

ISAIAH

Chapter 15

A Prophecy Against Moab

An oracle concerning Moab: Ar in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! Kir in Moab is ruined, destroyed in a night! ² Dibon goes up to its temple, to its high places to weep; Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. Every head is shaved and every beard cut off. ³ In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the roofs and in the public squares they all wail, prostrate with weeping. ⁴ Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard all the way to Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, and their hearts are faint. ⁵ My heart cries out over Moab; her fugitives flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah. They go up the way to Luhith, weeping as they go; on the road to Horonaim they lament their destruction. ⁶ The waters of Nimrim are dried up and the grass is withered; the vegetation is gone and nothing green is left. ⁷ So the wealth they have acquired and stored up they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars. ⁸ Their outcry echoes along the border of Moab; their wailing reaches as far as Eglaim, their lamentation as far as Beer Elim. ⁹ Dimon's waters are full of blood, but I will bring still more upon Dimon — a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land.

15:1–16:14 See Jer 48; Eze 25:8–11; Am 2:1–3; Zep 2:8–11. (CSB)

The scene Isaiah painted was graphic and frightening. The Moabites were in flight from sudden disaster. When God's judgment struck, even the armed soldiers wailed. Others picked up what they could and fled from the advancing trouble. In addition, drought withered everything green, and the waters turned to blood with the slaughter of Moab. If anyone was left, a lion attacked the escaping refugees. Moab was full of the sound of wailing. (PBC)

Ch 15 Moab and Israel had a long history of both friendship and discord (Gn 19:37; Dt 2:9). Kinship is expressed in genealogies, in the story of Ruth, as well as in similarity of language. But there was also animosity between them. The two nations had fought against each other since Israel came to claim the Promised Land. Moabites also fought with Israel over the former land of the Ammonites, which was claimed by Reuben and Gad. Thus, Isaiah exhibits both triumph and grief over the destruction of Moab. (TLSB)

15:1 *oracle*. See note on 13:1. (CSB)

Moab. A country east of the Dead Sea that was a perpetual enemy of Israel (see 25:10; 2Ki 13:20). (CSB)

AFTER the Philistines the most hostile enemies of the Jews were the Moabites, who were extraordinarily proud because of the fertility of their country and because it was densely populated, as we read in Jer. 48:1. On the plains of Moab Moses taught his people, as Deut. 1:5 says, and there also he was buried, as Deut. 34:5 f. says. Of a coming event, however, the prophet speaks as if it were present, and he sets it before the eyes as if he saw the event taking place. This is the most effective kind of teaching. (Luther)

The nation descended from the elder daughter of Lot, occupying the country southeast of the Dead Sea. (Kretzmann)

The Moabites worshiped Chemosh, apparently on the high places. Worship of this idol may have involved the sacrifice of children as burnt offerings (2 Kings 3:26, 27). Ruth, however, was a Moabite. By God's command, the Israelites did not attack the Moabites when they approached the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. God would not give the land of Moab to Israel because he had given it as a possession for the descendants of Lot (Deuteronomy 2:9). But the Moabites opposed the Israelites and hired Balaam to curse them (Numbers 22-24). Moab opposed God's people during the time of the judges until David subdued them. Even after that, the Moabites showed hostility to God's people whenever they could. (PBC)

Ar. The location of this city is unknown. (CSB)

The list relates the thoroughness of the destruction wrought on Moab. Ar is on the border of Moab (Dt 2:18). Kir-hareseth is in central Moab, c 12 mi E of the Salt Sea (Is 16:7, 11; 2Ki 3:25). Exact location of some places can no longer be determined. (TLSB)

The chief city of the Moabites was laid waste at night, that is, unexpectedly and by surprise, when they were fearing nothing less and were neither forewarned nor forearmed. In this way the prophet pictures the ease with which they were overcome and despoiled and at the same time the presumption and despair of that people, since by reason of their excessive pride they thought themselves safe from all dangers. (Luther)

ruined. The same word describes Isaiah's feelings about himself in 6:5. The destruction of Moab was probably connected with an invasion by Sargon of Assyria in 715/713 B.C. Cf. Jer 48:1-17. (CSB)

That is, destroyed, as in chapter 6:5 above. Kir, קִיר, sometimes means a wall or partition. Here it is a proper noun, like Beth, בֵּית, which otherwise means house. The Moabites named their temple thus because of its outstanding character. (Luther)

Kir. Probably Kir Hareseth, 15 miles south of the Arnon River and perhaps the capital of Moab at this time. Kir means "city." (CSB)

IN A NIGHT – What will make this destruction all the more terrible will be the fact that it occurred by night. (Leupold)

15:2 *He*. Moab's ruler. (TLSB)

temple. The people go up to their temple and the high places to weep, which signifies the failure of their god Chemosh to save them (Jer 48:35). (TLSB)

Dibon. Located four miles north of the Arnon River and given to the tribe of Gad at one time (see Nu 32:34). (CSB)

North of the river Arnon. (TLSB)

This was another one of their temples. (Luther)

high places. Shrines originally built on hilltops and usually associated with pagan worship. (CSB)

Namely, the people, in order to weep there, etc., whereas formerly they had been fierce and proud lions in time of peace. So the prophet derides a foolish people in their pride. Even so we usually tremble in trouble and make a wry face, although in our good days we were ready to devour the world. Formerly we were more than men, now we are more than women. Similarly authors have written about the insolence of the Gauls. So the Moabites, when they should be making a stand in the battle line and in arms, go off to the idols and weep before them. (Luther)

Nebo. North of the Arnon River, perhaps near Mount Nebo (Dt 34:1). (CSB)

Mountain on the north end of the Salt Sea, on which Moses stood to survey the Promised Land. (TLSB)

Medeba. About six miles south of Heshbon (see v. 4) and once captured by Israel from Sihon (see Nu 21:26, 30). (CSB)

C 5 mi SE of Nebo. (TLSB)

On Nebo and Medeba of Moab howling is going on"; for in these two towns in the hills toward the west they had sanctuaries. (Kretzmann)

head is shaved ... beard cut off. Characteristic of intense mourning (Jer 48:37). (CSB)

Baldness and shaving emphasizes the mourning of the nation (Is 22:12; Jer 41:5; Mi 1:16). (TLSB)

These were once a sign of grief, but now they grow beards in time of grief. Behold, those who were fierce lions before will then have neither caution nor strength. (Luther)

Oriental demonstrativeness, will have shaved their heads and gashed their beard, customs that prevailed almost universally in days of old to express grief (cf. in general Ezra 9:3; 2 Samuel 15:30; Jeremiah 14:3f; Lev. 13:45; Micah 3:7; Gen 37:24; 1 Kings 21:27; Is 3:24). (Leupold)

15:3 *sackcloth*. The coarse garb of mourners (see Job 16:15; Jer 48:37; La 2:10), made of goat hair. (CSB)

They ought to be standing on the wall, wearing iron tunics. (Luther)

roofs. Perhaps chosen because incense was sometimes offered there (see Jer 19:13). (CSB)

Public mourning. Jer 19:13 indicates that incense was sometimes offered on housetops. (TLSB)

There, formerly and especially in Judea, little gatherings and assemblies took place. Therefore, they howl on the rooftops and come down from there weeping. Everywhere there is grief. (Luther)

Making public display of their grief, as Orientals are wont to do, they will even shriek out their lamentation from the housetops (which are flat), carrying on to the point where they exhaust themselves over it and all and collapse in tears. (Leupold)

15:4 *Heshbon ... Elealeh ... Jahaz*. Cities in the northern section of Moab. Jahaz is c 16 mi S of the other two cities. The army of Moab can do nothing except cry aloud, each person trembling in the face of destruction. (TLSB)

Heshbon. Located about 18 miles east of the northern tip of the Dead Sea. See also Jer 48:34. It was King Sihon's capital before Israel captured it (see Nu 21:23–26). (CSB)

Elealeh. About a mile north of Heshbon and always mentioned with it. (CSB)

Jahaz. Just north of the Arnon River and about 20 miles from Heshbon (Nu 21:23; Jer 48:34). (CSB)

It is not to be wondered at that the prophet knows the location of cities and places in Moab so well that he makes no attempt at indicating their location. The land lay just across the River Jordan and the Dead Sea from Israel. (Leupold)

ARMED MEN ... CRY OUT – To indicate the intensity of the nation’s grief, it is stated that even her courageous men, her warriors, will cry out aloud in their distress and add to the universal outcry. These men will display no heroism, rather their soul shall tremble, each man of them. (Leupold)

Not only the common people are wailing, but even the nobles themselves, who ought to give courage to others and protect them with weapons; even their soul is trembling. Those who were iron-eaters are now mostly fugitives. Strong men will behave like sheep. Lions before, they are hares now. (Luther)

his. Ruler of Moab. (TLSB)

15:5 MY HEART CRIESS OUT OVER MOAB – It cries thus: My heart grieves there because of Moab’s wretchedness. Or this is prophetic irony, namely: How unjustly you are dealt with! (Luther)

Mourner is the Lord (cf v 9). Not only does He lament over His people Israel (Hos 11:8–9), but He also wails over Moab (cf Ps 145:9). (TLSB)

Zoar. Probably located near the southern end of the Dead Sea. Lot fled there from Sodom (see Ge 14:2; 19:23, 30). (CSB)

Mentioned in Gn 19:21–22, located in the southern Salt Sea area. The list of places likely includes Moabite cities in the southwest sector of the country, away from the fighting in the north. (TLSB)

One of five cities destroyed, in the neighborhood of Arabia. And Moab, “a three-year-old heifer,” that is, born three years before. This is the name given to Moab, once wanton and arrogant. In Psalm 68:30 the peoples are called calves. As a cow feeds the calves, so the state calls native citizens and immigrants by name. Thus Moab is pictured as proud, wanton, presumptuous, arrogant, and in full flower, as a three-year-old heifer is especially suited for work and for breeding. Nevertheless, it is about to flee to the end of the country and to a small city. (Luther)

Eglath Shelishiyah. Location unknown (see also Jer 48:34). The words may mean “a three-year-old heifer” (cf. 1Sa 1:24). (CSB)

Lit, “a heifer of three years,” but indicates a place (Jer 48:34); location unknown. (TLSB)

The three-year-old heifer,” that is, the locks or fortified boundaries of Moab reached as far as Zoar, the city of Lot’s refuge, on the peninsula extending into the southeastern end Of the Dead Sea. (Kretzmann)

Luhith. Location unknown (see also Jer 48:5). (CSB)

Locations unknown. (TLSB)

That is, the Moabite fugitives were ascending the incline of Luhith, in the southwestern part of their country, with bitter weeping. (Kretzmann)

Horonaim. Location unknown (see also Jer 48:3, 5, 34). (CSB)

On the road leading down to this town in the valley, Jer. 48:5. (Kretzmann)

15:6 *waters of Nimrim.* Perhaps to be identified with the Wadi en-Numeirah, ten miles from the southern end of the Dead Sea (cf. Jer 48:34). (CSB)

Probably Wadi Numeirah in southern Moab (variant spellings in Nu 32:3; Jsh 13:27). This oasis became barren and dry, a further reflection on the destruction. (TLSB)

It is delightful for a city to be situated beside water. But here the prophet speaks figuratively and thinks of the dried-up waters as being displaced people. The grass withers, and the new growth fails, that is, old and young flee. Otherwise this may also be understood literally. Since there will be no men to do the reaping, the grass itself must wither. (Luther)

grass is withered. The advancing enemy may have stopped up the major springs of Moab. (CSB)

The entire land being devastated, the vegetation drying up for want of care, and the crops apparently even burned up by the foes. (Kretzmann)

15:7 WEALTH THEY HAVE ACQUIRED – The meaning is: the riches they have amassed and the people they have assessed. (Luther)

Refugees flee from the conflict, keeping only what they can carry. (TLSB)

Ravine of the Poplars. Probably at the border between Moab and Edom (see v. 8). (CSB)

Or, “Ravine of the Poplars.” Possibly the Zered River that was the border with Edom (Nu 21:12; Dt 2:13). (TLSB)

Namely, the Assyrians will lead them captive and shift them beyond their boundaries. Some think the river of Jacob is called the brook of willows. (Luther)

15:8 OUTCRY ECHOES – Everywhere within all their borders there will be weeping and howling. (Luther)

Eglaim. Perhaps near the northern border of Moab. (CSB)

Locations unknown. May be cities on opposing borders, thus emphasizing the loss of the whole nation. (TLSB)

Beer Elim. Beer means “well” (cf. Nu 21:16). This site may have been close to the southern border. (CSB)

The cry of distress reaches from one end of the country to the other. (Kretzmann)

15:9 *Dimon’s waters ... blood.* The Hebrew for “blood” (*dam*) sounds like “Dimon.” This is probably also a wordplay on the name “Dibon” (v. 2), close to the Arnon River. Many Moabites will die in the conflict. (CSB)

Circles back to term in v 2, wrapping up this image of Moab’s destruction. Though blood fills the waters, punishment continues. We are not told who executes judgment on Moab. Subdued by various invaders, it vanished from the face of the earth. (TLSB)

a lion. A reference to either the Assyrian army (cf. 5:29; Jer 50:17) or actual lions (cf. 13:21–22). (CSB)

Shows inevitability of destruction. Though they run from the armies, the lion takes them (Am 1:2; 3:8; 5:19). (TLSB)

The reference being either to another enemy among foreign nations or to wild animals whom the Lord would send to complete the devastation of the land. He here calls out to all men: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked!” (Kretzmann)

As if to say: “So I have done to this people, but the end is not yet; because they have not become humble, I will send them a lion.” This may be reserved for and applied to Moab and may mean: Some in proud Moab will be spared and not captured nor driven out; yet they will not escape unpunished. There will be no peace for the remnant either. I will surround Moab in such a way that no one can escape. (Luther)