

# Book of Isaiah



## Chapter 15

*Theme: The burden of Moab*

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## Chapter 15

### Moab:

- Descended from eldest son of Lot and his eldest daughter's incest (Gen 19:37);
- King Balak hired Balaam, son of Peor (Num 31:15-16; 22:5; 23:8; Cf. Rev 2:14);
- Ruth: Elimelech and family during famine in Bethlehem;
- David: took his parents there when pursued by Saul (1 Sam 22:3); foreshadows Jer 48:47; Isa 16:4;
- Eludes rule of Coming World Leader, Dan 11:41.
- Hence: superficially friendly initially; but like Edom, became enemy of Israel.<sup>1</sup>

This brief chapter records the third burden, the burden of Moab. Chapters 15 and 16 deal with Moab. This seems strange in light of the fact that there were only two chapters that dealt with Babylon, and Babylon was the first great world power. Compared to Babylon, Moab may seem to us like it was very small potatoes. But in Isaiah's day -- in fact, as early as the time of David -- this land was very important, and it was a great kingdom.

Moab was the nation which came from Lot through the incestuous relationship with his elder daughter. Moab, the illegitimate son of this sordid affair, was the father of the Moabites. These people became the inveterate and persistent enemies of the nation of Israel. Balak, their king, hired Balaam, the prophet, to curse Israel, for he feared them when they passed through the land of Moab.

The lovely story told in the Book of Ruth concerns a maid of Moab. This maiden of Moab was a very wonderful person. I am in love with Ruth and have been for a long time -- not only the Book of Ruth, but also with my wife whose name is Ruth. David was part Moabite for his father Jesse was a descendant of Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth. David had relatives in Moab, and he took his father and mother there when Saul was pursuing him.

Today the nation of Moab has disappeared, but who are the modern Moabites? I feel that Moab is representative of those who make a profession of being children of God but actually have no vital relationship with Him (see Heb. 12:8). Like Felix and Festus, the Moabites were "almost persuaded." They were not very far from the kingdom, but they never quite made it. They were neighbors of God's people but never became followers of God.

The modern "Moabite" is easily discovered. He is in our churches today. He parades as a Christian. He is the one Paul describes in 2Timothy 3:5: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." Jude 1:16 also describes him: "These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." The modern Moabites are ungodly. They pretend to be godly, but they are not. They flatter you with great swelling words when they think they can get something from you, but drop you the minute they find that they cannot get anything from you.

Moab was a dangerous friend to have. It was never a trusted ally of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notes from Chuck Missler, KHouse.org

<sup>2</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

The literary structure of this oracle is generally chiasmic, focusing the reader's attention on security in Zion (16:4b-5). It is very difficult to date. One writer believed this invasion took place around 718 B.C. when Sargon the Assyrian descended on the tribal peoples of northwest Arabia (cf. 21:16-17), but this is not at all certain.<sup>205</sup> Another speculated that Tiglath-pileser's 732 B.C. or Sennacherib's 701 B.C. invasions of Moab may have fulfilled this prophecy initially.<sup>206</sup> Moab lay east of Judah and the Dead Sea, between the Arnon and Zered rivers, and occupied an area about 30 miles long and 30 miles wide. The Moabites were more friendly neighbors of Judah than the Edomites or the Ammonites, who also lived east of the Jordan River. Notice the more friendly tone of this oracle compared with the two preceding ones. But hostility toward Judah due to land claims in Transjordan had a long history and resulted in deep antagonism (cf. Zeph. 2:9-10). The point of this oracle is that Judah should not rely on Moab because she would suffer destruction.<sup>3</sup>

**<sup>1</sup>The burden of Moab. Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence;**

**Moab**, the son of Lot (Gen. 19:31-37), and his descendants settled east of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea -- from the south end of this sea to the river Zered and north to about 5 miles above the sea and 30-40 miles east. Edom joined Moab south of the river Zered and Ammon joined these on the north. The land was originally occupied by giants called Emims, who were defeated and expelled by the Moabites (Dt. 2:10). The north part of Moab was conquered by Sihon, giant king of the Amorites, and the river Arnon then became the boundary of Moab. When Israel came out of Egypt, Sihon was defeated by them and all his land (as well as that of Og, king of Bashan, and the land north of Og's kingdom) became the possession of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Moab oppressed Israel for 18 years after the death of Joshua (Judg. 3:14-21). Later peace was restored and Moab became a place of refuge for many Israelites (Ruth 1:1; 1Sam. 22:3). The record shows that Saul (1Sam. 14:47), David (2Sam. 8:1-12), Ahab (2Ki. 1:1; 3:4-5), and Jehoshaphat (2Chr. 20:1-30) defeated Moab. The Moabites continued as a nation after their defeat by Assyria about 3 years after this prophecy (Isa. 15:1-9; 16:6-14). They are mentioned in prophecies of the latter days along with Israel (Isa. 11:14; 16:1-5; Jer. 48:47; Dan. 11:41).<sup>4</sup>

**[Ar of Moab]** Ar, the chief city of Moab, was located about 15 miles south of the river Arnon, the northern border of Moab (Num. 21:15,28; Dt. 2:9,18,29).

**[laid waste, and brought to silence]** Moab was defeated by the Assyrians about the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign, and the prophecies of Isa. 15:1-9; 16:6-14 were then fulfilled.

**[Kir of Moab]** Kir was another large city of Moab located about 6 miles south of Ar (Isa. 22:6; 2Ki. 16:9; Amos 1:5; 9:7).

"In the night" -- the burden of Moab came suddenly. This expression is repeated twice to emphasize the suddenness of the storm which struck the nation. The storm came at night, and

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<sup>3</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

their night of weeping never ended. Assyria destroyed this nation in a way that is unbelievable and almost unspeakable. They seemed to wipe Moab off the face of the earth.

"Kir" is Kerak on a mountain peak about ten miles from the southeast corner of the Dead Sea.<sup>5</sup>

Moab was east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were descendants of Lot through his incestuous relationship with his older daughter (Genesis 19:31-37). Moab had always been Israel's enemy. They oppressed Israel and invaded their land (Judges 3:12-14), fought against Saul (1 Samuel 14:47) and against David (2 Samuel 8:2, 11, 12). Moab would be punished for treating Israel harshly.<sup>6</sup>

The founder of the people of Moab was the son born of the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters, when his daughters made Lot drunk, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites settled in the plains to the south-east of Israel, in what is modern-day Jordan.

At times, the Moabites were great enemies of Israel. It was the Balak, king of Moab, who hired Balaam the prophet, hoping that he could curse Israel (Numbers 22-25). It was Eglon, king of Moab, who oppressed Israel in the days of the Judges (Judges 3:12-30). During the time of Saul and David, Israel established a firm control over Moab, but later kings of Israel were not always able to keep them under Israeli dominance.

At the same time, there was a Moabite connection with Israel. First, they were related to Israel because Lot was Abraham's nephew. Because of this, God told Israel in Deuteronomy 2:9 that they were not to destroy Moab and take their land. As well, David, Israel's greatest king, was one-quarter Moabite. His paternal grandmother Ruth was from Moab, and David entrusted his father and mother to the protection of the king of Moab when he was a fugitive from Saul (1 Samuel 22:3-4). For these reasons, there is a great deal of sadness and empathy on Isaiah's part as he describes the coming judgment on Moab.<sup>7</sup>

God announces coming judgment on Moab, against these cities.

"Most of these sites were originally part of Israel's territory when Moses and Joshua defeated Sihon, King of the Amorites. All the cities north of the Arnon River . . . once belonged to the tribe of Reuben. Throughout the years, however, the Moabites had persistently pushed the Israelites out of these regions." (Wolf)

**<sup>2</sup>He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads *shall be* baldness, *and* every beard cut off.**

Bajith = Temple of Baal?

The picture is of a Moabite man fleeing the destruction of his city, running to his temple and his pagan gods for protection and mourning (To the high places to weep).

**Dibon:** Num 21:30; 32:3, 34; Jos 13:9, 17; Jer 48:18, 22;

Where Moabite Stone found, 3 mi E of Dead Sea: 1st alphabetic characters; confirms Biblical accounts.

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<sup>5</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>6</sup> Life Application Study Bible.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>

**Nebo:** Num 32:3, 38; 33:47; 1 Chr 5:8; Jer 48:1, 22  
**Medeba:** Num 21:30; Jos 13:9, 16; 1 Chr 19:7;  
**Baldness:** during mourning (22:12); Micah 1:16.<sup>8</sup>

**[He is gone up]** He (Moab), that is, those left after the destruction of Isa. 15:1-9.

**[Bajith]** Bajith. Only here; unidentified.

**[high places]** Places of sacrifice to idols.

**[Medeba]** A city in the eastern part of Reuben (Num. 21:30; Josh. 13:9,16; 1Chr. 19:7).<sup>9</sup>

There are several places mentioned in this verse with which I do not think we are acquainted. "Bajith" means house and apparently refers to the temple of Chemosh which was in that land. "Dibon" was a town on the east side of Jordan where the Moabite stone was found. "Nebo" is the mountain from which Moses saw the Promised Land. "Medeba" was a city that belonged to Reuben (see Josh. 13:16).

All of these cities and places belonged to Moab during Isaiah's day. They were going to be destroyed because, although the Moabites professed to know God, they spent their time in heathen temples dedicated to pagan gods, saying that they were worshiping the living and true God.<sup>10</sup>

The Moabites worshipped Chemosh and Baal Peor, to whom they offered human sacrifices and practiced a sexual cult.

He refers collectively to Moab. High places were sites of pagan worship (16:12). weep wail: This refers to the mourning over the destruction of the cities of Moab. Baldness and having one's beard cut off were aspects of mourning rituals.<sup>11</sup>

He has gone up to Bajith (KJV): 'alah ha-bayith. "Ha- bayith" means "the house." The subject of "He goes up" is Moab as a nation of people. The major temple of Chemosh, god of the Moabites is meant by "the House." The location is the high places (Heb. Bemoth or Bemas at Dimon) Actually Dibon is meant but Dimon is used because of the similarity of the word with one meaning "blood." The flight of Moab before the enemies to the succor of Chemosh is unavailing and useless.<sup>12</sup>

**Vs 2-4** The Moabites would express great grief over their national defeat. Dibon was the site of a temple to the Moabite god Chemosh. Many of the people would go there to bewail Chemosh's inability to save them. They would also mourn the loss of the towns of Nebo and Medeba in typical Near Eastern fashion. The residents of Heshbon and Elealeh in the north of Moab would be heard wailing in Jahaz to the south because the noise would be so great. Even soldiers would cry aloud in fear.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Notes from Chuck Missler, KHouse.org

<sup>9</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>10</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

<sup>11</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.moellerhaus.com/14-18.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

**<sup>3</sup>In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly.**

When I was in Amman, Jordan, I had a very funny feeling. It is a weird sort of place. It is a very poor land now, but in Isaiah's day it was a rich country. I felt as if the judgment of God was still on that place.<sup>14</sup>

Sackcloth and weeping were part of Middle Eastern mourning rites (Gen. 23:2; 37:34; 2 Sam. 1:11, 12).

At this invasion, and as a result of it, there will be great distress and mourning in Moab. Jeremiah 48:1-13 also prophesies the judgment of Moab, and also gives the reason why. "Moab has been at ease from his youth; he has settled on his dregs, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, nor has he gone into captivity. Therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent has not changed. Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I shall send him wine-workers who will tip him over and empty his vessels and break the bottles." When we are at ease, and are never "poured" from vessel to vessel, we "settle on the dregs" and are never refined. God uses the "pouring" process to refine us.<sup>15</sup>

**<sup>4</sup>And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard *even* unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him.**

**Heshbon:** 20 mi E of Jordan

**[Jahaz]** a city of Sihon (Num. 21:23; Dt. 2:32; Judg. 11:20; Jer. 48:34). Called Jahaza (Josh. 13:18); Jahazah (Josh. 21:36; Jer. 48:21); and Jahzah (1Chr. 6:78).

Heshbon, Elealeh, and Jahaz were cities in Moab. armed soldiers: The weeping would extend even to hardened fighting men.

**<sup>5</sup>My heart shall cry out for Moab; his fugitives *shall flee* unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction.**

**Zoar:** spared for Lot's sake (Gen 19:20-22); S tip of Dead Sea?

**[My heart shall cry out for Moab]** My (Isaiah's) heart shall cry for Moab.

**[Zoar]** Zoar, a small town at the southern end of the Dead Sea (note, Gen. 19:16).

**[heifer of three years old]** Flee like a three-year-old heifer (Jer. 48:34).

**[Luhith]** a height one mile west of mount Nebo where sacrifices were offered to idol gods (Jer. 48:5).

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<sup>14</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>

**[Horonaim]** an unidentified place in Moab (Jer. 48:3,5,34).<sup>16</sup>

Although Moab was the enemy of Israel, Isaiah's heart goes out to them in sympathy because of the terror that has come upon them. This reveals the heart of God. In spite of people's sin today, God still loves them and will extend His mercy to them if they will but turn to Him.

The rest of the chapter gives a detailed description of the further ravaging of the land of Moab. It has been literally fulfilled.<sup>17</sup>

My heart refers to Isaiah, who felt sympathy for Moab (16:9–11). Zoar was a southwestern border city of Moab on the south end of the Dead Sea. The Ascent of Luhith is also mentioned by Jeremiah in his lament over Moab (Jer. 48:5).<sup>18</sup>

His fugitives shall flee to Zoar: The connection is interesting, because Zoar was the city Lot and his daughters escaped from, hiding in the mountains, before Lot's daughters committed incest with their father, and brought forth the child Moab, the father of the Moabites.

Bultema on Zoar: "This town is called an heifer of three years old, apparently to indicate that it had never been under the yoke of strangers."<sup>19</sup>

**Vs 5-9** The Lord also expressed His grief over Moab's coming judgment through the prophet (cf. 21:3-4; 22:4; Jer. 9:1). Isaiah took up God's words in his own mouth and represented God's thoughts and words by using the first person singular (cf. 16:9). The Moabite refugees would move from place to place trying to find security. Their movement would be generally south, so the enemy may have descended from the north. The whole country would suffer devastation. Even though people would flee, they would not escape destruction. A lion is frequently an image of a fierce, implacable attacker in biblical poetry (v. 9; cf. Amos 3:12).<sup>20</sup>

**‘For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing.**

**[Nimrim]** probably the Wady Nimrim at the south end of the Dead Sea (Jer. 48:34).

[for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing] Three proofs of desolation:

1. The hay is withered away.
2. The grass fails.
3. There is no green thing.<sup>21</sup>

The waters and green grass of the oasis could not survive the numerous refugees.

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<sup>16</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>17</sup> Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

<sup>18</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/isaiah.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

The green grass has withered away: The beautiful plains of Moab were wonderful grazing land. But now, under the hand of God's judgment, the green grass has withered away.<sup>22</sup>

**<sup>7</sup>Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows.**

[they carry away to the brook of the willows] The abundance of Moab in storehouses will be carried away to the brook of willows. The Septuagint reads: "I will bring the Arabians upon the valley and they shall take it."<sup>23</sup>

[brook of the willows] This may refer to the brook Zered, the boundary between Moab and Arabia (Dt. 2:13-14), indicating that Arabs helped destroy Moab.<sup>24</sup>

Therefore the abundance they have gained . . . they will carry away to the Brook of the Willows: The picture is of fleeing refugees, carrying with them all their possessions.<sup>25</sup>

**<sup>8</sup>For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beerelim.**

[Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beerelim] Eglaim, a city 8 miles south of Ar (cp. Ezek. 47:10). Beer-elim, well of the princes. Unknown at the present.<sup>26</sup>

The cry has gone all around the borders of Moab: Their pain in the midst of judgment is evident to all. Everyone around the borders of Moab sees God's judgment against them.

**<sup>9</sup>For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land.**

[Dimon shall be full of blood] Perhaps the same as Dimonah (Josh. 15:22) and Dibon (Num. 32:3). They were to be colored with the blood of the slain.<sup>27</sup>

[lions upon him that escapeth of Moab] Lions and wild animals were to help destroy the remnant of Moab.<sup>28</sup>

The term Dimon sounds like blood in Hebrew. Lions: Fleeing from one tragedy after another in their flight southward, the refugees turn to Judah in the west for asylum (16:1-5). As would be

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>

<sup>23</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>24</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>

<sup>26</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>27</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

<sup>28</sup> Dake's Annotated Reference Bible

the case with Israel (1:9; 6:13; 10:20; 11:16)—but not with Assyria (14:22) and Philistia (14:30)—a remnant would survive in Moab.<sup>29</sup>

Lions upon him who escapes from Moab: If the judgment of the night attack did not complete the work of judgment, God would send lions upon him who escapes. God will finish His work of judgment!<sup>30</sup>

Alec Motyer provided a helpful diagram of the structure of this section (chs. 13—23) and the one that follows it (chs. 24—27).

<b>Babylon</b> (13:1—14:27) Political overthrow	<b>The desert by the sea (Babylon)</b> (21:1-10) Religious overthrow	<b>The city of emptiness</b> (24:1-20) Broken laws and gates
<b>Philistia</b> (14:28-32) A Davidic king will yet reign in Zion	<b>Silence (Edom)</b> (21:11-12) Indefinite continuance of things as they are	<b>Zion's king</b> (24:21-23) "After many days"
<b>Moab</b> (chs. 15—16) Moab in need, but through pride suffers destruction in spite of shelter in Zion	<b>Evening (Arabia)</b> (21:13-17) Desert tribes in need: no ultimate refuge in mutual security	<b>The great banquet</b> (ch. 25) All nations feasted in Zion save Moab, excluded by pride
<b>Damascus/Ephraim</b> (chs. 17—18) Strong cities forsaken; the forgotten rock	<b>The Valley of Vision (Jerusalem)</b> (ch. 22) The city torn down	<b>The city of God</b> (ch. 26) The strong city; the everlasting rock
<b>Egypt</b> (chs. 19—20) Co-equal membership: Egypt, Assyria and Israel	<b>Tyre</b> (ch. 23) Holiness to the Lord	<b>The final gathering</b> (ch. 27) The harvest from Egypt and Assyria

Note that each of the first two columns of oracles (chs. 13—23) begins with Babylon, and the fourth section of each of these columns deals with Israel, which the peoples of the world surround in the literary structure of the passage. In the first column: Babylon is to Israel's north, Philistia to the west, Moab to the east, and Egypt to the south. In the second column: Babylon is to the north, Edom to the south, Arabia to the east, and Tyre to the west. Thus the selection of these nations in the literary structure of the passage suggests that Israel occupies the central place in God's plans, and the surrounding nations are vulnerable.

<sup>29</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/guz/isaiah-15.html>