


كَمُوشُ

Chemosh 

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# Chemosh

For other uses, see [Chemosh \(disambiguation\)](#).

In the Hebrew Bible, **Chemosh** (/ˈkiːmɒʃ/; from Hebrew: כְּמוֹשׁ [keˈmoʃ]), was the god of the Moabites (Num. 21:29; Jer. 48:7, 13, 46). The etymology of “Chemosh” is unknown. He is also known from Ebla as *Kamish*.

Chemosh was the national deity of the Moabites whose name most likely meant “destroyer,” “subduer,” or “fish god.” While he is most readily associated with the Moabites, according to Judges 11:24 he seems to have been the national deity of the Ammonites as well. His presence in the Old Testament world was well known, as his cult was imported to Jerusalem by King Solomon (1 Kings 11:7). The Hebrew scorn for his worship was evident in a curse from the scriptures: “the abomination of Moab.” King Josiah destroyed the Israelite branch of the cult (2 Kings 23).

According to the Hebrew Bible, the worship of this god, “the abomination of Moab,” was introduced at Jerusalem by Solomon (1 Kings 11:7), but was abolished by Josiah (2 Kings 23:13). (Note: The Talmud quoted by Rashi says that his wives built the temples and he is considered responsible for not stopping them.) On the Moabite stone, *Mesha* (2 Kings 3:5) ascribed his victories over the king of Israel to this god, “And Chemosh drove him before my sight.”

According to [Morris Jastrow, Jr.](#) and [George Aaron Barton](#) in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*,

The national god of the Moabites. He became angry with his people and permitted them to become the vassals of Israel; his anger passed, he commanded Mesha to fight against Israel, and Moabitish independence was reestablished (Moabite Stone, lines 5, 9, 14 et seq.). A king in the days of Sennacherib was called “Chemoshnadab” (“K. B.” ii. 90 et seq.; see Jehonadab). Chemosh was a god associated with the Semitic mother-goddess *Ashtar*, whose name he bears (Moabite Stone, line 17; compare Barton, “Semitic Origins,” iv.). Peake wrongly holds that *Ashtar-Chemosh* was a deity distinct from Chemosh, while Moore and Bähring (*Beiträge zur Semitischen Religionsgeschichte*, p. 14) regard “*Ashtar*” in this name as equivalent to “*Astarte*,” who they believe was worshipped in the temple of Chemosh. “*Ashtar*” is more probably masculine here, as in South Arabia, and another

name for Chemosh, the compound “*Ashtar-Chemosh*” being formed like “*Yhwh-Elohim*” or “*Yhwh-Sebaoth*.” Whatever differences of conception may have attached to the god at different shrines, there is no adequate reason for doubting the substantial identity of the gods to whom these various names were applied. Hosea ix. 10 is proof that at some period (according to Wellhausen, at the time of the prophet himself) the impure cult of the Semitic goddess was practised at *Baal-peor* (compare Wellhausen, *Kleine Prophetell*; Nowack’s Commentary; and G. A. Smith, *Twelve Prophets*, ad loc.). Chemosh, therefore, was in general a deity of the same nature as *Baal*. On critical occasions a human sacrifice was considered necessary to secure his favor (compare II Kings iii. 27), and when deliverance came, a sanctuary might be built to him (Moabite Stone, line 3). An ancient poem, twice quoted in the Old Testament (Num. xxi. 27-30; Jer. xlvi. 45, 46), regards the Moabites as the children of Chemosh, and also calls them “the people of Chemosh”.

The name of the father of *Mesha*, *Chemosh-melek* (“Chemosh is Malik” or “Chemosh is king”; compare Moabite Stone, line 1), indicates the possibility that Chemosh and Malik (or *Moloch*) were one and the same deity. Book of Judges xi. 24 has been thought by some to be a proof of this, since it speaks of Chemosh as the god of the Ammonites, while *Moloch* is elsewhere their god (compare 1 Kings xi. 7, 33). Solomon is said to have built a sanctuary to Chemosh on the Mount of Olives (I Kings xi. 7, 33), which was maintained till the reform of Josiah (II Kings xxiii. 13). This movement by Solomon was no doubt to some extent a political one, but it made the worship of Chemosh a part of the religious life of Israel for nearly 400 years.

According to II Kings xi. 7, evidence is given that Chemosh and *Moloch* were perhaps two manifestations of the same god, at least to the peoples who worshiped them. Solomon had “high places” built for both gods at the same time and in the same location, “on the mountain which is East of Jerusalem.” Both Chemosh and *Moloch* may have had the same origins but if so, by Solomon’s time they had been denominated into differing objects for different peoples, Chemosh for the Moabites and *Moloch* for the Ammonites. According to Genesis xix. 30-38, both the people of Moab and Ammon were descended

from the two sons of Lot (themselves half-brothers by his two daughters), Moab and Ben-ammi.

## 1 Literary references

- John Milton, “Paradise Lost”, Book I

Next CHEMOS, th' obscene dread of  
 MOABS Sons,  
 From AROER to NEBO, and the wild  
 Of Southmost ABARIM; in HESEBON  
 And HERONAIM, SEONS Realm, beyond  
 The flowry Dale of SIBMA clad with Vines,  
 And ELEALE to th' ASPHALTICK Pool.  
 PEOR his other Name, when he entic'd  
 ISRAEL in SITTIM on their march from NILE  
 To do him wanton rites, which cost them woe.  
 Yet thence his lustful Orgies he enlarg'd  
 Even to that Hill of scandal [the Mount of  
 Olives], by the Grove  
 Of MOLOCH homicide, lust hard by hate;  
 Till good JOSIAH drove them thence to Hell.

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## 2 References

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