

Isaiah 15
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Idea: Along with an expected warning to Moab, we also find something surprising and unexpected. We find mercy! God weeps for Moab. In the next chapter we find that the Lord extends mercy to Moab, and to us, in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. This unexpected revelation highlights the pathetic weakness of Moab's so-called God, and magnifies God's mercy and power.

Intro: The people of Moab had descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew. That makes them relatives of the Israelites, and you might suspect that it would also make them friendly toward their cousins. Unfortunately, this was not the case. In fact, it was almost the complete opposite. Moab almost always took sides against the Jews. A brief history is in order.

Moab descends from Lot, Abraham's nephew. Lot came with A from Ur, settled near A until they had to split up. Lot took the choicest land and settled next to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot escaped destruction, by God's mercy, and fled to the hills. Along with his daughters, his wife, who longed for what was lost, was turned into a pillar of salt. While hiding in the hills, Lot and his daughters acted shamefully. Lot got drunk and his daughters slept with him so as to have children and preserve the family tree.

From the two daughters came two people groups, the Moabites and the Ammonites, neither of which had much love for the children of Israel.

Next – after Exodus from Egypt, Israel on the way to promised land. Moses led the Israelites to go around Moab, because of family, then defeated a neighboring nation, the Amorites, by God's strength. But with the coming of the Israelites, Moab became worried about this new potential enemy. You might remember their king and his solution. Balak, King of Moab, hire the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. But three times, Balaam blessed Israel instead of cursing them, much to Balak's horror. Finally, Balaam speaks his own words, instead of the words of God, and counsels Balak to entice Israel to intermarry with Moab. It's almost like Balaam, instead of sending soldiers to fight Israel, sends an army of prostitutes to sleep with Israel. Moab did this, leading Israel away from the Lord and into idolatry and immorality. From then on, Moab comes into the history of Israel when they rise up in oppression or rebellion against the children of Israel, and God delivers Israel from their hand.

Given the lessons from history that have come before and Moab's aggression against Israel, this prophecy about Moab stands out. In chapter 14 we learned from Babylon that the Lord will rise up against those who afflict his church. He rises up to vindicate His own great name and stands against all His enemies because they have raised their hand against His people. So here we have Moab, surely a thorn in the side of God's people and a history of aggression. Because of this, we find what we have been led to expect, that false gods cannot deliver Moab, or anyone else for that matter. But along with that expected warning, we also find something surprising and unexpected. We find mercy! God weeps for Moab, and in the next chapter we find that the Lord rescues a remnant from them. This unexpected revelation highlights the pathetic weakness of Moab's so-called God, and magnifies God's mercy and power.

First, an expected message vss. 1-4 – Your idol cannot save you.

The Moabites worshipped an idol named Chemosh. This idol bore many similarities to the false gods of the rest of the Canaanites. The people would often build shrines to Chemosh on the high places, going up to them to call on their god. The worship of Chemosh also appears to have included human sacrifice, much like Molech, the god of the Ammonites. In 2 Kings 3 we read of how the King of Moab sacrificed his own son to try to appease Chemosh after a devastating military loss.

What Isaiah 15 makes clear is the message, “your idol cannot save you.” Vss. 1-4 relate how the people of the cities of Moab would go to the high places to call on their god. Isaiah lists the destruction of the cities of Ar and Kir, Nebo and Medeba. Then Moab goes up to his temple and to the high places, weeping over the losses. All the words speak of how men and women humble themselves before their gods, even striking similarities to godly humiliation. They shave their heads and beards. They wear sackcloth. They wail and weep bitterly. All signs of repentance of repentance. But a lifeless idol cannot hear or see or answer or save. So Moab faced despair without answer from their god, and came to even despair of their own lives, fearful of the future knowing that Chemosh was silent. Therefore their soldiers cry out, the ones trained to be brave would fall to fear, and their lives will be burdensome. They despair of life itself.

Vss. 5-9 continue to recount a lament for Moab, recording the terrible destruction that would come on M. It couples names of prominent and prosperous location in Moab with graphic descriptions of desolation. Fugitives flee from the enemy, looking but not finding a place of refuge. The refugees here no words of comfort, but only weeping and warnings of further destruction. The waters of Nimrim will be desolate, instead of being a place of refreshment and life. The green grass has withered away; the grass fails, there is nothing green. Any stores of food and supplies have all be carried away and the people face starvation. The land of Moab, from boarder to border, will be filled with wailing, and the rivers will be filled with blood.

The message, Your idol cannot save you.

One more point about the expected message. Vss. 5 and 9 make it clear that God is speaking. And He is the one who rises up against the false gods and all those who would afflict his people. God says, “For the waters of Dimon will be full of blood; because I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him who escapes from Moab, and on the remnant of the land.” God says that He will bring this about. Chapter 16 continues that message, which I will treat next week. But listen to 16:13-14.

This is the word which the Lord has spoken concerning Moab since that time. But now the Lord has spoken, saying, “Within three years, as the years of a hired man, the glory of Moab will be despised with all that great multitude, and the remnant will be very small and feeble.” Is 16:13-14

We find what we have been led to expect. God is holy, holy, holy, and mankind is not. The Lord justly condemns all men and women who are sinful by nature. And more specifically, He rises up to defend His own name and His own covenanted people, bringing devastation on the nation of Moab because the stood outside the covenant of grace. We learn as well that false gods cannot deliver Moab, or anyone else for that matter. Chemosh could not hear or see, and could not save. Internal Standard Bible Encyclopedia characterizes Chemosh well, as being served with fear of retribution. Where God chastises, but relieves His children with promises of restoration, Chemosh

grants no mercy. Moab is left paralyzed in fear and despair. 16.12 captures this stark reality.

And it shall come to pass, When it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, That he will come to his sanctuary to pray; But he will not prevail. Is 16:12

2. But along with that expected warning, we also find something surprising and unexpected. We find mercy! Vs. 5, God weeps for Moab. Motyer touches on something very significant in this revelation. The righteous judge weeps as He smites. “The grief of the judge of all the earth is one of the [two] striking truths of this oracle.” (151) We find rich theology here. Sometimes men portray God as a cold, wrathful God who laughs with some insane glee at the death of the wicked. But the Bible reveals the Lord differently. He weeps as He smites. He is full of mercy!

Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ Eze 33:11

Then out of love, God sent His own beloved son, Jesus Christ, to die for sinners and to reconcile us to Himself. Jesus himself modeled this same compassion as he wept over Jerusalem and the hardness of the people’s heart.

So we find something unexpected here. We find mercy. And not only do we witness the mercy of God, but the Lord reveals that He would act in mercy to save some from Moab!

Let me draw in some vss from chapter 16 again.

Let My outcasts dwell with you, O Moab; Be a shelter to them from the face of the spoiler. For the extortioner is at an end, Devastation ceases, The oppressors are consumed out of the land. In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, Judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.” Is 16:4-5

He would have mercy on them through His promised servant, the son of David, Jesus Christ. God promised a place of refuge and a way of salvation, not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. Salvation would come through the One who will sit on the throne in mercy. He will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness. I’ll consider this more next week, but once again, take note of the striking message of God’s mercy in Christ.

Application

1. Your idol cannot save you. I can’t help but think of this passage in the midst of the great economic crisis our country faces. We don’t burn sacrifices any more or go to the high places, but money is certainly an idol for our times. And our idol has fallen with a crash over the last several weeks. Our nation is valiantly trying to prop our idol back up again. But many have been laid low, and there is much weeping and wailing over the collapse. But that idol cannot save you. No matter how loud you call, he will not hear you. No matter your acts of contrition, you are left in fear without relief. Expected message! You cannot serve God and money. If you are trusting your future, or your well being on the idol of money then it shall come to pass that you will pray to your so-called god, but he will not hear.

2. But God is merciful. The message startles us, it’s so unexpected. Our false gods have been no help. Our sins and our own conscience condemn us. How could God love and forgive me? But He does. God is merciful. The living God provides a way of salvation, and a real refuge. You may find forgiveness of sin in Jesus. He gives us sweet

relief by providing the perfect sacrifice for sin, and by covering over our shame with His own righteous robes.

One other character from history that comes from Moab that I haven't mentioned yet, that highlights the fact that God provides salvation through His promised Messiah. Can anyone think of another prominent Biblical character from Moab. Let me give you a couple of hints. If I were the character I might say, "My life was very hard. We faced famine, poverty, hunger. I had to work hard just to provide for my household, but God was so good to provide for me even more than I ever expected. I am from Moab, but now I live in Israel and I'm now part of God's people by choice. I left behind the gods of my childhood so as to follow the true God of A, I, and J. God has made all things new. I have a new God, and new land, and new family. You see, I left behind my family and by faith I followed my mother-in-law back to Israel. Do you know me yet? Part of my sorrow is that my own husband died, that's right, I'm a woman. Now do you know me? But God provided a new husband, a redeemer who rescued me from poverty as surely as the Great Redeemer, the Promised Messiah, rescued me from sin. In fact, I am David's grandmother, and a great, great, great grand mother of Jesus. I am Ruth, the Moabitess."

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