

# THE MOABITE STONE & THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

“Now Mesha King of Moab was  
a sheep breeder . . .”  
(2 Kgs 3:4)



## RON E. TAPPY

G. ALBERT SHOEMAKER PROFESSOR EMERITUS  
PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
PITTSBURGH, PA

The reliability of the history of ancient Israel as presented in the pages of the Hebrew Bible is a sometimes hotly debated subject today. Some scholars believe that we can know very little about ancient Israel or key biblical figures. These scholars sideline the biblical accounts by claiming that they are only theological texts and contain very little reliable historical information. But in fact, the biblical accounts stack up very well against details given in ancient writings outside the Bible. I will examine one ancient monument that is vital to understanding the history of Israel during the time of King Ahab.

The Moabite Stone, commissioned by King Mesha of Moab around 840 BCE, tells the story of the Moabite kingdom's subjugation to the Israelite kings Omri and Ahab and Mesha's claim to have thrown off the foreign yoke to restore his kingdom under the protection of the Moabite god Chemosh. The stone (whose discovery in 1868 occasioned decades of political intrigue and competition before it wound up in the Louvre) contains a treasure trove of information relating to the intertwined histories of Moab, Israel, and Judah in the ninth century BCE. Recent examinations, with the help of new photographs taken with advanced technology, make it possible to solve some of the interpretive problems of the stone and shed even more light on the history of Israel during this time.

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