

# JEPHTHAH V. THE AMMONITES

## THE ECONOMICS OF LAND-GRABBING – BACKDROP TO THE STORY

1. Ammon's traditional territory was situated about 20 m. E. of the R. Jordan, between the R. Jabbok on the north and a few miles north of the Dead Sea.
2. The capital city of Rabbat-Ammon (modern Amman) was strategically located at the point where the east and west branches of the King's Highway converged. This was the only trade and communication route between Elat and Damascus.
3. Products from Egypt, Arabia, Canaan, Syria, Mesopotamia and Gilead would travel on this road.
4. Ammon's possible alliance with the Philistines (**Judg. 10:7**) may well have been due to converging trade interests (**Norman K. Gottwald**).
5. Ammon, in control of the King's Highway, could gain by linking up with Philistia, which controlled the international coastal road (Via Maris in Roman days).
6. The raids in **10:9** may be seen as Ammonite probes across a weakened Gilead to gain access to three roads from Jericho to the west: i) the road across Judah to Kiryat-Yearim, Bet-Shemesh and the coast; ii) the road across Benjamin to Gibeon, Bet-Horon and Gezer; and iii) the road across Ephraim to Bethel and Aphek.
7. By Jephthah's time, there are archaeological hints that the Philistines had extended their influence south from Bet-Shean to Succot in the Jordan Valley, which had been alienated by Gideon's harsh punishment.
8. Succot was located just north of the Gileadite shrine city of Mizpah.
9. The main concern of the king of Ammon was to consolidate his control of the King's Highway, as part of it ran through Israelite Gilead to the north and south of Rabbat-Ammon. As long as the Israelites possessed Gilead, Ammon's economic advantage would be constrained.
10. To achieve his goal, it would be necessary to expand to the west and sieze Gilead.
11. The resulting 18-year occupation forms the backdrop to the conflict in Jephthah's time.

**E. John Hamlin – Judges: At Risk in the Promised Land (1990).**