

Isaiah 14:28-16:14 “The Oracles against the Nations: Philistia and Moab” January 24, 2021

Isaiah 13-27 forms the second major section of the book of Isaiah.

One commentator borrows from Isaiah 26:1 for the title of this section:

“We have a strong city.”

This is especially helpful in orienting us to the first part of these chapters – because chapters 13-23 will consist of oracles against the nations – showing how the cities of man do not last – *cannot* last.

Chapters 13-23 set forth ten oracles concerning the nations.

Last time we hear the oracle against Babylon.

Oracle	
Babylon	13:1-14:27
–	
The Year that King Ahaz died	14:28-32
Moab	15:1-16:14
Damascus	17:1-18:7
Egypt	19:1-25

Chapter 20 consists of a *sign* given in the middle of the ten oracles (five on either side).

wilderness of the sea	21:1-10
Dumah	21:11-12
Arabia	21:13-17
valley of vision	22:1-25
Tyre	23:1-18

These are all the nations involved in the middle eastern conflict of the late 8<sup>th</sup>-century.

As we go through these oracles we will hear what God says about the powerful nations – Babylon and Assyria – who were the China or the United States of the ancient world – but also what God says about Philistia and Moab – the nobodies of that day.

As God explains his purposes for the nations,  
we will still see Zion at the center of history.  
But we will also learn that God’s purposes include the whole earth.

We saw in chapters 13-14 the mockery of the King of Babylon,  
and the certainty of the fall of Assyria.

The great and proud nations will fall because of the lofty pride of their rulers.

Tonight we are looking at two much smaller nations – Philistia and Moab.  
And Isaiah's tone is also quite different.

There is much more lament here – and only a little bit of rebuke.  
And the rebuke comes for Moab's pride!

### **1. The Oracle Concerning Philistia in the Year that King Ahaz Died (14:28-32) (The Fall of Assyria Brings No Comfort)**

<sup>28</sup> *In the year that King Ahaz died came this oracle:*

The year that King Ahaz died was an eventful year. (715)

Hezekiah inherited the throne,  
but due to Ahaz's treaty with Assyria,  
he was a vassal to the Assyrian empire.

And Philistia sent ambassadors, probably to bring the condolences of the Philistines,  
but also most likely to encourage Hezekiah  
to join them in rebellion against Assyria.

Isaiah insists that Yahweh is the refuge of Zion,  
and therefore urges Hezekiah to turn away the messengers of the nation.

The Philistines are one of the best-known enemies of Israel.

They caused no end of trouble to Israel during the time of the Judges.

Samson delivered Israel from the Philistines (Judges 14-16),

and later Samuel, Saul and David would do battle against them (1 Sam 4-7, 13-14, 17-18)

David finally subdued them (2 Sam 8, 21, 23),

but they continued to harass Israel and Judah throughout the days of the kings.

In Isaiah's day Philistia was well-known as a rebellious province of the Assyrian empire.

In 734 Gath had refused to pay tribute – and was sacked.

In 720 the Philistine cities tried to join Egypt in revolt,  
but were conquered by Sargon II.

In 711 the Philistines again led a revolt—as also in 705,  
which Sennacherib crushed in 701.

So in the year that King Ahaz died, Philistia and Egypt are trying to put together  
an anti-Assyrian coalition,  
and they invite Hezekiah to join them.

<sup>29</sup> *Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you,  
that the rod that struck you is broken,  
for from the serpent's root will come forth an adder,  
and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent.*

Probably this refers to the sudden death of Shalmaneser V –

the Assyrian king who died in 722.  
There was considerable disruption after his death –  
and Sargon II – the commander of his army – took the throne.  
Sargon spent the next several years subduing the Babylonians, Medes, and Syrians  
(thus leaving Palestine relatively free of Assyrian control).

But Isaiah says – no, “from the serpent’s root will come forth an adder.”  
The Assyrian Empire is not going away.  
When you have arrogant rulers who love to exercise power,  
then even their demise does not result in peace:  
rather, it results in someone else taking their place –  
and doing the same sorts of things  
(except for the benefit of a different group of people!)

And Isaiah warns the Philistines that their rebellion is doomed:

<sup>30</sup> *And the firstborn of the poor will graze,  
and the needy lie down in safety;  
but I will kill your root with famine,  
and your remnant it will slay.*

<sup>31</sup> *Wail, O gate; cry out, O city;  
melt in fear, O Philistia, all of you!  
For smoke comes out of the north,  
and there is no straggler in his ranks.*

The modern-day Philistine thinks that with sufficient planning and political action,  
we can withstand the Assyrians!

<sup>32</sup> *What will one answer the messengers of the nation?  
“The LORD has founded Zion,  
and in her the afflicted of his people find refuge.”*

When Isaiah speaks of *Zion* he is not just talking about Jerusalem.  
He is speaking of the city of God –  
the heavenly city – which is beginning to take shape on earth.  
But if we ever confuse the earthly city with the heavenly city,  
we will wind up like the Philistines!

Isaiah then turns east:

## **2. The Oracle Concerning Moab (15:1-16:14)**

*15 An oracle concerning Moab.*

The Philistines are due west from Jerusalem.

Moab is directly east of Judah, across the Dead Sea.

It's important to remember that "borders" are always in flux.

Cities and towns could change hands

(and most of the inhabitants would remain the same!) –

All that would change is the address to which you sent your tribute!

Isaiah assumes that you know this area.

After all, Heshbon was only about 30 miles from Jerusalem.

In other words – about the distance from here to LaPorte.

You could walk there in a day if you wanted to.

And then all the cities mentioned in this chapter are within another 30 miles south of Heshbon.

Most are in the highlands, along the Arnon River –

or one of the many wadis that characterize the region.

Most of these cities are named many times in the OT.

"Ar" probably means "city" in Moabite –

and Kir was the southernmost city in Moab -

almost certainly the Kir-hareseth –

which was the only Moabite city left standing

when King Mesha of Moab rebelled against Israel in 2 Kings 3.

This is the city known to historians as Kerak – the ancient capital of the region –

which controlled the caravan routes between Egypt and Syria – the old "king's highway."

There are five key episodes in the story of Israel's relations with Moab.

First, this is the old territory of Sodom and Gomorrah

(the reference to Zoar in verse 5 echoes this –

since that is where Moab's father Lot fled with his daughters in Gen 19).

Second, the northern part of Moab was part of the territory of Sihon of the Amorites,

when Reuben defeated him in Numbers 21 –

and captured Dibon, Nebo, and Medeba (v2).

In Numbers 22, the Moabite king Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel –

but Balaam blessed Israel instead

(although Balaam *did* tell the Moabites *how* to curse Israel –

by seducing their men with sexual immorality and idolatrous feasts!)

This is where Moses looked out from Mt. Nebo (v2) and saw the promised land.

Third, the Moabites recaptured the northern part of the region –

and through the time of the Judges,

it remained under Moabite control.

(during this time, Eglon, King of Moab, oppressed Israel – Judges 3)

Fourth, King David conquered Moab and for much of the period of the kings,  
Moab paid tribute to Israel –  
    though periodically rebelling.  
It's worth noting that *before* David became king,  
    when he was running from Saul,  
        he sent his parents to the King of Moab for protection (1 S 22)  
    (his great-grandmother was Ruth, the Moabitess).  
We don't know what happened –  
    but shortly after David becomes king,  
        he defeats the Moabites and they become his servants (2 S 8).

Fifth, during the reign of King Ahab, Mesha, king of Moab recaptured the region.  
Jahaz is the place where the King of Israel resided while fighting against Mesha.

**a. Moab Laid Waste (15:1-4)**

*Because Ar of Moab is laid waste in a night,  
    Moab is undone;  
because Kir of Moab is laid waste in a night,  
    Moab is undone.  
<sup>2</sup> He has gone up to the temple,<sup>[1]</sup> and to Dibon,  
    to the high places<sup>[g]</sup> to weep;  
over Nebo and over Medeba  
    Moab wails.  
On every head is baldness;  
    every beard is shorn;  
<sup>3</sup> in the streets they wear sackcloth;  
    on the housetops and in the squares  
    everyone wails and melts in tears.  
<sup>4</sup> Heshbon and Elealeh cry out;  
    their voice is heard as far as Jahaz;  
therefore the armed men of Moab cry aloud;  
    his soul trembles.*

The picture in verses 1-4 is of a sudden devastation.  
Moab will be undone – laid waste in a night.

Clearly in verses 1-4, there is great lamentation in Moab –  
but how should we think of this?

Moab and his half-brother Ammon were descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew –  
so they are an Abrahamic people.

In Deuteronomy 2, God warns Israel not to take possession of Moab,  
because he had given that land to the sons of Lot.  
On the other hand, in Deuteronomy 23, God declares that  
“no Ammonite or Moabite may enter the Assembly of the LORD.  
Even to the tenth generation,  
none of them may enter the Assembly of the LORD forever.”  
and the reason was that they did not show hospitality to Israel in the wilderness,  
but hired Balaam to curse Israel instead.

But of course, Ruth was a Moabitess,  
and so the house of David had Moabite blood in their veins.

Throughout the history of Israel, Moab was regularly in conflict with Israel.  
One of the first oppressors of Israel was Eglon, King of Moab,  
whom Ehud assassinated in Judges 3.  
After many years of conflict, the Moabites were subjugated by David,  
and they served the kings of Judah and Israel until the death of Ahab.  
But then they rebelled (2 Kings 1:1),  
and for the last 150 years Moab had been a thorn in the side of Israel and Judah.  
Bands of marauders would wreak havoc in the countryside,  
looting and plundering the villages. (2 Kings 13:20; 24:2)

How does God think of Moab?  
Listen to verses 5-9.  
Who is speaking here?

You might think that it is a sympathetic prophet –  
but in fact (as verse 9 shows) this is God himself:

**b. The Lament of the LORD Over Moab (15:5-9)**

<sup>5</sup> *My heart cries out for Moab;  
her fugitives flee to Zoar,*

(just like Lot did with his daughters – when Sodom fell...)

*to Eglath-selishiyah.  
For at the ascent of Luhith  
they go up weeping;  
on the road to Horonaim  
they raise a cry of destruction;  
<sup>6</sup> the waters of Nimrim  
are a desolation;  
the grass is withered, the vegetation fails,*

*the greenery is no more.*  
<sup>7</sup> *Therefore the abundance they have gained*  
*and what they have laid up*  
*they carry away*  
*over the Brook of the Willows.*  
<sup>8</sup> *For a cry has gone*  
*around the land of Moab;*  
*her wailing reaches to Eglaim;*  
*her wailing reaches to Beer-elim.*  
<sup>9</sup> *For the waters of Dibon<sup>[h]</sup> are full of blood;*  
*for I will bring upon Dibon even more,*  
*a lion for those of Moab who escape,*  
*for the remnant of the land.*

In verse 9 there is a play on words –  
*Dam* is the Hebrew word for blood – and so Isaiah spells *Dibon* “*Dimon*” here.

Yes, God says, *I will bring blood upon Dibon –*  
*a lion for those who escape! –*  
*he is the one who brings destruction...*  
*and yet, God himself grieves over the destruction of Moab. (15:5-9)*

While he is the one who brings judgment against the wicked,  
 truly does God say, “I do not delight in the death of the wicked.” (Ezek 33:11)

Wrath is God’s *alien* work –  
 in one sense it is foreign to him.

Why do we say that?  
 Because God has not always been wrathful.  
 Before there was sin, God had no wrath.  
 Where did his wrath come from?

Because he *loves*.  
 Indeed, God *is* love!  
 And because he loves – therefore he is angry with that which harms what he loves!

God’s wrath is not inconsistent with his love –  
 his wrath is always driven *by* his love.

Our wrath – our anger – is also driven by our loves –  
 which is why we are so *inconsistent!* –  
 because our loves are inconsistent!  
 Sometimes we love rightly – but often our loves are misdirected –

and so our anger is misdirected as well!

But notice what happens to Moab in verses 1-5 of chapter 16:

**c. The Daughters of Moab Seek Refuge in Zion (16:1-5)**

*16 Send the lamb to the ruler of the land,  
from Sela, by way of the desert,  
to the mount of the daughter of Zion.*

*<sup>2</sup> Like fleeing birds,  
like a scattered nest,  
so are the daughters of Moab  
at the fords of the Arnon.*

Sela seems to be the name for Petra –  
where the Nabataeans later carved their famous city out of the rocky cliffs.

The “way of the desert” refers to the King’s Highway –  
the ancient trade route between Egypt and Assyria and Babylon.

There was a shorter way – to follow the way of the sea – and pass through Philistia and Tyre –  
but the coastal route could be expensive.

There were lots of powerful cities who all wanted a share in the tolls!  
Long before the time of Abraham,  
the desert tribes had developed a route across the Sinai peninsula to Aqaba,  
and then up through Edom, Moab, and Ammon to Damascus.

So Moab is sending a lamb from Sela (the border with Edom) along the “way of the desert”  
to the “mount of the daughter of Zion” –  
yes, you can think of Jerusalem –  
but it’s better to think of *what Jerusalem should be!*

And in their panic the daughters of Moab cry out:

*<sup>3</sup> “Give counsel;  
grant justice;  
make your shade like night  
at the height of noon;  
shelter the outcasts;  
do not reveal the fugitive;  
<sup>4</sup> let the outcasts of Moab  
sojourn among you;  
be a shelter to them<sup>[i]</sup>  
from the destroyer.*



This is “Panting, breathless Hebrew”–like those who have run and are out of breath  
but the reason for their coming to Zion is to plead  
for their daughters at the fords of the Arnon.  
Let the daughters of Moab rest under the protection of the house of David.  
(Remember Ruth!)

Verses 4b-5 appear to be God responding to Moab.

*When the oppressor is no more,  
and destruction has ceased,  
and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land,  
5 then a throne will be established in steadfast love,  
and on it will sit in faithfulness  
in the tent of David  
one who judges and seeks justice  
and is swift to do righteousness.”*

Four words are offered if they will submit to the tent of David:

*hesed* (steadfast love), *emeth* (faithfulness), *mishpat* (justice), and *tsedeq* (righteousness).

This is what Zion offers to Moab.

Again – Jerusalem may or may not do well at this!

But this is what Zion looks like.

Hesed and emeth – steadfast love and faithfulness;

being true to your word – loyal to your covenant;

when you say something you mean it! – and you do it!

Mishpat and tsedek – justice and righteousness.

When these two words are used together,

righteousness has to do with how you organize your community;

justice has to do with judging rightly in the particulars.

Zion is a city where the community is organized well.

Think about the problem we saw earlier:

when the King of Assyria died,

all the vassal kingdoms rebelled.

That’s example of *unrighteousness*.

If your kingdom is ordered *rightly* and *well* –

then when you die, there should be an orderly transition of power.

One of the most remarkable features of American government

has been forty-five consecutive peaceful transitions of power!

Britain has a longer streak in terms of years –

but they have only had 13 monarchs since the last Revolution in 1688.

Of course, righteousness also includes *doing right!* –

and that is something that has not always characterized US government.

In that respect, we are more like Moab:

**b'. The Lament of God over the Pride of Moab (16:6-12)**

*<sup>6</sup> We have heard of the pride of Moab—  
how proud he is!—  
of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence;  
in his idle boasting he is not right.*

There were four words describing Zion:  
steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice.

Now there are four words describing Moab:  
pride, arrogance, pride, and insolence.

I say four words – because there are, in fact, four words.  
But three of them have the same root –  
and that root is used four times in the space of six words!  
“the pride of Moab – excessive pride –  
his prideliness – his pride”  
and his insolence...

In other words, when Isaiah thinks of Zion,  
there is richness, beauty, complexity in the glory that he beholds!  
But when he thinks of Moab,  
it gets really simple really fast:  
it's pride.  
Can't think of any other way of saying it.  
That's what it is!

Have you ever had that moment?  
That moment when it crosses your mind that maybe – just maybe –  
you are the one who is being proud?  
Maybe it's not all those other people...  
maybe it's me...

Don't be like Moab!  
You are not the hot stuff that you like to think you are!

Is there hope for me?  
Is there hope for you?

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore let Moab wail for Moab,*

*let everyone wail.  
Mourn, utterly stricken,  
for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth.*

Notice that it's not just Moab wailing for Moab –  
but Isaiah calls *everyone* to wail.

Wail over your pride – yes –  
but also wail over the pride of your enemy!

Wail over the pride of Donald Trump.  
Wail over the pride of Joe Biden.  
Wail over the pride of Vladimir Putin.

Because pride goes before a fall –  
and when the mighty come crashing down,  
there are a whole lot of people who get hurt along the way:

<sup>8</sup> *For the fields of Heshbon languish,  
and the vine of Sibmah;  
the lords of the nations  
have struck down its branches,  
which reached to Jazer  
and strayed to the desert;  
its shoots spread abroad  
and passed over the sea.*

<sup>9</sup> *Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer  
for the vine of Sibmah;  
I drench you with my tears,  
O Heshbon and Elealeh;  
for over your summer fruit and your harvest  
the shout has ceased.*

<sup>10</sup> *And joy and gladness are taken away from the fruitful field,  
and in the vineyards no songs are sung,  
no cheers are raised;  
no treader treads out wine in the presses;  
I have put an end to the shouting.*

<sup>11</sup> *Therefore my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab,  
and my inmost self for Kir-hareseth.*

Isaiah joins himself to the weeping of God over *Moab!*  
He doesn't rejoice because this pesky nuisance has been eliminated!  
No, he weeps.

Therefore Judah mourns over his cousin,  
and indeed, God himself “moans like a lyre for Moab” (16:11)  
because Moab has preferred his own gods (12) to Yahweh.

Notice verse 12:

*<sup>12</sup> And when Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself on the high place, when he comes to his sanctuary to pray, he will not prevail.*

He will not weary himself on the high places,  
but because he will not serve the living God,  
“the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt,  
in spite of all his great multitude,  
and those who remain will be very few and feeble.”

**a'. The Glory of Moab Brought into Contempt (16:13-14)**

*<sup>13</sup> This is the word that the LORD spoke concerning Moab in the past. <sup>14</sup> But now the LORD has spoken, saying, “In three years, like the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all his great multitude, and those who remain will be very few and feeble.”*

Already we are beginning to see the universal purposes of God.  
If Moab would humble himself, then God would show mercy.  
This is true for you as well!

If you will humble yourself, then God will show mercy!

Humility is hard!  
It is complicated!

There is nothing complicated about pride.  
I'm right.  
When in doubt, agree with me!  
Very simple.  
Very easy.

Humility recognizes that it's more complicated.  
So let us humble ourselves before God.

Our closing hymn is #227 – which is taken from the end of Isaiah 13-27.  
We'll be singing it fairly often for the next few weeks,  
since it reminds us of where the story is going!