

CHAPTER 15

This chapter, and that which follows it, are the burden of Moab — a prophecy of some great desolation that was coming upon that country, which bordered upon this land of Israel, and had often been injurious and vexatious to it, though the Moabites were descended from Lot, Abraham's kinsman and companion, and though the Israelites, by the appointment of God, had spared them when they might both easily and justly have cut them off with their neighbours. In this chapter we have,

I. Great lamentation made by the Moabites, and by the prophet himself for them (v. 1-5).

II. The great calamities which should occasion that lamentation and justify it (v. 6-9).

ISAIAH 15:1-5

THE BURDEN OF MOAB

The country of Moab was of small extent, but very fruitful. It bordered upon the lot of Reuben on the other side Jordan and upon the Dead Sea. Naomi went to sojourn there when there was a famine in Canaan. This is the country which (it is here foretold) should be wasted and grievously harassed, not quite ruined, for we find another prophecy of its ruin (Jeremiah 48), which was accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar. This prophecy here was to be fulfilled *within three years* (²³⁶⁴Isaiah 16:14), and therefore was fulfilled in the devastations made of that country by the army of the Assyrians, which for many years ravaged those parts, enriching themselves with spoil and plunder. It was done either by the army of Shalmaneser, about the time of the taking of Samaria, in the fourth year of Hezekiah (as is most probable), or by the army of Sennacherib, which, ten years after, invaded Judah. We cannot suppose that the prophet went among the Moabites to preach to them this sermon; but he delivered it to his own people,

1. To show them that, though judgment begins at the house of God, it shall not end there, — that there is a providence which governs the world and

all the nations of it, — and that to the God of Israel the worshippers of false gods were accountable, and liable to his judgments.

2. To give them a proof of God's care of them and jealousy for them, and to convince them that God was an enemy to their enemies, for such the Moabites had often been.

3. That the accomplishment of this prophecy now shortly (*within three years*) might be a confirmation of the prophet's mission and of the truth of all his other prophecies, and might encourage the faithful to depend upon them.

Now concerning Moab it is here foretold,

I. That their chief cities should be surprised and taken in a night by the enemy, probably because the inhabitants, as the men of Laish, indulged themselves in ease and luxury, and dwelt securely (v. 1): Therefore there shall be great grief, *because in the night Air of Moab is laid waste and Kir of Moab, the two principal cities of that kingdom. In the night that they were taken, or sacked, Moab was cut off.* The seizing of them laid the whole country open, and made all the wealth of it an easy prey to the victorious army. Note,

1. Great changes and very dismal ones may be made in a very little time. Here are two cities lost in a night, though that is the time of quietness. Let us therefore lie down as those that know not what a night may bring forth.

2. As the country feeds the cities, so the cities protect the country, and neither can say to the other, *I have no need of thee.*

II. That the Moabites, being hereby put into the utmost consternation imaginable, should have recourse to their idols for relief, and pour out their tears before them (v. 2): *He* (that is, Moab, especially the king of Moab) *has gone up to Bajith* (or rather to the house or temple of Chemosh), *and Dibon*, the inhabitants of Dibon, *have gone up to the high places*, where they worshipped their idols, there to make their complaints. Note, It becomes a people in distress to seek to their God; and shall not we then thus *walk in the name of the Lord our God*, and call upon him in the time of trouble, before whom we shall not shed such useless profitless tears as they did before their gods?

III. That there should be the voice of universal grief all the country over. It is described here elegantly and very affectingly. Moab shall be a vale of tears — a little map of this world, v. 2. The Moabites shall lament the loss of Nebo and Medeba, two considerable cities, which, it is likely, were plundered and burnt. They shall tear their hair for grief to such a degree that *on all their heads shall be baldness, and they shall cut off their beards*, according to the customary expressions of mourning in those times and countries. When they go abroad they shall be so far from coveting to appear handsome that *in the streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth* (v. 3), and perhaps being forced to use that poor clothing, the enemy having stripped them, and rifled their houses, and left them no other clothing. When they come home, instead of applying themselves to their business, they shall go up to *the tops of their houses* which were flat-roofed, and there they shall *weep abundantly*, nay, they shall *howl*, in crying to their gods. Those that *cry not to God with their hearts* do but *howl upon their beds*, ^{<3074>}Hosea 7:14; ^{<3003>}Amos 8:3. *They shall come down with weeping* (so the margin reads it); they shall come down from their high places and the tops of their houses weeping as much as they did when they went up. Prayer to the true God is heart's ease (^{<0018>}1 Samuel 1:18), but prayers to false gods are not. Divers places are here named that should be full of lamentation (v. 4), and it is but a poor relief to have so many fellow-sufferers, fellow-mourners; to a public spirit it is rather an aggravation *socios habuisse doloris* — *to have associates in woe*.

IV. That the courage of their militia should fail them. Though they were bred soldiers, and were well armed, yet they *shall cry out* and shriek for fear, and every one of them shall have *his life become grievous to him*, though it is characteristic of a military life to delight in danger, v. 4. See how easily God can dispirit the stoutest of men, and deprive a nation of benefit by those whom it most depended upon for strength and defence. The Moabites shall generally be so overwhelmed with grief that life itself shall be a burden to them. God can easily make weary of life those that are fondest of it.

V. That the outcry for these calamities should propagate grief to all the adjacent parts, v. 5.

1. The prophet himself has very sensible impressions made upon his spirit by the prediction of it: “*My heart shall cry out for Moab; though they are enemies to Israel, they are our fellow-creatures, of the same rank with us,*

and therefore it should grieve us to see them in such distress, the rather because we know not how soon it may be our own turn to drink of the same cup of trembling.” Note, It becomes God's ministers to be of a tender spirit, not to desire the woeful day, but to be like their master, who wept over Jerusalem even when he gave her up to ruin, like their God, *who desires not the death of sinners*.

2. All the neighbouring cities shall echo to the lamentations of Moab. *The fugitives*, who are making the best of their way to shift for their own safety, shall carry the cry to *Zoar*, the city to which their ancestor Lot fled for shelter from Sodom's flames and which was spared for his sake. They shall make as great a noise with their cry *as a heifer of three years old* does when she goes *lowing* for her calf, as ^{<9162>}1 Samuel 6:12. They shall go up the hill of *Luhith* (as David went up the ascent of Mount Olivet, many a weary step and all in tears, ^{<1150>}2 Samuel 15:30), and *in the way of Horonaim* (a dual termination), the way that leads to the two Beth-horons, the upper and the nether, which we read of, ^{<6163>}Joshua 16:3, 5. Thither the cry shall be carried, there it shall be raised, even at that great distance: *A cry of destruction*; that shall be the cry, like, “Fire, fire! we are all undone.” Grief is catching, so is fear, and justly, for trouble is spreading and when it begins who knows where it will end?

^{<2356>}ISAIAH 15:6-9

THE BURDEN OF MOAB

Here the prophet further describes the woeful and piteous lamentations that should be heard throughout all the country of Moab when it should become a prey to the Assyrian army. “By this time *the cry has gone round about all the borders of Moab*,” v. 8. Every corner of the country has received the alarm, and is in the utmost confusion upon it. It has reached to *Eglaim*, a city at one end of the country, and to *Beer-elim*, a city as far the other way. Where sin has been general, and all flesh have corrupted their way, what can be expected but a general desolation? Two things are here spoken of as causes of this lamentation: —

I. *The waters of Nimrim are desolate* (v. 6), that is, the country is plundered and impoverished, and all the wealth and substance of it swept away by the victorious army. Famine is usually the sad effect of war. Look

into the fields that were well watered, the fruitful meadows that yielded delightful prospects and more delightful products, and there all is eaten up, or carried off by the enemy's foragers, and the remainder trodden to dirt by their horses. If an army encamp upon green fields, their greenness is soon gone. Look into the houses, and they are stripped too (v. 7): *The abundance of wealth that they had gotten with a great deal of art and industry, and that which they had laid up with a great deal of care and confidence, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows.* Either the owners shall carry it thither to hide it or the enemies shall carry it thither to pack it up and send it home, by water perhaps, to their own country. Note,

1. Those that are eager to get abundance of this world, and solicitous to lay up what they have gotten, little consider what may become of it and in how short a time it may be all taken from them. Great abundance, by tempting the robbers, exposes the owners; and those who depend upon it to protect them often find it does but betray them.

2. In times of distress great riches are often great burdens, and do but increase the owner's care or the enemies' strength. *Cantabit vacuus coram latrone viator — The penniless traveller will exult, when accosted by a robber, in having nothing about him.*

II. *The waters of Dimon are turned into blood* (v. 9), that is, the inhabitants of the country are slain in great numbers, so that the waters adjoining to the cities, whether rivers or pools, are discoloured with human gore, inhumanly shed like water. *Dimon* signifies *bloody*; the place shall answer to its name. Perhaps it was that place in the country of Moab where the waters seemed to the *Moabites as blood* (^{21R1}2 Kings 3:22, 23), which occasioned their overthrow. But now, says God, *I will bring more upon Dimon*, more blood than was shed, or thought to be seen, at that time. *I will bring additions upon Dimon* (so the word is), additional plagues; I have yet more judgments in reserve for them. *For all this, God's anger is not turned away.* When he judges he will overcome; and to the roll of curses shall be *added many like words*, ^{21R2}Jeremiah 36:32. See here what is the *yet more evil* to be brought upon Dimon, upon Moab, which is now to be made a land of blood. Some flee, and make their escape, others sit still, and are overlooked, and are as a remnant of the land; but upon both God *will bring lions*, beasts of prey (which are reckoned one of God's four judgments, ^{21A1}Ezekiel 14:21), and these shall glean up those that have

escaped the sword of the enemy. Those that continue impenitent in sin, when they are preserved from one judgment, are but reserved for another.