

## *Session 16*

# Isaiah 15:1-16:14 | The Burden of Moab

*Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White*

### The burden of Moab and desolation of its cities (vv.15:1-15:9)

- **Verse 1 — Ar and Kir are places, not peoples.** Both are presented as leading Moabite strongholds whose fall represents the collapse of the nation.
  - **Ar of Moab** was a city, or possibly the chief district centered on that city, near the Arnon River east of the Dead Sea. Numbers 21:15, 28 and Deuteronomy 2:9, 18 also associate Ar directly with Moab. Its precise archaeological location has not been established.
  - **Kir of Moab** means the fortress or fortified city of Moab and is commonly identified with **Kir-hareseth** in Isaiah 16:7 and 2 Kings 3:25. It is often associated with modern **Kerak** in Jordan, a naturally fortified site southeast of the Dead Sea, although the identification is not certain.
  - **Verse 1 is prophecy expressed as though the destruction has already occurred.** The KJV's "is laid waste" gives the vision the vivid certainty of accomplished fact, but Isaiah 16:13-14 identifies the material as the LORD's prior word and announces that Moab's glory will be diminished "**within three years.**"
- Isaiah is therefore foretelling an imminent historical judgment rather than merely reporting news of a past disaster.
- **The fulfillment was historical, though the surviving records do not identify every detail with certainty.** Assyria brought Moab under tribute and devastated the region during Isaiah's era; the oracle may correspond to campaigns associated with Tiglath-pileser III, Sargon II, or Sennacherib. Later Babylonian judgment also completed Moab's national decline, as reflected in Jeremiah 48. Isaiah 16:14 requires a near fulfillment within three years, but Scripture does not identify the precise invading campaign by name.
- **Verses 2–4 — Moab's mourning and grief spread throughout the nation.** The lament moves from temples and high places, to streets and rooftops, to cities and soldiers, showing that religious, civic, and military life have all been overwhelmed.
- **Verse 2 — Moab goes to its religious centers to mourn.** The singular "**he**" is best understood collectively as **Moab**—the nation personified as one man—rather than

as an unnamed king or individual.

- **"Bajith"** may be a place-name, but the Hebrew can mean **"the house"** and probably refers to the temple of Moab's god. **Dibon**, identified with modern Dhiban in Jordan, was an important Moabite city north of the Arnon and the hometown of King Mesha. Its people ascend to the temple and high places, but their worship provides no deliverance.
- **Nebo** was a town and cultic site near Mount Nebo; **Medeba** was a prominent plateau city farther south, identified with modern Madaba. Both lay in territory contested by Israel and Moab. Their fall causes lamentation throughout the nation.
  - Modern **Madaba** is famous for the **Madaba Map**, a sixth-century Byzantine mosaic laid in the floor of a church. Preserved in the Greek Orthodox Church of St. George, it is the oldest surviving pictorial map of the Holy Land and depicts Jerusalem, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and many other biblical sites.
- **Bald heads and cut beards** here describe deliberate shaving as a public sign of grief, humiliation, and lost honor—not natural baldness such as Elisha's in 2 Kings 2:23. Similar mourning rites appear in Isaiah 22:12, Jeremiah 7:29, 41:5, 48:37, and Micah 1:16. Deuteronomy 14:1 forbade Israel to make ritual baldness **"between your eyes for the dead,"** while Moab practiced such visible rites without that covenant restriction. The point in Isaiah is the extremity and universality of Moab's mourning: every head and every beard bears the mark of disaster.
- The wording moves from the collective singular **"he"** to the plural **"their"**

because the vision shifts from Moab personified as one nation to the many mourners whose heads and beards display the nation's grief.

- **Verse 3 — Public mourning fills Moab's streets and rooftops.** Sackcloth, weeping, and howling show that the catastrophe reaches ordinary life throughout the cities.
  - **Sackcloth** was coarse clothing worn to express grief, humiliation, distress, or repentance. Individuals wore it, as Jacob did while mourning Joseph (Genesis 37:34), and whole communities wore it in times of crisis, as in Esther 4:1-3 and Jonah 3:5-8. Here its use is national because Moab's population shares the catastrophe.
  - **"On the tops of their houses"** refers to the flat rooftops used as open gathering places. The Moabites mourn both in the streets below and on the roofs above; no part of civic life escapes the lamentation.
  - The plural pronouns continue because Isaiah is now describing Moab's inhabitants collectively rather than personifying the nation as a single **"he."**
- **Verse 4 — The cry spreads across northern Moab.** The named cities trace the breadth and intensity of the disaster, while the soldiers' failure of courage shows that Moab cannot defend itself.
  - **Heshbon**, commonly associated with Tell Hesban, was a major city east of the Jordan and north of Medeba. **Elealeh**, probably modern el-Al just northeast of Heshbon, stood on elevated ground nearby. Their joined cry is heard as far as **Jahaz**, a town farther east or southeast whose exact location remains debated.
  - Jahaz was remembered as the place

where Israel defeated Sihon (Numbers 21:23-24). Its appearance here gives the lament a military setting: the cry reaches a place already associated with decisive defeat.

- **"The armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out"** changes the focus from the population generally to the men expected to defend it. Even the warriors collapse in fear; **"his life shall be grievous unto him"** returns to a collective singular, portraying Moab itself as sick at heart and despairing of survival.
- **Verse 5 — Isaiah's own heart joins Moab's lament as its refugees flee southward.** **"My heart"** most naturally refers to Isaiah, the prophet who sees the judgment and cries out in compassion for Moab. The prophets could announce deserved judgment without taking pleasure in human ruin; Isaiah similarly grieves over Moab in Isaiah 16:9, 11 and over his own people in Isaiah 21:3-4 and 22:4.
  - **Rashi contrasts Isaiah with Balaam.** Balaam, the Gentile prophet hired by Moab, desired Israel's ruin; Isaiah, Israel's prophet, mourns when judgment falls upon Moab. In this Jewish reading, compassion for an enemy helps distinguish the true prophetic spirit from vindictive religion.
  - **"His fugitives"** refers to Moab's refugees. The pronoun continues the personification of Moab as a single man whose surviving people flee toward the southern end of the Dead Sea.
  - **Zoar** was the small city to which Lot fled from Sodom in Genesis 19:20-23. Its probable location near the southeastern end of the Dead Sea made it a natural destination for Moabites escaping an invasion from the north.
    - **The flight is a Lot–Moab replay.**
- Lot fled to Zoar when God sent judgment upon Sodom; generations later, Moab—descended from Lot—flees toward the same Zoar when divine judgment falls again. The geography turns the event into a replay of Moab's own family history.
- **"An heifer of three years old"** translates a difficult Hebrew expression, *eglath shelishiyah*. A three-year-old heifer was mature, vigorous, and in its prime; the phrase may portray Zoar or Moab as formerly strong and unbroken but now terrified and fleeing. Another interpretation treats **Eglath-shelishiyah** as a place-name near Zoar. Jeremiah 48:34 repeats the same expression, so the uncertainty belongs to the ancient wording rather than to Isaiah's basic picture of panic and flight.
- **The mounting up of Luhith** was an ascending road or pass in Moab. Its precise location is unknown, but both Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:5 picture refugees climbing it in tears.
- **The way of Horonaim** was a road leading toward another Moabite town, probably in the southern highlands or on a descent toward the Dead Sea. Jeremiah 48:3-5 repeats the cry from Horonaim and the weeping ascent of Luhith, confirming that these places marked a remembered route of disaster and escape.
- The movement of the verse is geographical and emotional: refugees flee toward Zoar, climb the road at Luhith weeping, and raise **"a cry of destruction"** on the way to Horonaim. Moab's grief is no longer stationary at its temples and cities; it travels with a displaced population.
- **Verses 6–7 — The land can no longer sustain Moab, so the refugees carry away whatever wealth remains.** Failed water and vegetation force the people onward with their

stored possessions toward a border crossing.

- **Verse 6 — The waters of Nimrim and the surrounding vegetation are desolate.** The judgment reaches beyond cities and armies to the land's ability to sustain life.
  - **The waters of Nimrim** were a Moabite stream, springs, or well-watered district. Its exact identification is uncertain; proposals include Wadi Nimrin northeast of the Dead Sea and Wadi en-Numeirah near its southeastern shore. The southern location fits the refugee route in verse 5 particularly well.
  - **"The hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing"** describes total agricultural collapse. In a pastoral land known for sheep and tribute in lambs (2 Kings 3:4), loss of water and pasture meant the disappearance of food, livestock support, and economic survival.
  - The repeated clauses intensify the picture: the water source is desolate, cut vegetation has withered, new grass fails, and nothing green remains. Whether the invader stopped or polluted the water, or the language describes drought accompanying judgment, the result is the same—Moab's refugees cannot depend upon the land.
  - **Jeremiah 48:34** later repeats the desolation of Nimrim's waters during another judgment upon Moab. Jeremiah reuses Isaiah's geography and language for a later Babylonian-era devastation.
- **Verse 7 — The refugees carry their remaining possessions across the brook of the willows.** The drought and destruction explain **"therefore"**: because they cannot remain in the land, they take what they can and continue their escape.
  - **"The abundance they have gotten"**

and **"that which they have laid up"** refer to accumulated produce, goods, and wealth. What once represented settled prosperity has become a portable burden carried by displaced people.

- **"The brook of the willows"** was probably a wadi or boundary stream on Moab's southern edge, often associated with the Zered valley, modern Wadi al-Hasa, though the identification is not certain. The Hebrew may also be rendered **"brook of the Arabim"** or **"ravine of the poplars."** Its role in the passage is clear even if its precise location is not: the fugitives cross it while carrying their possessions out of the devastated region.
- The contrast between verses 6 and 7 is severe: nothing green remains in the land, but the refugees still struggle to preserve the wealth they had previously gathered. Judgment has converted abundance into baggage and homeowners into fugitives.
- **Verses 8–9 — Moab's cry reaches every border, yet further judgment awaits both fugitives and survivors.** The chapter closes with lament encircling the land, waters filled with blood, and no group able to escape what God will add.
- **Verse 8 — The cry goes round about the borders of Moab.** What began in particular cities has become a national lament heard from one limit of the country to another.
- **Eglaim** and **Beer-elim** were Moabite locations, probably toward the country's outer reaches, although neither site can now be identified with certainty. **Beer-elim** means **"well of the mighty ones"** or **"well of heroes."** The two names function geographically: Moab's howling has traveled throughout its

territory.

- The repetition of **"the howling thereof"** makes the sound itself seem to move across the map. Isaiah has traced grief through temples, streets, rooftops, refugee roads, ruined pastureland, and finally the whole border.
- **Verse 9 — The waters of Dimon are full of blood, and God will bring still more upon the land.** Flight, thirst, and loss are followed by death; even those who escape the first disaster remain exposed to judgment.
- **Dimon** is generally understood as another form of **Dibon**, the important Moabite city named in verse 2. Isaiah likely uses **Dimon** to create a sound association with Hebrew *dam*, **"blood"**: the waters of *Dimon* are filled with *dam*.
- **"I will bring more upon Dimon"** introduces the LORD as the speaker and shows that the devastation already described does not exhaust the judgment. The city may survive one stage only to face an added calamity.
- **"Lions"** may refer literally to wild animals moving into depopulated territory, as in 2 Kings 17:25, or symbolically to a fierce invading power, as in Jeremiah 4:7. The Aramaic

Targum takes the interpretive route and paraphrases the lion as **a king with his army** who destroys the Moabites. In every reading, the image is of a predator overtaking people who believed they had escaped.

- **"Him that escapeth"** and **"the remnant of the land"** cover the two apparent paths of survival: those who flee and those who remain. Neither geographical escape nor endurance in place guarantees safety when the announced judgment continues.
- The **remnant** here is simply the surviving population, not automatically a faithful or believing remnant. Context must determine whether biblical remnant language describes spiritual faithfulness or only those left alive after disaster.
- **Chapter 15 is the darkness before the Davidic King appears in chapter 16.** The chapter ends with blood, fugitives, and a remnant still exposed to danger. Isaiah 16 will move through the plight of outcasts and the end of oppression to a throne established **"in mercy"** in the tabernacle of David (Isaiah 16:4-5). The devastation of Moab creates the dark human need against which the righteous rule of Messiah begins to shine.

## Moab's prophetic contingency: submission or displacement (vv.16:1-4)

- **Verses 1–4 present Moab with an implied prophetic contingency.** The passage does not use a formal **"if...then,"** but it places two courses before the nation: humble submission to Zion's ruler and protection of God's outcasts, or continued pride followed by displacement and judgment.
- **Verse 1 — "Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land."** Isaiah summons Moab

to acknowledge the Davidic ruler in Zion by restoring tribute and seeking his protection.

- The **lamb** is literal tribute rather than a sacrificial reference to Christ. Moab was famous for sheep; Mesha king of Moab had rendered Israel **"an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool"** before rebelling (2 Kings 3:4-5). Sending the lamb therefore

signifies renewed submission.

- **"The ruler of the land"** is the Davidic king ruling from Jerusalem. In the immediate setting this would be Judah's reigning king, but verse 5 will reveal the righteous Davidic King toward whom the summons ultimately points.
- **Sela** means **"rock"** and commonly refers to the Edomite stronghold later associated with Petra, south of Moab. The tribute travels from Moab's rocky wilderness refuge toward Jerusalem, **"the mount of the daughter of Zion."**
- **"Daughter of Zion"** personifies Jerusalem and its people as a woman; it does not refer to one literal daughter.
- **Verse 2 — Refusal leaves Moab like birds driven from their nest.** The verse can be heard as the warned consequence of failing to submit: the nation that will not humble itself before Zion's ruler becomes displaced and defenseless.
  - A **"wandering bird cast out of the nest"** is figurative language for frightened refugees who have lost home, protection, and direction.
  - **"The daughters of Moab"** may emphasize Moabite women, who were especially vulnerable in war, or may personify the inhabitants of Moab's towns collectively.
  - **The fords of Arnon** were shallow crossings of the Arnon River, modern Wadi Mujib, which cut through central Moab and often served as a political boundary. The people crowding the fords are suspended between ruined homes and an uncertain destination.
  - The image reverses Moab's former condition: a nation of cities, high places, pasture, and stored wealth has become a scattered nest.
- **Verses 3–4a — Moab is given another**

**kingdom-aligned alternative: practice justice and shelter God's outcasts.** Rather than cooperate with the spoiler, Moab is to conceal the vulnerable and refuse to betray those fleeing oppression.

- **"Take counsel"** means form a wise plan, and **"execute judgment"** means render a just decision. Here **judgment** has the sense of justice rather than punishment.
- **"Make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday"** is figurative language for complete protection. Moab is to conceal exposed fugitives as securely as nighttime darkness hides what would otherwise be visible at noon (Isaiah 4:6; 25:4-5; 32:2).
- **"Hide the outcasts"** requires actual refuge, while **"bewray not him that wandereth"** means **do not expose or betray the fugitive** to the pursuing enemy. *Bewray* is older English for disclose or betray, not a form of *beware*.
- **"Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab"** identifies the alternative most clearly in the KJV. The Masoretic Hebrew and its accents favor this reading: God calls them **"mine outcasts"** and addresses Moab, commanding it to shelter fleeing Israelites. Rashi identifies them as **"the fleeing children of Israel."**
- Many modern versions instead read **"the outcasts of Moab,"** following the Septuagint, Syriac, some Hebrew manuscripts, and the contextual emphasis upon Moabite refugees. That reading turns verses 3–4 into Moab's appeal to Judah. The KJV/Masoretic reading produces the sharper contingency: Moab, itself facing displacement, is commanded to protect God's displaced people.
- **"A covert"** is a hiding place, shelter, or protective covering from **"the spoiler,"** the invading devastator.

- **Verse 4b — The present oppressive order will not last.** "The extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land" gives Moab a reason to choose rightly: the violent power it fears is temporary, while the Davidic kingdom announced next is God's future.
- **"The extortioner"** is one who squeezes or exacts what belongs to others; **"the oppressors"** are literally those who tread people down. Together the terms describe economic, military, and social domination.
- The verbs announce the oppressors' end with prophetic certainty. Moab must decide whether to accommodate the passing spoiler or act according to the justice of the coming kingdom.
- **The implied choice is therefore:** submit to Zion's ruler and shelter God's outcasts, or persist in pride and become an outcast. Verse 6 will identify Moab's pride as the obstacle that keeps the nation from taking the offered course.

### The throne established in mercy (v.16:5)

- **Verse 5 — "In mercy shall the throne be established."** The disappearance of oppressive rule is followed by righteous Davidic government; biblical hope is not merely the absence of a tyrant but the presence of the rightful King.
- **"Mercy"** carries the covenantal sense of steadfast love or loyal kindness. The throne rests not upon exploitation like the rule of verse 4, but upon God's faithful commitment to the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:20-37).
- **"He shall sit upon it in truth"** describes a dependable ruler whose judgments correspond to reality and whose reign is faithful rather than deceptive. **Truth** and **mercy** together recall the qualities by which God maintains His covenant purposes.
- **"In the tabernacle of David"** means within David's house or dynasty, not that the king merely sits inside a temporary tent. The expression connects the promised ruler with the continuing Davidic covenant and anticipates the restoration language of Amos 9:11.
- **"Judging, and seeking judgment"** means that the King actively administers justice rather than waiting passively for oppression to spread. He searches out what is right and gives attention to the cases of those who need protection.
- **"Hasting righteousness"** means He is prompt and skillful in carrying righteousness into effect. Unlike rulers who delay justice or profit from disorder, this King acts quickly to make what is right prevail.
- The verse may have had an immediate horizon in the hope of faithful Davidic rule in Isaiah's day, but its language reaches beyond every merely human king. The throne established in covenant mercy, occupied in truth, and perfectly administering justice finds its fullest realization in Messiah (Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5; Luke 1:32-33).
- **The movement from verse 4 to verse 5 is essential:** the spoiler's rule ends and is replaced by Messiah's throne. Protection of the vulnerable reflects the character of the coming kingdom and its King.

### Pride and mourning of Moab and its lands (vv.16:6-11)

- **Verse 6 — Moab's pride makes the offered alternative unacceptable to her.** The repeated words—**pride, proud, haughtiness, wrath**—portray more than self-confidence. Moab's inflated estimate of herself prevents the humble submission and mercy described in verses 1-5.
  - **"But his lies shall not be so" (KJV)** means that Moab's boasts will not prove true. Modern versions variously render the difficult final words as **"his boasts are false"** (ESV), **"her boasts are empty"** (NIV), or **"his idle boasts are false"** (NASB). The Hebrew is terse, but the point is consistent: Moab's claims exceed the reality.
  - Rashi gives an unusually severe Jewish interpretation. He connects Moab's unjustified pride with the nation's shameful origin in Lot's elder daughter (Genesis 19:30-38), and he also understands Moab's **wrath** as anger long harbored against Israel. In this reading, Moab boasts in a lineage and strength that furnish no legitimate ground for pride.
- **Verses 7-8 — Proud Moab becomes mourning Moab as its celebrated produce and settlements collapse.** The whole nation wails, and the repetition **"Moab shall howl for Moab"** makes the grief sound self-enclosing: there is no outside deliverer to answer it.
  - **"The foundations of Kir-hareseth" (KJV)** reflects an older reading also found in Rashi, who relates the Hebrew *ashishei* to **walls**. Most modern versions render the expression **"the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth."** The latter fits the normal biblical use of the related word for pressed cakes of raisins (2 Samuel 6:19; Song of Solomon 2:5; Hosea 3:1) and the agricultural setting of verses 8-10. On that reading, the people mourn the loss of a prized local product; on the older Jewish and KJV reading, they mourn the ruined defenses of the city.
- **Heshbon, Sibmah, and Jazer** lay in the fertile territory east of the Jordan. Heshbon's fields and Sibmah's vines represent the economic life and former abundance of Moab. Rashi observes that these places had belonged to Israel east of the Jordan and proposes that Moabites occupied them after the Reubenites and Gadites were exiled by Assyria (1 Chronicles 5:26).
- **"The lords of the heathen have broken down the principal plants" (KJV)** is rendered by modern versions as the rulers or invaders of the nations **trampling** or **striking down** the choice vines. An older, unusual interpretation takes the clause figuratively: Sibmah produced wine so potent that it "struck down" the rulers of nations by intoxicating them. The context of devastation favors enemy rulers destroying the vines, but the alternate reading shows how easily the imagery could evoke the fame of Moabite wine.
- The vine whose branches reach Jazer, wander through the wilderness, and cross **"the sea"** probably pictures the former extent of Sibmah's vineyards and trade, with the sea likely being the Dead Sea. Rashi, following the Targum's direction, instead treats the fields, vines, and branches as an allegory of Moab's camps, rulers, and exiles scattering outward.
- **Verses 9-10 — The prophet joins the lament as the sounds of harvest become the sounds of invasion.** The first-person voice—"I will bewail" and **"I will water thee with my tears"**—shows that announcing divine judgment does not require delighting in another nation's ruin. Isaiah grieves over the destruction he faithfully

predicts.

- **"Thy summer fruits"** refers especially to fruit gathered or dried in summer; some modern versions use **"summer fruit," "fruit,"** or simply **"harvest."** Together with the grain harvest and vineyards, the language describes the loss of the entire agricultural cycle.
- The Hebrew word *hedad* can denote the rhythmic shout of workers treading grapes, but in verse 9 it can also be heard as the cry of attackers. The KJV says **"the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen,"** while some modern translations make the hostile sense explicit with **"the battle cry has fallen."** Rashi identifies it as the noise of robbers and plunderers.
- Verse 10 completes the reversal: joy, singing, and the vintagers' shout disappear from the vineyards because no grapes remain to be pressed. The final **"I have made their vintage shouting to cease"** identifies the LORD as the One who has silenced Moab's prosperity. The same sound that

once marked abundance has been overtaken by judgment.

- **Verse 11 — Judgment produces grief deep within the prophet.** **"My bowels shall sound like an harp"** uses the ancient bodily language of the inward parts as the seat of deep emotion. Modern versions commonly say **"my inner being"** or **"my inward parts moan like a lyre,"** avoiding the changed modern associations of *bowels* without changing the meaning.
- A lyre sounds because its strings vibrate. The image therefore suggests an involuntary resonance within Isaiah: Moab's lament sets his own inward being trembling. Rashi simply explains the sound as lamentation, while the parallel reference to Kir-hareseth brings the section back to the city named in verse 7.
- Moab's pride does not make Moab's destruction emotionally trivial. The passage holds moral judgment and genuine compassion together: pride must be brought down, yet its human and earthly cost is still worthy of tears.

## Moab's prayer and the LORD's word about its decline (vv.16:12-14)

- **Verse 12 — Moab's worship cannot rescue Moab.** The nation that refused refuge under Zion's righteous throne finally appears at its own **high place** and enters its own sanctuary to pray, but **"he shall not prevail."** The contrast completes the contingency of verses 1-5: Moab would not humble herself before the LORD's appointed king, and her own religious system proves powerless in the crisis.
- The Hebrew may be understood, **"when Moab appears at the high place, when he wearies himself,"** which explains why many modern versions describe repeated, exhausting worship. The KJV, **"when it is**

seen that Moab is weary on the high place," follows the same Hebrew words but relates them somewhat differently.

- **"He shall not prevail"** translates the ordinary verb *yakol*, **"be able."** Modern versions therefore say that his prayer **"will be to no avail," "will accomplish nothing,"** or **"he cannot prevail."** The failure is not a lack of religious effort; neither the sanctuary nor the god addressed there possesses the power to deliver.
- The customary interpretation identifies the high place and sanctuary with the worship of Moab's god Chemosh (Numbers 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7). Rashi offers a striking

alternative: Moab first becomes weary from fighting upon the high places of its fortified towers and then withdraws to its sanctuary to pray. Either way, military strength and religious appeal both fail.

- **Verse 13 — The oracle was not invented after the disaster.** "This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning Moab since that time" points back to the preceding prophecy as a word already given.

- Verse 14 begins "**But now**," distinguishing a newly announced timetable from the older prophecy. The judgment itself had been revealed previously; the new revelation specifies how soon its major fulfillment would arrive.

- Rashi understands the older word as Isaiah's prophecy delivered many days before Moab's calamity. He also preserves an unusual Jewish alternative: "**from long ago**" may reach back to the days when Balak king of Moab hired Balaam against Israel (Numbers 22-24). On that reading, the present judgment belongs to a much older history of Moabite hostility toward God's covenant people.

- **Verse 14 — The LORD places Moab's humiliation on a precise three-year clock.** "Within three years" is not an indefinite expression for some future generation. The comparison "**as the years of an hireling**" pictures a contracted laborer carefully counting the exact term of service: the employer receives no extra time, and the worker accepts no extension. Isaiah uses the same kind of expression for a one-year deadline against Kedar in Isaiah 21:16.

- The emphasis is not that the years will feel difficult but that the deadline is fixed and exact.

- "**The glory of Moab shall be condemned**" uses an older English word meaning **despised, treated with contempt, or regarded as worthless**. It is related to *contempt*, not *condemned*. Moab's splendor, reputation, population, and power will be humiliated and made insignificant. The prophecy does not require every Moabite to disappear: it expressly leaves a remnant, but one "**very small and feeble**." The final Hebrew, *lo kabir*, can mean "**not mighty**," "**not strong**," or "**insignificant**," accounting for variation among modern translations.
- The text does not name the invading king or supply the starting year, so proposed historical correlations remain uncertain. The three years most naturally belong to Isaiah's own historical horizon and an Assyrian reduction of Moab's power, even though the nation continued afterward and later faced Babylonian judgment (Jeremiah 48). The prophecy promises the collapse of Moab's **glory**, not its immediate and permanent extinction.
- Rashi connects the deadline with Moab's aid to Sennacherib during a three-year campaign and says that Moab was then swept into captivity with the Assyrian forces. This preserves a specific Jewish historical tradition, though identifying the exact Assyrian campaign from the biblical and surviving historical records remains difficult.
- **The chapter closes by contrasting two kinds of certainty.** Moab's proud boasts in verse 6 "**shall not be so**," but the LORD's measured word in verse 14 will occur on schedule. Human glory is unreliable; the prophetic word is exact.