

# ISAIAH

## Chapter 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. 2 Like fleeing birds, like a scattered nest, so are the daughters of Moab at the fords of the Arnon. 3 “Give counsel; grant justice; make your shade like night at the height of noon; shelter the outcasts; do not reveal the fugitive; 4 let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you; be a shelter to them from the destroyer. 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.” 6 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. 7 Therefore let Moab wail for Moab, let everyone wail. Mourn, utterly stricken, for the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 Therefore my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab, and my inmost self for Kir-hareseth. 12 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. 13 This is the word that the LORD spoke concerning Moab in the past. 14 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.”**

Ahab of Israel each year (see 2Ki 3:4), so now proud Moab, which has often oppressed Israel, is advised in her crisis to submit to the king in Jerusalem. (CSB)

Traditional tribute from the Moabites. Partial fulfillment of 2:1–5. (TLSB)

During their long history, the Moabites had given sheep and goats to Judah and Israel as tribute. To send lambs to the Daughter of Zion meant once again to submit and become dependent on Judah. If they returned to Judah, they could share the hope found in all the promises of God concerning Judah and the coming Messiah. They would come under the protection of the Lord, the God of free and faithful grace. This advice is an invitation to repent and believe. Good advice for people who are described as birds fleeing from a predator. (PBC)

Moab here, having found refuge in Petra of Idumea, being admonished to send its tribute of lambs to the ruler of the land, to the king reigning at Jerusalem, the road to this capital, whose most important section was Mount Zion, leading through the wilderness south and west of the Dead Sea. To submit to Judah, in both the physical and the spiritual sense, was Moab’s only hope. (Kretzmann)

*Sela*. The naturally fortified capital of the Edomites south of the Dead Sea, situated on a rocky plateau that towers 1,000 feet above the nearby Petra (cf. 42:11). The name means “cliff.” The tribute would be sent around the southern end of the Dead Sea. (CSB)

City in Edom (Jgs 1:36). The leaders of Moab have fled into Edom and are sending for help from there. (TLSB)

*way of the desert*. The desert surrounding the Salt Sea lay between Sela and Jerusalem. (TLSB)

*Daughter of Zion*. A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. (CSB)

That is, to the temple and the worship of God in Jerusalem. Have you proud people finally been humbled? Are you coming now from your great state? Now that your gods do not answer you, do you now seek an answer from the priests of God? After your idols do you now want to worship our God too? He said “lamb” for “lambs” and “ruler” for “rulers.” (Luther)

**16:2** *like fleeing birds* – These words prove that the preceding words were ironic. “It will be in vain,” he says, “you will accomplish nothing. You will be thrown out of your kingdom like a bird out of its nest.” He used the same comparison above in chapter 10:14. The daughters of Moab are not only the virgins and girls but entire cities. This is a Hebraism. (Luther)

People of Moab wait at the border, desiring to flee into Judah for safety. (TLSB)

*fords of the Arnon*. The women were fleeing south, away from the northern invader. (CSB)

Boundary of Moab. (TLSB)

This is a huge, rugged, and steep rock, next to which is a vast desert that marks the border of the kingdom of Moab. The city, a walled town, was called Arnon. This place was fit for robbers, and because of them neither entrance nor exit was safe. (Luther)

**16:3–4a** Shows the Moabites’ willingness to put themselves under the authority of Judah. (TLSB)

**16:3** *give counsel* – This is pure irony. He says: “This is plainly at hand, that you have to lament. Therefore give yourself counsel, be wise and gather all your sages for counsel. Use your wisdom and counsels so that you can prepare a shade and a preventive against the impending heat and the extremely hot noon, that is, trouble.” (Luther)

*shade like night*. Covering completely. (TLSB)

*shelter the outcasts*. The Moabites are asking Judah for refuge (contrast Ru 1:1; 1Sa 22:3–4). (CSB)

Refugees from Moab. A plea that God would protect the Moabites. (TLSB)

Just as the birds hide a nest under the branches. (Luther)

The prophet now lays the very words that the Moabites are to use in their mouth. He spells out the course of procedure for a badly frightened and bewildered people. They are to appeal to

Judah to tell them what to do. By this approach Moab throws itself upon the mercy of its brother nation. (Leupold)

**16:4** *destroyer*. Probably Assyria (see notes on 15:1; 33:1). (CSB)

*oppressor*. Moab. (CSB)

It is as if the advice of the Lord through His prophet was not heard at all. The Moabites sought temporary shelter and refuge. They showed no interest in repentance and faith. They did not appear to desire permanent help and salvation, only temporary relief from their difficulty. The advice of Isaiah to turn to Judah for shelter and hope in the promises of the Lord seemed too much for Moab. His advice implied a spiritual conversion that Moab resisted. (PBC)

**16:5** *throne ... tent of David*. A time is envisioned when the oppressors of Moab will vanish and the people will find blessing in the Davidic king. This is a longing for the messianic King (9:2–7; 11:1–5), when all the nations will come to Zion and experience peace (2:1–5). The vision is fulfilled in Jesus, David’s greatest Son, whose genealogy includes Ruth, a Moabite woman (Mt 1:5). (TLSB)

The prophet returns to his own people with a pleasant promise, as if to say: “Thus it will happen to you Midianites that you will not have any counsel or help, neither from God nor from men; you will perish, but we will remain.” So the ungodly look at the godly as if they would perish in a moment, but the wheel will turn, and against such presumptions we must lay hold of these and like promises with which we may lift up and strengthen our confidence. He says: “Do not look at Moab in its pride, for it will collapse. You, however, although hopeless in the eyes of the world, will be saved.” Godly David and his successor, Hezekiah, will be saved, and the throne of David will be established, not in wrath but in steadfast love. (Luther)

*steadfast love ... faithfulness ... justice ... righteousness*. Luther: “Steadfast love is a divine blessing and favor, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He says that there will not be a hypocrite there but that pure truth and faithfulness will reign. This King will not only judge for His own Person and in His office deliver the oppressed, the poor, and the widows, but He will also seek justice, that is, He will see to it that the other magistrates of the kingdom will judge in this way, and He will swiftly get justice done and not drag it out for many years. This is the glory and the duty of every prince. But it is a gift of God that is now exceedingly uncommon” (AE 16:150). (TLSB)

This is an affront to all foreign kings and princes. Steadfast love is a divine blessing and favor, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He says that there will not be a hypocrite there but that pure truth and faithfulness will reign. This King will not only judge for His own Person and in His office deliver the oppressed, the poor, and the widows, but He will also seek justice, that is, He will see to it that the other magistrates of the kingdom will judge in this way, and He will swiftly get justice done and not drag it out for many years. This is the glory and the duty of every prince. But it is a gift of God that is now exceedingly uncommon. (Luther)

*tent of David*. See 9:7; Am 9:11 and notes. “House” equals “dynasty” (see note on 7:2). (CSB)

*who judges and seeks justice*. See 11:2–4 and notes. The Messiah is again in view. (CSB)

For those are the principles of His government. There is only one way for Moab to escape the threatening everlasting Judgment, and that is by throwing itself upon the mercy of this King. The Lord's invitation was issued to Moab also, for He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The appeal, however, was unavailing, and therefore the prophecy of punishment is once more resumed. (Kretzmann)

This verse comes again from the mouth of the prophet. He responded to the question of the Moabites for advice. He gives a witness to the refugees. His words are a beautiful confession of faith in the promise of God. This verse is like a judgment. Isaiah and all believers stand upon it and invite others to find the same security and hope. All around this rock there is turmoil and judgment. (PBC)

This little verse combines five significant ideas that of special interest to believers. Together these ideas provide a rich promise of hope and love for all who are surrounded by the troubles of life and threatened by God's judgment upon sin. (PBC)

*Love* – God promised grace and kindness toward His people and bound Himself by a contract, or covenant, to them. This is the covenant love of God for His people. While the love of God's people for God may grow cool, God's loves endures and never changes. (PBC)

*Faithfulness* – God is dependable and certain. When God promises, He remains absolutely committed to His promises; the promise of God is true because God is true. No truth exists outside of Him. In the turmoil of human history, God's people have grasped the promises of God in faith and held firmly even when all the world around them boiled with uncertainty. (PBC)

*The house of David* – God had promised that the Messiah would be a son of David. The Hebrew texts use “tent of David.” God had bound Himself to David long before any palace or glory came to David. Remember that God chose David when he was nothing but a shepherd in Judah. (PBC)

*Judging and justice* – These words identify the activity of the Messiah. He would carry out all the functions of His kingdom. For us, “judging” and “justice” imply only one branch all the functions of government – judicial, legislative, and executive. This leader – the Messiah – would govern every aspect of His kingdom. (PBC)

*Righteousness* – God's will determines what is straight and correct, that is, what is righteous. God is the absolute standard. No natural human can ever be right according to God's standard by the effort of any thought, action, or word or by the cumulative record of all such things. God alone is righteous. Yet God declares all humans morally right, straight, and correct because of the work of the one who came from the house of David. God Himself prepared the righteousness He confers on unrighteous sinners. He justifies them. (PBC)

Steadfast love is a divine blessing and favor, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. He says that there will not be a hypocrite there but that pure truth and faithfulness will reign. This King will not only judge for His own Person and in His office deliver the oppressed, the poor, and the widows, but He will also seek justice, that is, He will see to it that the other magistrates of the kingdom will judge in this way, and He will swiftly get justice done and not drag it out for many years. This is the glory and the duty of every prince. But is a gift of God that is now exceedingly uncommon. (Luther)

**16:6** *pride of Moab*. Though a small nation, Moab is proud and defiant like Assyria and Babylon. Cf. 10:12; 14:13; 25:11; Jer 48:42. (CSB)

Instead of love, Moab chose arrogance, pride, insolence, and boasting (25:10–11). As a consequence, Moab is caused to wail (v 7) and is brought low (2:12–18). Pride is the sin at the root of rebellion against God (Gn 3:5). (TLSB)

This is rhetorical anticipation. “Here,” he says, “these things seem foolish to the Moabites who despise us, but don’t you become fainthearted. I know the pride of Moab; it is very much advertised (cf. Jer. 48:29). But his pride is bigger than his power; he brags more than he can do.” Barking dogs don’t bite. Waters that roar a lot are not deep. Where there are extremely many words, there is a lack of substance. In the end one will wail louder than another, and tribe will wail louder than tribe. And this will happen in individual places separately at first, and then together. Not only the common people, but the foundations, too, that is, the chiefs in the state. (Luther)

This pride could have been the result of the overthrow of Samaria in 722 BC. Moab felt unduly elated over the fate of her one-time rival and gave every evidence of the fact that she had not attempted to subdue such feelings but gave free rein to them. The exact form of this pride is not here indicated. In a parallel passage Jeremiah (48:42) indicates that this was that that it had magnified itself against the Lord. Such an attitude can never be harmless. By heaping terms – arrogance ... haughtiness ... boastful talk” – the prophet indicates how really extreme this pride of Moab was. Using the same root three times, the prophet makes his words more effective (something like *hafter*, *haughtiness*, etc.). (Leupold)

**16:7** *raisin cakes*. Used in various feasts. The vineyards and fields that produced the ingredients of these delicacies will be destroyed (cf Sg 2:5). In Hos 3:1, “cakes of raisins” are associated with idol worship, in which the Moabites also indulged (Is 16:12). (TLSB)

The prophet centers attention on one item only, an item that played a large role in Moabite life, and of which the Moabites may have been excessively proud. So he begins with the famous raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, which no longer can be raised or exported. (Leupold)

*Kir Hareseth*. The four cities in vv. 7–8 appear in inverted (chiastic) order in vv. 9–11. (CSB)

Capital city of Moab. (TLSB)

The crippled will groan, that is, those who are of the people will ponder words of grief among themselves. They will be unnerved so that they will falter because they do not have the aid of comfort and protection. For even the foundations will be laid waste. (Luther)

**16:8** *Heshbon*. This state has well-cultivated fields, but it will be as if a paradise of pleasure were directly turned into a desert. (Luther)

*Heshbon ... Sibmah*. Locations unknown. (TLSB)

*Sibmah*. Perhaps three miles west of Heshbon. See Jer 48:32. (CSB)

Their richest products being ruined by the invaders. (Kretzmann)

*choicest vines.* The poet shifts to a metaphor, comparing Moab to a vineyard (see 5:1–7). He returns to a literal description again in v. 10. (CSB)

*desert.* On the eastern edge of Moab. (CSB)

*shoots spread out.* This is hyperbole, as in Ps 80:11, where Israel is the vineyard. (CSB)

Depicts spreading of Moab’s influence, perhaps through trade in wine to surrounding nations. These vines are destroyed by the lords of the nations (Is 15). (TLSB)

That is, scattered. The meaning is that the people will be moved from Heshbon and Sibmah across the sea. Agriculture and wine dressing denote a people equipped with wisdom, wealth, etc. The shoots are the nobles, the sages, the offspring through whom posterity is preserved. They are the youth, men and women, who will be taken away by others. (Luther)

*sea.* Probably the Dead Sea. (CSB)

**16:9–11** *I ... I ... I ... My ... my.* The Lord weeps and laments over the destruction he has had to bring on proud Moab to humble her. (CSB)

**16:9** *therefore I weep* – He shows that the weeping is to be heard far and wide, namely as far as Jazer. This is putting on an act, for the prophet himself did not weep for this, but he repeats the words of the people of Moab. “I will weep,” he says, “for the removal of the choicest youth.” (Luther)

The Lord is speaking. (TLSB)

*Elealeh.* C 1 mi NE of Heshbon (15:4). (TLSB)

*summer fruit.* Grape harvest. (TLSB)

*drench you with my tears* – That is, “I will soak and water you.” (Luther)

*shout.* In celebration of a good harvest. The joy and activity normally associated with the harvest of grapes is taken away because of war, destruction, and the dispersed people (Jer 48:33). (TLSB)

The prophet continues in the metaphor. In the time of harvesting and grape-picking men who have something to gather are moved to joy. In the same way parents are happy over their offspring, the state over its young people, the prince over an obedient populace. The prophet, then, indicates that a song different from the song of those rejoicing in the harvest or fruit, namely, the noise and uproar of war, will intervene. Or, the kingdom of Moab was literally laid waste in the time of the harvest. The prophet put summer in place of the summer’s crop, that is, the fruits. He is taunting the Moabites by means of irony or sarcasm. That is to say, “I truly think that the voice of people rejoicing has come into your harvest. Those who will be jubilant in your harvest will certainly come. Others will carry off what you have reaped, and they will be jubilant. Ps. 39:6 reads: ‘Man heaps up, and knows not who will gather.’ The Assyrians will carry off your young people who were trained to till the soft and to manage the affairs of the state.” Moreover, this principle extends in its broadest sense to all the misfortunes of the ungodly. When they have scraped many things together, then they depart into hell, and Satan in their death deprives the self-righteous of all righteousness, so that they are compelled to despair. (Luther)

**16:10** *treads out wine*. The grapes were trampled on, and the juice flowed into the wine vat. (CSB)

*I have put an end to the shouting* – The destruction wrought by the enemy has brought about the end of all happy harvesting; for what he does not destroy outright he plunders. (Kretzmann)

**16:11** Cf. Jer 48:36. (CSB)

*my inner parts moan...Moab* – This, too, is imitative. It means the inmost parts. Heart and justice will grieve, groan, and cry out in sadness. (Luther)

Isaiah's heart lamented because of the judgment he had to announce here, and so did God's heart. Moab was Judah's neighbor, but she was more than just a close neighbor. Moab was also a cousin nation. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. God had protected the Moabites when the Israelites came from Egypt to claim the inheritance God promised because they were relatives, descendants of Lot (Deuteronomy 2:9). Later, God chose Ruth, a Moabite, to be an ancestor of David and, therefore, of Christ (Ruth 4:13-22). Of course, there had also been tension between the two nations, but neither God nor His prophet took any pleasure in the judgment that would fall upon Moab. (PBC)

Deepest seat of emotion (63:15; Jer. 31:20; Lm 2:11). (TLSB)

*Kir-hareseth* – This is a proper noun. The prophet means that the kingdom of Moab is to be destroyed altogether; indeed, Moses ridicules both their god and their worship as something empty. (Luther)

*moan like a lyre* – This was like the sounding-board of a stringed instrument, which vibrates with the depth of his emotion. (Kretzmann)

As if he were playing a lament in his heart. (TLSB)

**16:12** *presents himself*. Before his god Chemosh. (TLSB)

*wearies himself*. All the effort of pagan worship is wasted because idols cannot help. (TLSB)

*high place*. Here is the reason for God's judgment. Moab had turned away from the Lord and His promises. She had returned to the worship of her own gods upon the high places. It is a sad commentary. Like Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, Moab refused to repent and turn to the God of grace. The result was judgment. The result of all refusal to cling to God is always judgment. (PBC)

*pray ... to no avail*. Moab's god, Chemosh, was a mere idol (see 44:17–20; 1Ki 11:7). (CSB)

Where," he asks, "are their gods?" (Deut. 32:37). Truly this ungodly practice and this worship of idols is nothing else but weariness and useless toil, and the ungodly and hypocrites have more trouble in their false worship than the godly in the true. The remorse of the ungodly is twofold. On the one hand it is toil and weariness, on the other, destruction and uselessness. The godly always have a joyful conscience and know that they are pleasing to God. They are unconcerned

about what may befall them from without, and they will not lack fruit like the ungodly, however great a cross they bear, both from without and from within. The external cross is self-imposed, not of God. The internal cross is of the devil and death. The godly bear only an external cross, not self-imposed but placed by God, and they have no cross within, but they do have peace and a cheerful and serene conscience. Let us, therefore, beware of ungodly doctrines because they are extremely destructive and nothing but toil and grief, yea, a plague of God, as Moses says in Deut. 28:36: “There you shall serve other gods.” God can put up with our weakness and our dereliction, if only we will abide in His pure Word. But if the Word is removed, then God Himself and true worship are also removed. In works there are always endless defects, which even the performers themselves always find in them, and among the ungodly satisfaction is never to be made nor any forgiveness of sins. But faith in Christ makes life happy, even though we may fall at times. “Your sins are forgiven,” He says (Matt. 9:2). We believe in the forgiveness of sins. (Luther)

**16:13–14** An epilogue to 15:1–16:12. (CSB)

**16:13** *spoke concerning Moab* – These things were decreed before by God concerning Moab, which always hated the people of God and God Himself dwelling in Jerusalem, and they rejoiced over their misfortune, obviously since they were holy apart from God and devoted to the worship of gods. Now, however, matters will not be drawn out any longer, but “I will set a term of three years,” He says, “if perchance they will repent.” (Luther)

Not the first warning to Moab, but now God gives them a timeline. (TLSB)

**16:14** *Within three years*. Other signs that have a three-year limit are given in 20:3; 37:30. Moab’s three years were over by c. 715 B.C. (CSB)

Isaiah finishes this view of the demise of Moab with a time frame for the oracle to come to pass. In three years, Moab will fall; their pride will be removed. In his oracles about the nations (chs 13–23), Isaiah also specifically predicts time periods. (TLSB)

These are such as when some one is hired for a certain job for a specific amount of money and has the right to leave when the job is finished. So “after three years I will release Moab into the hand of the enemies.” *Removed*, that is, brought into contempt. Its glory, that is, its kingdom, wisdom, religion, power, population, and wealth will be trifling. Nevertheless, a remnant, though small, will be preserved. Where formerly there was a prince, there will now be a peasant. Summary: By a large number of examples and a cloud of witnesses (cf. Heb. 12:1) we are taught that God does not forsake His own and that He brings the proud low. In the morning the godly will have comfort, though in the evening they must be afflicted and must endure for the testing of their faith, as we read in Ps. 30:5. Always they are troubled by the sins of the inhabitants of hell, always God is with them to comfort them and to visit evil upon those who bother them. Thus He did also to the Moabites. (Luther)

*hired worker*. Cf. 21:16–17, where the prophecy against Kedar follows the pattern of this verse. (CSB)

A servant bound by contract counts the days until her or she is free of the obligations required by the contract. (PBC)

*will be very few and feeble* – The ruins of the places mentioned in this prophecy, whose names have been preserved even to this day, testify to both the inspiration of prophecy and the punitive justice of God. (Kretzmann)



**Chs 15–16** The complicated history of friendship and enmity between Israel and Moab would come to an end with Moab’s bloody destruction. Yet even Moab’s refugees will find shelter in the tent of the coming Davidic king. Pride was the downfall of Moab, and it is our downfall too. The Lord desires not our destruction, but that we turn to Him in repentant faith. In Jesus, He offers steadfast love and righteousness. • Heavenly Father, in Your steadfast love, You sent Your Son to save the lost. Lead us to repentance over every arrogant act, and teach us to depend on the love and faithfulness of Jesus in every endeavor. Amen. (TLSB)