

## Isaiah 15-16 Handout

In chapter 14, we saw God's authority over all nations and human pride. It contrasted the downfall of arrogant nations like Babylon, Assyria and Philistia with God's lasting refuge He will provide to the humble. We saw that no earthly power can stand against God's purposes and that pride always leads to a fall.

Chapters 15 and 16 stand as a single, unified prophecy that provides a lament and oracle of judgment against the nation of Moab. Chapter 15 focuses on the description of the devastation while chapter 16 describes Moab's reaction and gives the reason behind the judgment.

### Verse 1

**Who is this prophecy against?** \_\_\_\_\_

Moab was located east of Judah and the Dead Sea. It was about 30 miles long and 30 miles wide. Moab is a little different than the other nations around Israel as they were ethnically related to Israel, but were still seen as enemies. Moab descended from Lot who was Abraham's nephew. Lot's older daughter had a son named Moab from an incestuous act with her father (Genesis 19). So we see that Moab begins through human schemes rather than trust in God, a pattern we will see echoed in these chapters today.

The relationship between Moab and Israel was often hostile. Some reasons for this hostility include:

- Moab denied Israel passage and water when Israel left Egypt. This caused the Lord to forbid Moabites from entering His assembly (Deuteronomy 23)
- King Balak of Moab hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, though God turned the curse into blessings (Numbers 22-24).
- Spiritual corruption - Moabite women lured Israelite men into idolatrous worship and sexual immorality, leading to a plague (Numbers 25).
- Moab oppressed Israel for 18 years after Joshua's death (Judges 3:12-30), establishing a history of antagonism.

Two cities are mentioned here in verse one. Ar was a major city that was located in central Moab. Kir was a fortified city and was most likely Moab's main military stronghold.

**What does it say about these two cities?** \_\_\_\_\_

This seems to be showing sudden destruction with no time to prepare, defend or escape.

### Verses 2-4

These verses show the expression of grief among the nation of Moab. This is intense national mourning.

Dibon was the location of a temple of the Moabite god Chemosh. The people will go to their pagan temples to cry out to their gods, but will see their gods inability to save them. This shows their desperation and the futility of their idols to save them when judgment comes.

**What will happen to every head and beard?** \_\_\_\_\_

This was a sign of deep grief; cultural mourning.

**What will the people wear?** \_\_\_\_\_

This is a public lament. We see the collapse of Moab's joy, security and pride.

**In the second part of verse 4, who will also cry out?** \_\_\_\_\_

These would normally be the last to panic, but they are crying out just like everyone else.

We see in these four verses an overwhelming national grief that brings a clear message: there is no earthly refuge when God brings judgment. No religion, military or city can stand against Him.

## **Verse 5**

**What do we see in the first line of verse 5?** \_\_\_\_\_

It seems that Isaiah is the one speaking here, but that he is expressing God's heart. God doesn't take pleasure in the suffering of people even when they are under judgment.

Ezekiel 18:23 says, *"Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?"*

The people of Moab seem to flee south. Zoar is a small city near the southern tip of the Dead Sea. Luhith was a steep, uphill path in Moab. Horonaim was a southern town in Moab. The picture we get is one of panic and chaos as the nation collapses from north to south. The people are overwhelmed and don't know what to do. The once proud, successful nation is now reduced to frightened refugees.

## **Verses 6-9**

**What picture does verse 6 give?** \_\_\_\_

Nimrim was an area that had abundant springs that kept the area fertile and lush.

**What would happen to this area?** \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 7 shows them taking with them whatever they can carry before they flee south.

Moab's people take whatever wealth or goods they can salvage and flee south, likely toward Edom. The "Ravine of the Poplars" most likely is referring to a stream on the southern border. We get this image here of a refugee caravan, with people clutching whatever they can carry while leaving everything else behind. This is total vulnerability and desperation.

The two cities mentioned in verse 8 seem to be showing the extent of the wailing as Eglaim is to the north and Beer-elim is to the south. It covers the extent of the wailing, showing how every part of Moab is in anguish. The wailing is so loud that the entire nation of Moab can hear it.

The city of Dibon in verse 9 is one of the key cities in Moab with water pools.

**What does it say these waters will be filled with?** \_\_\_\_\_

This gives us a graphic picture of what will take place – many lives lost.

**What does God say He will bring upon Dibon?** \_\_\_\_\_

This seems to be symbolizing unstoppable destruction, even on those who might initially escape the catastrophe. What this actually looks like, we don't know, but what this means is that there will be no safe place for those who flee.

What we see in this chapter is that Moab's judgment is complete and unavoidable.

## **Chapter 16**

### **Verse 1**

**What is Moab told to do in verse 1?** \_\_\_\_\_

This symbolizes humility and a plea for help. Historically, Moab would send lambs as tribute to Israel (II Kings 3:4). Here Isaiah is telling them to do it again. This is basically saying, "submit to Judah and acknowledge the rightful king in Zion."

Sela, across the desert, refers to Moab's southern regions. This is where the people are fleeing. This is Moab's chance to turn to Israel's God for refuge.

### **Verse 2**

This verse shows Moab as fugitives and refugees. They will flee south to the borders of Judah, scattered like birds from their nest.

### **Verses 3-4**

Let's break down verse 3:

"Make up your mind", "Render a decision" – Moab is asking Judah to show mercy on the people of Moab as they flee to them.

"Make your shade like the night– at high noon" – In this part of the world, shade at noon would have been the safest place from the scorching sun. This is like asking for maximum protection. They are asking Judah to provide strong refuge for them.

"Hide the fugitives" – The people of Moab who escape the destruction will flee to Judah looking for asylum.

"Do not betray the refugees" – This is asking Judah not to hand the fleeing people over to their enemies. Don't betray those seeking refuge by sending them back into danger.

Verse 3 shows Moab's urgent appeal to Judah. This both reveals Moab's desperation and Judah's opportunity to show compassion and mercy.

Verse 4 continues with the plea for refuge from the devastation that has come upon Moab and its people.

**What does it say about both the oppressor and the destruction?** \_\_\_\_\_

The aggressor will vanish. This is showing that the oppression will not last forever. The destroyer will eventually be removed. Whoever God raises up to judge Moab, will have a limited lifespan. They won't continue indefinitely.

We see in these verses that there are two intertwined ideas:

- Moab's plea
- God's promise

## **Verse 5**

**Who is this verse talking about?** \_\_\_\_\_

Right in the middle of God's message of judgment to Moab, we get a messianic promise. Moab is pleading for refuge (vs 3-4), in this verse, God is lifting their eyes, as well as Judah's to the ultimate refuge: Jesus. He will come from the line of David.

**How will this throne be established?** \_\_\_\_\_

This king who will come will not be like the oppressive rulers that Moab fears. His rule will be defined by covenant love and faithfulness. He will be trustworthy and true. He will rule with justice and righteousness. He will be nothing like the current kings of the nations.

These first five verses show us that God desires compassion, even toward enemy nations. Ultimately though, it shows Moab's real need is to come under the rule of God's chosen king.

In verses 6-12 we will see why Moab will not find relief.

## **Verses 6-8**

**In verse 6 we get the reason for Moab's destruction. What is it?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do we learn about their boasts?** \_\_\_\_\_

The Moabites wail in grief and mourning because everything they trusted in will collapse and be destroyed. The end of verse 7 says, "lament and grieve for the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth." This is symbolizing the nation's pride, luxury and idolatrous way of living. Raisin cakes were a delicacy and a symbol of wealth. They were the product of Moab's rich vineyards and were often connected to pagan worship celebrations. Kir Hareseth was probably Moab's strongest, most important fortified city.

The places mentioned in verse 8 were known for their fertile fields and vineyards.

**What will happen to the fields and vineyards?** \_\_\_\_\_

This shows how Moab's prosperity will wither and dry up. Moab's economy will collapse.

### **Verses 9-11**

In verse 9 we see Isaiah's own emotional response (and ultimately God's heart being expressed through him) to what is happening. **What does it say he does?** \_\_\_\_\_

Jazer and Sibmah were both places with famous vineyards. Heshbon and Elealeh were nearby cities that were located on a high plateau and were known as rich agricultural centers.

Verse 10 completes the picture of Moab's agricultural collapse.

**Who put an end to their joy, gladness and shouting?** \_\_\_\_\_

This verse makes it very clear that this judgment is not random. It is not just some military defeat. God's sovereignty is all over this. It is also very clear that it is all because of their pride and arrogance and their refusal to humble themselves.

Again in verse 11 we see Isaiah's compassion on the people of Moab rather than celebrating or gloating.

### **Verse 12**

This verse acts as a climactic verdict on Moab's guilt. In their distress, Moab cries out to their pagan gods. Despite their cries of distress, God will not respond in the way that they hope. This verse shows that superficial prayers or ritualistic lament without true repentance and humility are ineffective.

### **Verses 13-14**

**This chapter ends with a firm declaration. How many years will it be before Moab comes to an end?** \_\_\_\_\_

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One thing we see from this chapter is the broken beginnings do not doom a people, but continued pride does. Moab's tragedy is not where it started, but that it never learned to trust in the Lord instead of itself. It also serves as a warning that origins may shape us, but they don't excuse us. God's mercy is available to everyone, even to nations born in sin, if they will humble themselves.

One of the things I think is really cool is how Ruth was a Moabite. She came out of a nation born from Lot's brokenness and a people hostile to the nation of Israel, and a group excluded from Israel's assembly. If you know the story of Ruth, you know that she was totally different. She was humble, loyal and sought refuge under God. She trusted the Lord and His people. Ruth shows us what Moab could have been. We know that Ruth was a part of the Davidic line. She was an ancestor of the Messiah. What Moab rejected nationally, Ruth embraced personally.

This is one of the things I love about God. Everyone makes their own choice, showing us that God redeems individuals even when nations resist Him. Lineage doesn't determine where you end up — faith does. God delights in weaving grace from broken beginnings. Moab's story ends in judgment, but Ruth's story ends in redemption. This shows us that God's invitation always stands.

### **Why must judgment be real for mercy to be meaningful?**

It can be hard when you read chapters like this to see beyond just a "judgment on Moab". That's why we have to look deeper. I think we get a good glimpse into the heart of God in these chapters. Some things we see:

- God is just, but not cruel
- God is sovereign, but not distant
- God is grieved, not gleeful
- God is patient, but not permissive
- God is compassionate, even toward enemies

Look closely at what we just read about the heart of God revealed in these chapters.

### **What stands out to you when you look at this?**

Let's look at how these chapters prepare us for the fuller revelation of God's heart in Christ where judgment and mercy meet at the cross.

- ❖ Before we ever reach the New Testament, we meet a God who laments over those He judges.
  - This prepares us for a cross where God's judgment against sin is real and severe and God Himself bears the emotional and moral cost.
  - At the cross, judgment is not outsourced—it is absorbed.
  - Isaiah shows us God weeping over judgment; the cross shows us God entering into it.
- ❖ Moab falls because of pride—self-exaltation, self-reliance, refusal to bow.
  - This sets up the gospel contrast where Moab clings to pride and is brought low whereas Christ *empties Himself* and is lifted up (Phil 2:6–11)
  - The cross answers the problem Isaiah exposes: Pride must die—but in Christ, it dies in us because He died for us.
- ❖ Moab is invited to submit to a throne marked by steadfast love, justice and faithfulness.
  - This anticipates Christ who becomes the true refuge for the outcast and the righteous king who welcomes enemies.
  - At the cross, God does not merely invite the guilty to seek shelter—He becomes the shelter Himself.

- ❖ Isaiah points forward to a king whose reign is defined not by conquest, but by faithful love and justice.
  - The New Testament reveals that Christ's justice is satisfied through self-giving love.
  - Isaiah prepares us to recognize this kind of king—one who reigns by mercy without abandoning righteousness.
- ❖ Moab's judgment is delayed, measured and purposeful
  - This prepares us for the long patience of God in redemptive history, and the moment when judgment and mercy intersect decisively.
  - God does not cancel judgment; He redirects it—from sinners to the Sin-Bearer.
- ❖ Moab is a foreign, hostile nation, yet God weeps for them.
  - This anticipates a Messiah for the nations, a gospel for enemies and a cross that tears down dividing walls.
  - Isaiah 15–16 teaches us to expect a salvation wide enough to include former outsiders.

Isaiah 15-16 are so important because it keeps us from viewing God as harsh in the Old Testament and kind in the New Testament and it keeps us from separating judgment and love. These chapters prepare us to see the cross the right way. The cross is not a change in God's heart — it is the clearest revelation of it.

## Prayer

*Righteous and merciful God,*

*We have heard Your word, and we feel its weight.*

*You are just in all You do, yet slow to anger and rich in compassion.*

*Your grief over Moab reminds us that judgment is never spoken lightly and that mercy is always being offered.*

*Guard us from the pride that trusts in our own strength,  
from hearts that resist Your invitation to refuge.*

*Where we are tempted to rely on what we have built,  
teach us instead to rest under Your rule.*

*Teach us to hear Your warnings as grace,  
to recognize that Your call to refuge is an act of love.*

*Where we see sorrow, let us not respond with arrogance or indifference,  
but with the same compassion You show.*

*Thank You for providing a shelter that does not fail—  
for a righteous King whose throne is established in steadfast love.  
We place our hope not in fleeting security,  
but in You alone, our refuge and our peace.*

*Receive our obedience, shape our hearts,  
and lead us to walk in faithful trust before You. Amen.*