

1. Overview

We can find various records in the Bible about conflicts between Israel and other nations. There are two ways to determine which of these nations stood out among them. The first way is by adding up all the conflicts described in the Bible between Israel and individual people groups. The second way is by looking at the nations mentioned in the summaries of the enemies of Israel. There are four summaries in the Bible. Sometimes Israel was stronger than her enemies; other times she was defeated. Some nations appear in only one summary, others in several summaries, which points to a more intense enmity.

In the table below, both ways are combined. The peoples who had the most individual conflicts and who are mentioned in the most summaries, qualify as the greatest enemies of Israel. They have been marked grey. Those of whom only a few individual conflicts are recorded and whose names don't appear in the summaries, can be considered a sporadic enemy.

Country	Summaries of conflicts				Individual conflicts
	Enemies during the period of the judges Judges 10:11-12 1 Samuel 12:9,12	Enemies king Saul fought against 1 Samuel 14:47-48	Enemies defeated by king David 2 Samuel 8:1-14 = 1 Chron 18:11	Enemies who fought against king Jehoiakim 2 Kings 24:1-2	Number of individual conflicts recorded in the Bible
Amalek	x	x	x	1)	7
Ammon	x	x	x	x	9
Amorites	x				1
Arabians					3
Aram / Zobah		x	x	x	12
Assyria					7
Babylon				x	3
Cush					1
Edom		x	x		4
Egypt	x				3
Ishmaelites					2
Midian					2
Moab	x	x	x	x	4
Philistia	x	x	x		16
Sidon	x				

1) The Amalekites aren't mentioned in 2 Kings. That doesn't mean they had become friends or so. No, they had been extinguished and didn't exist as people anymore.

Philistia and Aram stand out as enemies of Israel, with a high number of individual conflicts and being mentioned in three of the four summaries. When the Amalekites were still around, they were great enemies as well.

Ammon and Moab are found in all four summaries, which shows they were important enemies of Israel as well.

Only four peoples are not referred to in any summary: the Arabs, Cushites, Ishmaelites and Midianites. Also, the Bible contains only a few records of conflicts between them and Israel. This indicates that they generally had peaceful relationships with Israel.

2. Location of the nations

The illustration below shows the approximate habitat of the different nations and peoples. Initially the Midianites lived close to Moab, but were defeated by the Edomites and therefore moved more to the South (Genesis 36:35). The Assyrian empire emerged in the 7th century B.C. and fell to the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C.

The location of Cush is unclear; some people locate it south of Midian and others east of the Jordan river. The majority believe it was a nation south of Egypt.

The Amorites are not mentioned as they were eventually merely annihilated by the Israelites.



3. List of individual conflicts between Israel and other nations

Amalek

- 1) Exodus 17:8-16 fought the Israelites in the desert
- 2) Numbers 14:45 After spying the land, the Israelites eventually went up and were defeated by the Amalekites and Canaanites.
- 3) Judges 3:13-30 joining the Moabites, together with Ammon
- 4) Judges 6:3 Joining the Midianites, together with the people of the East
- 5) 1 Samuel 15 Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites and fought them, but kept many alive, including the king
- 6) 1 Samuel 27:8, 30:1-18 David went raiding the Amalekites
- 7) 1 Chronicles 4:43 Some Simeonites killed the remaining Amalekites

Ammon

- 1) Judges 3:12-30 joining the Moabites, together with the Amalekites
- 2) Judges 10:7-12
- 3) Judges 11:4-33
- 4) 1 Samuel 11:1-11
- 5) 2 Samuel 10:1-14 = 1 Chronicles 19:1-19 After David's men have been humiliated by the new Ammonite king
- 6) 2 Samuel 11:1; 12:27-31 = 1 Chronicles 20:1-3
- 7) 2 Chronicles 20:1-23 Moab, Ammon and Meunites (part of Edom) fought against Jehoshaphat
- 8) 2 Chronicles 26:6-8 the Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah, indicating he had defeated them
- 9) 2 Chronicles 27:5 Jotham

Arabians

Of these people it isn't clear who they were because the words used in Hebrew differ from the normal word used to describe the Arabs.¹ It is possible that they were descendants of Ishmael, but it could also be that other tribes are referred to.

(2 Chronicles 17:10-11 the Philistines and Arabians brought tribute to Jehoshaphat) **

- 1) 2 Chronicles 21:16 The LORD stirred up against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabians who are near the Ethiopians.
- 2) 2 Chronicles 22:1 the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp killed all the older sons (of Jehoram king of Judah).
- 3) 2 Chronicles 26:7 God helped King Uzziah against the Philistines, and Arabians that dwelt in Gurbaal, and the Meunims.

Aram/Zobah/Syria

- 1) Judges 3:7-11
- 2) 2 Samuel 8:5-6 = 1 Chronicles 18:5-6 King David subjected the Syrians of Damascus
- 3) 2 Samuel 10:6-19 = 1 Chronicles 19:10-15 Joab fought the Ammonites and the Syrians, who were their ally.
- 4) 1 Chronicles 19:17-19 King David killed many Syrians and subjected them
(1 Kings 15:20-22 = 2 Chronicles 16:2-4 Asa hires Aram against Israel)
- 5) 1 Kings 20:1-29 King Ahab

* The tribute points to a previous conflict. However, no conflict is mentioned, so this is not counted

- 6) 1 Kings 22:1-35 = 2 Chronicles 18:30-34 King Ahab: Frequent conflicts, eventually Syrians killed him
- 7) 2 Kings 6:8(-23) many conflicts at the time of Elisha, who informed the king of Israel of the enemy's tactics.
- 8) 2 Kings 6:24(- 7:16) Samaria besieged but miraculously delivered
- 9) 2 Kings 8:12 many conflicts at time of king Joram of Israel of which 8:28 = 2 Chronicles 22:5-6 and 12:17-18 = 2 Chronicles 24:23-25. The Syrians wounded him
- 10) 2 Kings 12:17-18 King Jehoash of Judah was subjected to Hazael king of Syria
- 11) 2 Kings 13:3-24 King Jehoahaz of Israel had several conflicts with Hazael king of Syria and his son Ben-Hadad.
(2 Kings 15:37 Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel against Ahaz of Judah, also 2 Kings 16:5 = 2 Chronicles 28 = Isa 7:1-8)
- 12) 2 Chronicles 24:23-24 King Joash of Judah lost of a small army of Syrians because he and the people had forsaken the Lord.

Assyria

- 1) 2 Kings 15:19-20
- 2) 2 Kings 15:29
- 3) 2 Kings 17:3-5
- 4) 2 Kings 18:13-16
- 5) 2 Chronicles 28:20 Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to King Ahaz and distressed him.
- 6) 2 Chronicles 32:1-22; 2 Kings 18:17 - 20:35; Isaiah 36:1 - 37:37 During the reign of king Hezekiah Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem.
- 7) 2 Chronicles 33:11 King Manasseh was taken to Babylon by king of Assyria (and was brought back to Jerusalem because he repented v13).

Babylon

- 1) 2 Kings 24:1 = 2 Chronicles 36:6-7 Jehoiakim vassal of Babylon
- 2) 2 Kings 24:10-17 = 2 Chronicles 36:10 Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar
- 3) 2 Kings 25:1-21 = 2 Chronicles 36:13-20 Zedekiah / Jerusalem conquered by Nebuchadnezzar

Cush

2 Chronicles 14:9-15 Cush fought against king Asa of Judah (possibly this was an Egyptian army).

Edom

(1 Kings 22:47 'No king in Edom', which means they were subjected to Israel)

- 1) 2 Chronicles 20:1-23 Moab, Ammon and Meunites (which was part of Edom) fought against Jehoshaphat. At that time the Edomites in general were still subject to Jehoshaphat (see 2 Kings 3:5-27).
- 2) 2 Kings 8:20 = 2 Chronicles 21:8-10 Edom rebelled during the reign of king Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat.
- 3) 2 Kings 14:7 = 2 Chronicles 25:11-14 Amaziah, son of Joash fought the men from Seir in the valley of Salt and slaughtered and captured Edomites.
- 4) 2 Chronicles 28:17 King Ahaz: For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives.

Egypt

- 1) 1 Kings 14:25 = 2 Chronicles 12:1-12 Rehoboam subjected by Egypt
- 2) 2 Kings 23:29 = 2 Chronicles 35:20-24 Josiah marches against Egypt, even though Egypt isn't attacking Judah
- 3) 2 Kings 23:33-34 = 2 Chronicles 36:3-4 Jehoahaz son of Josiah taken by Egypt

Ishmaelites

- 1) Judges 6:3 the people of the East, who are made equal to Kedar (Jeremiah 49:28), the second son of Ishmael, assisted the Midianites
- 2) 1 Chronicles 5:19-22 Hagrites, assisted by Jethur and Naphish, two sons of Ishmael

Midian

- 1) Numbers 31:2-9 Moses fought the Midianites because they had turned against Israel in cursing and seducing them
- 2) Judges 6:3 - 8:28 God gave Israel over into the hand of the Midianites and then delivered them.

Moab

- 1) Judges 3:12-30 with the help of the Ammonites and Amalekites
- 2) 2 Kings 1:1; 3:5-27 Moab rebelled against Joram, son of Ahab, king of Israel, which means they were first subject to Israel. Jehoshaphat and Edom went with Joram.
- 3) 2 Kings 13:20 Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring
- 4) 2 Chronicles 20:1-23 Moab, Ammon and Meunites (part of Edom) fought against Jehoshaphat

Philistines

- 1) Judges 3:31
- 2) Judges 10:7-12
- 3) Judges 13 - 16 several conflicts at the time of Samson
- 4) 1 Samuel 4:1-10
- 5) 1 Samuel 7:3-11
- 6) 1 Samuel 14:1-23 Saul victorious over them
- 7) 1 Samuel 14:54 all the days of king Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines
- 8) 1 Samuel 17:1-54
- 9) 1 Samuel 18:30
- 10) 1 Samuel 28 - 31 = 1 Chronicles 10
- 11) 2 Samuel 5:17-21 = 1 Chronicles 14:8-12
- 12) 2 Samuel 5:22-25 = 1 Chronicles 14:13-16
- 13) 2 Samuel 21:15,18,19,20 = 1 Chronicles 20:4-7 (Were these separate battles from others?) (2 Chronicles 17:10-11) the Philistines and Arabians brought tribute to Jehoshaphat)
- 14) 2 Chronicles 21:16-17 Philistines and Arabs living near the Cushites against Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah
- 15) 2 Chronicles 26:6 King Uzzia: "He went out and made war against the Philistines and broke through the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod, and he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines" ²
- 16) 2 Chronicles 28:18 at the time of King Ahaz: "the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages. And they settled there"

- 17) 2 Chronicles 28:18 “The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the low country, and of the south of Judah, and had taken Bethshemesh, and Ajalon, and Gederoth, and Shocho with the villages thereof, and Timnah with the villages thereof, Gimzo also and the villages thereof: and they dwelt there.”

Finally, there are two references that don't fit the list of conflicts, though they do indicate the kind of negative or positive relationship the Israelites had with these peoples at that time.

- 1) 2 Chronicles 24:26 An Ammonite and Moabite killed king Joash. From God's perspective this was in revenge for the death of the son of priest Jehoiada (v.22).
- 2) Jeremiah 35:11 When Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, the Rechabites said, 'Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and the army of the Syrians.' So, we are living in Jerusalem."

4. Conclusion

In light of all the recorded conflicts Israel had with other peoples, the problems they had with the Ishmaelites stand out as being very few. Probably the Arabs mentioned in Chronicles were descendants of other tribes such as the Midianites, who eventually assimilated with the original Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael the son of Abraham. But even if these Arabs were descendants of Ishmael, the relationship between the offspring of Ishmael and his half-brother Isaac is not dominated by much violence.

That helps us interpret the third part of Genesis 16:12 correctly, which states: “he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”³ According to some translations, Ishmael would live in enmity with his brothers.⁴ The Biblical record of the conflicts between Israel and the surrounding peoples favors the neutral ESV translation. For a deep study of Genesis 16:12, please visit www.godlovesishmael.com/genesis16-12

¹ 2 Chronicles 26:7 mentions a people called *Arviyim* who lived in Gur-baal. Their name differs from those mentioned above in the Bible in that it contains an extra letter yod but is also translated "Arabian". 2 Chron 17:11 mentions a people called *Arvi'im* who brought Jehoshaphat tribute of rams and he-goats. Their name is also generally translated as "Arabians" although it differs noticeably in spelling from the above mentioned names as it contains the letter aleph at the end of the stem. Nothing else is known about these groups.

...On the other hand it is used in 2 Chronicles 21:16 for a seemingly different people located in Africa plausibly the same Africans referred to as an *erev* (mix of people) in Ezekiel 30:5.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_%28etymology%29#Semitic_etymology

² English Standard Version

³ English Standard Version

⁴ For instance, the New International Version states, “and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers”, adding a footnote that ‘hostility toward’ can also be translated “live to the east of”

www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2016&version=NIV