

28 Aroer

Names (also known as)

Modern day Ara'ir or Ar'arah.

Etymology

Strong's H6177 - “Juniper” (from its nudity of situation). Smith's, BDB – “ruins”. Others say the name Aroer comes from the root-verb ערר ('*arar*), meaning to be, or become naked and means “bushes of dwarf juniper trees”.

Location/Description



Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon (Deut. 2:36), to the east of the Dead Sea, in present-day Jordan, is the place of modern 'Ara'ir on the north bank of the Arnon ravine, about 18 km (11 miles) from the mouth of the river.

The town was an ancient Moabite settlement that provided a serious road block to Israel entering the Land.

Scriptural references

Old Testament

Num. 32:34; Deut. 2:36; 3:12; 4:48; Josh. 12:2; 13:9,16,25; Jud. 11:26,33; 1 Sam. 30:28; 2 Sam. 24:5; 2 Kings 10:33; 1 Chron. 5:8; 11:44; Isa. 17:2; Jer. 48:19.

Famous characters

Sihon - king of Amorites
Hazeal, Jehiel, Jephthah, David, Joab



Brief history

Aroer was usually described by its situation, in order to distinguish it from other localities of the same name (Deut. 3:12, 4:48; Josh. 12:2, 13:9; Jud. 11:26; 2 Sam. 24:5).

It appears first to have been captured from Moab by the Amorite king Sihon (see Num. 21:26). After the Israelite conquest of the Amorites, it was assigned as part of the territory of the tribe of Reuben, whose southern frontier it marked. This is the city mentioned in Num. 32:34, with the southern towns, as having been built by the tribe of Gad before the tribal allotments of Israel. When Hazael of Aram Damascus took the Transjordan territory from the Kingdom of Israel, Aroer is given as its southern limit (2 Kings 10:33). It is clear, from Jer. 48:19, that the Moabites ultimately recovered it from Israel.



According to a prophecy in Isa. 17:2, Aroer will become either forsaken, forsaken and desolate, or forsaken forever, depending on which manuscript is used to derive the English translation. Its geographical surroundings may be included in this prophecy, as well, for the passage reads "the cities of Aroer."

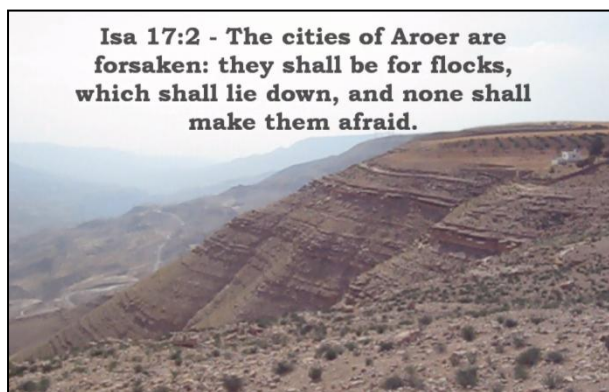
The name Aroer is applied in the O.T. to three distinct localities:

1. Aroer on the edge of the valley of Arnon (Deut. 2:36).
2. A city in the territory of the tribe of Judah (1 Sam. 30:28, and probably Josh.15:22). It has been identified with the ruins of 'Ar'āra, 32 kms (20 miles) south of Hebron and 19 kms (12 miles) southeast from Beer-sheba.

David sent to the elders of this city a share of the booty taken from the Amalekites who had attacked Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:28).

3. A town east of Rabbath-Ammon (Josh. 13:25) in the territory of the tribe of Gad, originally an Ammonite city (Jud. 11: 33). It has not yet been identified.

Someone hailing from Aroer is called an Aroerite (1 Chron. 11:44).



The Moabites had gained control of Aroer under King Mesha, as his inscription on the Moabite Stone witnesses (about 850 BC).

Spiritual significance of Aroer

Aroer stood like a sentinel high on the ridge of Wadi Arnon to the north. As Israel wound their way down the steep slopes of Arnon north of Ar of Moab, they could look up at the stronghold of Sihon king of the Amorites “who dwelt in Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer” - Josh. 12:2. It was his fortress and place of rulership, though not his place of permanent residence. This is clearly because being his southern boundary on the lip of Arnon, it was the obvious place to be when threatened by enemies.

Deut. 2:36 – “From Aroer, which is by the brink of the river of Arnon, and from the city that is by the river, even unto Gilead, there was not one city too strong for us: the LORD our God delivered all unto us.”

Against all the odds (from a purely human perspective), Israel captured Aroer and conquered Sihon. This was achieved by the intervention of Yahweh in a manner equivalent to the destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea as Moses testifies in Num. 21:14-15:

“Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of Yahweh, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.”

The capture of Aroer therefore marks one of the most significant victories by Israel, under the hand of God, in its entire history.

It may well have been this fact that motivated Joab to commence the unwelcome task of numbering Israel on David’s orders from Aroer as recorded in 2 Sam. 24:5:

“And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in **Aroer**, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer.”

Though Joab was a cruel and self-interested ‘politician’ who would murder at will to secure his position in David’s government, there were at least two occasions when he rightly attempted to correct David. One was the rebuke of David’s reaction to the news of Absalom’s death in Mahanaim (2 Sam. 19:1-8), the other was his questioning of the propriety of David’s instructions to number the potential army of Israel (2 Sam. 24:2-4).

Having been ignored, but still clearly disturbed, Joab began the task at Aroer. Might he not have been harking back to the very first major victory of Israel over the inhabitants of the land to be distributed among the tribes? It had all begun here with a huge victory by Divine intervention. Why did David need to know how strong his army was now?

Aroer therefore represents a promise that the greatest of obstacles in the way of entering the Land of promise can be overcome by faith and trust in Yahweh to do what we cannot do for ourselves in our own strength.

Sources

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