

REVISIONIST HISTORY

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Judges 11:4-5 says, “And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob.” In verse 12, Jephthah “sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?” The King of Ammon responded to Jephthah by rewriting 300 years of ancient history to justify his wicked effort to steal Israel’s land: “And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, *Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.*” God would not allow this lie to prevail and delivered Israel by the hand of his righteous servant Jephthah.

What really happened

The Ammonite accusation that Israel had taken away their land when they had come up from Egypt was completely false. “And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: and said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, *Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon*” (Judg 11:14-15). The nation of Ammon was descended from Benammi, a son of Lot by his younger daughter after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:30-38). Of course, Lot was Abraham’s nephew, and therefore the Ammonites were a nation of cousins to Israel (as was Moab and Edom). Israel had taken no land from the Ammonites, but rather the Amorites. When Israel came into Canaan, God explicitly forbade Israel from taking the land of Edom (Deut 2:2-8), Moab (Deut 2:8-9), and Ammon (Deut 2:17-19). Concerning Ammon, God told Israel: “*And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession*” (Deut 2:19). Israel followed this prohibition: “*Only unto the land of the children of Ammon thou camest not, nor unto any place of the river Jabbok, nor unto the cities in the mountains, nor unto whatsoever the Lord our God forbad us*” (Deut 2:37; Judg 11:16-18). Instead of these lands, God gave Israel the lands of the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Num 21:21-35; Deut 2:24-36; 3:1-17; Judg 11:19-24). Moses testified, “And we took at that time out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites the land that was on this side Jordan, from the river of Arnon unto mount Hermon; (which Hermon the Sidonians call Sirion; and the Amorites call it Shenir;) all the cities of the plain, and all Gilead, and all Bashan, unto Salchah and Edrei, cities of the kingdom of Og in Bashan” (Deut 3:8-10). Not even Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab disputed what Israel had taken from the Amorites back then (Judg 11:25; see Num 22:1-6).

The real issue

In Judges 11:15-27, Jephthah answered the King of Ammon’s lying version of

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history by proceeding to remind the Ammonites of the historical facts: “And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: and said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: but when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. So now the Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess. And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, *while Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time? Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the Lord the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.*” If Israel had really dispossessed the Ammonites as they were now claiming, then why did they wait 300 years to do something about it (Judg 11:26)? These were the facts that Jephthah presented to correct the Ammonites. But they would not listen to the truth: “Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him” (Josh 11:28). Why wouldn’t he listen? The reason was obvious: he coveted Israel’s land. But using lies to justify wickedness only added sin to sin. In the end, a war was fought, and God did judge between Israel and Ammon, and subdued Ammon before Israel (Judg 11:32-33). Truth and righteousness prevailed!