affair with Bathsheba took place (2 Sam. 11–12). Uriah, her husband, was killed while attacking Rabbah. During the revolt by his son Absalom, David was given material aid from several sources, one



of which was "Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites" (2 Sam. 17:27).

Solomon's marriages to foreign wives included Ammonites (1 Kings 11:1). As a result, Solomon followed the foreign gods, including "Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites" (11:5). It is not mentioned how many Ammonite wives Solomon had, but one of them, Naamah, was the mother of Rehoboam, the first king of Judah during the divided kingdom (14:31).

The divided kingdom. Later, during the divided monarchy, the Ammonites appear again. Ammon, Moab, and Edom formed a coalition against Jehoshaphat king of Judah (2 Chron. 20:1–30). Jehoshaphat was victorious with God's assistance. Likewise, during the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, a coalition of Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite forces attacked him, although this time it was at God's direction because "he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his predecessors had done" (2 Kings 23:36–24:6). According to 2 Chron. 26:8; 27:5, the Ammonites had earlier brought tribute to Uzziah and his son Josiah.

The Ammonites appear on the scene again just before the fall of Judah. During the reign of Zedekiah, a coalition of several nations including Ammon was thwarted by God through Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jer. 27:1–7).

The exilic and postexilic periods. Ammonite opposition to Judah continued. According to Jer. 41:10, 15, governor Gedaliah's assassin found refuge among the Ammonites. Later, under Nehemiah, the Ammonites actively resisted the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:1–3). In the postbiblical period, the Ammonites are mentioned as those among whom Jason, who slaughtered his fellow citizens, was given refuge (1 Macc. 4:26; 5:7).

In addition to the historical books, the Ammonites are mentioned numerous times in the prophetic books. Isaiah predicts that Ephraim and Judah will together "swoop down" and subject Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites (11:14). Jeremiah prophesies against them at some length (49:1–6), mainly because of the worship of Molek, although God will "restore the fortunes of the Ammonites" (v. 6). Likewise, Ezekiel prophesies the destruction of Ammon (21:28–32; 25:1–7, 10).

Eventually, Rabbah became a shell of its former self (see Jer. 25:5) and was rebuilt by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC), who renamed the city "Philadelphia." It became a city of the Decapolis (a group of ten Greek cities [see Matt. 4:25; Mark 5:20; 7:31]).