

## THE MOABITES.

A traveler who crosses the Jordan at the ford due east of Jericho and follows the route along the Wady Heshbon will in about two hours and a half commence the ascent of El Belka, the mountains of Moab. Here is the road down which the children of Israel passed after their conquest of Gilead and Bashan, and round here the tribes of Reuben, Gad and part of Manasseh received their inheritances.

The first inhabitants of the fertile highlands from the eastern shores of the Dead Sea to the mountains of Gilead were peopled by a nation in sacred writ called Enim. These were expelled by the Moabites and the Ammonites, the latter of which took possession of the northern parts of the district, leaving the southern part, known as "the field of Moab," to the Moabites.

The whole land of Moab "must be understood," says Hayue, "to consist of a parallelogram, in rough measurement some fifty miles from north to south, by thirty from east to west, bounded on the west by the Dead Sea and the Jordan, on the east by the Pilgrim Road from Damascus to Mecca, and extending from the oasis of Safieh on the south to the gorge which runs down from Elealeh and Heshbon to the Jordan valley on the north, and including that portion of the plain of Shittim which lies between the watercourse and the Dead Sea, now known as the Seisaban."

It is a remarkable fact that while in the course of the past ages kingdoms have risen and fallen and their remains been scattered, like the fragments of Nebuchadnezzar's image, to the four winds, the Moabites have kept their small strip of country to themselves, and still live there much as in ages past. Their origin, their history, as they have often come in contact with the people of God, are interesting items to a Bible student, particularly as they, too, have yet a future before them and will be called upon to take part in the winning up scenes of our age.

## ORIGIN OF THE MOABITES.

On the fearful day of judgment, upon the cities of the plains, a judgment that reduced a beautiful but sin-stained tract of land to a bay of the Dead Sea, and hurled thousands of guilty souls into the depths of Hades, early, before sunrise, Lot, his wife and two daughters fled from Sodom into the little village Zoar. As soon as this place of refuge had been reached, the first blood-colored rays of the sun spread their threatening glare over the landscape. Everything was as yet quiet in the doomed cities. The nightly revelers were still struggling with their haunting dreams, while abused nature endeavored to snatch from the morning hours a little rest, and to heal up wounds innumerable inflicted by shameless sin.

The sun had just risen. But suddenly the whole atmosphere is darkened. Clouds, charged from the electric batteries of Almighty God, rush hurriedly together from all quarters

of the heavens, executors of divine justice. A terrible cannonade! Thunders roll; lightnings cross each other in all directions, incessantly. They strike the earth. Here! There! Everywhere. The soil, saturated with combustibles, takes fire. In a moment the whole plain is one burning lake. Sinful men and women wake up. One hour of terrible agonies and they are no more.

From this elevated refuge Lot had witnessed the commencement of this fearful drama. But although the angel of the Lord had assured him that Zoar should be spared, yet he concluded to flee from Zoar and find a refuge, in his judgment, more secure. Trembling from fear, he therefore left Zoar and ascended the mountain. He knew of a cave the interior of which he thought safer than the places appointed by God's promise.

One false step was taken. The consequences followed. On the way the unfortunate man lost his wife, and in the place of refuge, selected by his own wisdom, where he seems to have lived for some time with his daughters, he became the father of two sons, Moab and Ben-Ammi, the fathers of the two nations later known as Moabites and Ammonites (see Genesis xix, 1-38). This, then, is the origin of the Moabites.

The relationship between the Jews and the Moabites will be understood when it is remembered that Lot was the son of Abraham's brother.

The name Moab given to the son by his mother, the eldest daughter of Lot, means "From Father;" so that the very name is and will ever be a monument of the pit into which a "righteous man" was precipitated on account of his mistrust in God's promise.

## MOAB AGAINST ISRAEL.

Centuries rolled on. From individuals sprang up nations, covering the face of the earth like branches of olive trees. Israel had passed through their long thralldom in Egypt and had been liberated through God's own interference in their behalf. They had wandered their weary way through the wilderness, and we now find them camping in the field of Moab, after their complete victory over the mighty Amorites.

The next neighbors to the Moabites there were the Midianites, a people descended from Midian, a son of Abraham and Kethurah. It was among this people that Moses had sojourned while in exile, and found his wife Zipporah, the daughter of the Midianitic priest, Jethro.

Up till this time the two nations, the Moabites and the Midianites, so closely related to Israel, had made no efforts to bar the way of the chosen people. But now, on seeing the Israelitish camp in their own country, and learning of the wonderful victories obtained, fear came over Moab, and the king determined to oppose the children. This was all the more unjust, as God had expressly forbidden Israel to make war upon the descendants of Lot and Esau (Deut., II, 1-9), and Israel had consequently asked for the privilege of marching through this coun-

try peaceably, paying for all they needed, even the water. But the offers of peace were not accepted. The king of the Moabites at this time was Balak, the son of Zippor.

In the country was also at this time a prophet, the notorious Balaam. This prophet seemed to have possessed the confidence of his countrymen in a high degree. It was generally held that whatever he said would surely come to pass. Having established this reputation, he, like his brethren in modern times, was able to make large sums of money out of his prophecies.

It is hardly necessary to remark that this Moabitic soothsayer, or magician, was no true prophet of God, even if his predictions very often came true. His whole course shows that he was not. It is probable that he, like Socrates and others, had a good genius who followed him, and whose voice he erroneously held to be the voice of Jehovah. But he was undoubtedly also in rapport with bad spirits whose assistance he obtained, or imagined himself to obtain, through the practice of various dark arts.

Now, in his fear, Balak sent a deputation, consisting of Moabitic and Midianitic princes to Balaam, requesting him to come and curse Israel. The particulars are well remembered. Balaam was too willing to please Balak, as there was profit in it. But Jehovah himself interfered in behalf of this people, and impressed the money-making prophet, even through a miracle, with the fact that there was no use trying to curse when God commanded to bless. If God—this was the object lesson—could direct the mouth of the animal into articulate sounds, how easy would it be for the same God to prevent a man from uttering curses where God wanted him to utter blessings. Accordingly, Balaam blessed Israel, and his prophecies on this occasion may be relied upon as inspired by God himself.

The question might be asked why was it so important that God should prevent Balaam from cursing Israel? A stream of words would, apparently, not have been able to do the people any harm, even if those words were strung together into a curse. Whence the necessity of performing that great miracle which has always been the stumbling-block of timid theologians and a subject of ridicule to infidels? Well, the necessity arose in the purpose of God to spare the Moabites from extinction. Had Balaam been allowed to curse Israel, this would have so worked upon the superstition and, perhaps, fanaticism of the Moabites that they would have thrown themselves into a battle with the people of God, out of which only a few of them would have come alive. This God would prevent. The Moabites were not, like some of the surrounding nations, and the Canaanites, ripe for extinction. They had, therefore, by the unfathomable mercy of God, to be spared, even at the cost of Jehovah's personal interference and a singular miracle.

But although God prevented