

## Isaiah Lesson 9 Articles

Moab was once part of David's kingdom and the next section of the "oracle" (16:1–5) appears to allude to that Golden Age as a possible source of hope for the defeated Moabites. The prophet first speaks of the Moabite refugees sending tribute to the king of Israel, as in the old days when Mesha king of Moab sent "a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams" (2 Kings 3:4). The security of "the daughter of Zion", that is, Jerusalem, is contrasted to the panic and vulnerability of "the daughters of Moab at the fords of Arnon", that is, the main cities in the centre of the country. He then addresses his own people, calling upon them to show justice and mercy to "the outcasts of Moab", and predicting an end to oppression and the establishment of a kingdom of steadfast love, faithfulness, justice and righteousness, in which they can share.

An important theological term that occurs here for the first time in Isaiah is "steadfast love" (RSV), "mercy" (AV), "mutual trust" (NEB) (Heb. *hesed*). There are a number of words for "love" in Hebrew, and this one is distinguished from the rest by its consistent association with "faithfulness, loyalty, devotion"; *hesed* is the cement that holds communities, families and other relationships together. It is particularly frequent in the Psalms where it refers both to the devotion of the Psalmist (a "devotee") to God, and to the love of God that he can rely on, come what may (Pss. 5:7; 18:50). In the present context, as in many passages, it is concentrated in the throne of David at Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>

The one place the Assyrians could not conquer was Jerusalem (10:24–34). Though the Assyrian army entered the kingdom of Judah and did a great deal of damage to the land, it could not capture Jerusalem (chaps. 36–37). However, instead of fleeing to Mt. Zion, the Moabite fugitives fled south to the fords of the Arnon River and the "rock city" of Sela in Edom.

From Sela, the fugitives sent an appeal to the king of Judah to give them asylum from the enemy. But Isaiah warned them that it would take more than a request: They would need to submit to the king of Judah, which meant acknowledging the God of Judah. In that day, sending animals to a ruler was a form of paying tribute (2 Kings 3:4). Moab begged the leaders of Judah to give them refuge from the enemy, like a protecting rock on a hot day (16:3–4; see 32:1–2).

Isaiah was not impressed with the appeals of the Moabites. He called the Moabites extortioners, spoilers, and oppressors, and announced that the nation was destined to be destroyed (16:4). Why? Because they wanted Judah's help, but they did not want Judah's God. Verse 5 is definitely a messianic promise, pointing to the day when Messiah will reign in righteousness and mercy on David's throne. But Moab would not submit; they wanted deliverance on their own terms.

*The pride of Moab (Isa. 16:6–14).* We can understand the pride of a city like Babylon (14:12–14), but what did the tiny nation of Moab have to boast about? Their pride kept them from submitting to Judah, and this led to their defeat. Their boasting would turn into wailing and their songs into funeral dirges. Moab would become like a vineyard trampled down and a fruitful field left unharvested. Isaiah 16:9–11 describes the prophet's grief—and the Lord's grief—over the destruction of Moab. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 33:11). Isaiah could have rejoiced at the destruction of an old enemy, but instead, he wept (Prov. 24:17–18).<sup>2</sup>

**17:1–14 Damascus and Israel: Partners in crime, partners in punishment.** The northern kingdom of Israel (referred to as "Ephraim" in some translations) and Damascus, the capital of Aram, had been allies against Judah. For this they would suffer together (17:1–3). Both would be besieged and deported by Assyria (see 2 Kings 15:29; 17:6). Israel was singled out for special rebuke since they had forsaken their Rock (17:10). Then Assyria itself would be judged (17:12–14).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sawyer, J. F. A. (1984). *Isaiah* (Vol. 1, pp. 155–156). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (pp. 48–49). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>3</sup> Willmington, H. L. (1997). *Willmington's Bible handbook* (p. 364). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.