

## The refugees of Moab

God weeps for the refugees of Moab. They break his heart.

*My heart cries out over Moab; her refugees flee as far as Zoar, as far as Eglath Shelishiyah...So I weep, as Jazer weeps for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon, O Elealeh, I drench you with tears...my heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth. (Isaiah 15:5; 16:9,11)*

Who are these refugees? Moabites, cousins of the Israelites, under attack from Assyria, the dominant world power of the 8th Century BC. Survivors are being driven south across the river Arnon. Moab's destruction is certain, her cities will be 'ruined in a night' (Isa 15:1), her 'splendor and all her many people will be despised, and her survivors will be very few and feeble' (Isa 16:14).

The whole land of Moab weeps, from north to south, in the temples, homes and public squares and on the battle field.

*Dibon goes up to its temple, <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>to its high places to weep; Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>Every head is shaved <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>and every beard cut off. <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the roofs and in the public squares <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>they all wail, prostrate with weeping. Heshbon and Elealeh cry out, their voices are heard all the way to Jahaz. <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out, and their hearts are faint. (Isa 15:2-4)*

The rulers of Moab plead for asylum for their refugees.

*Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>from Sela, across the desert, <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>to the mount of the Daughter of Zion. <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>Like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, <sup>[L] [SEP]</sup>so are the women of Moab at the*

*fords of the Arnon. 'Give us counsel, render a decision. <sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>Make your shadow like night - at high noon. <sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>Hide the fugitives, do not betray the refugees. Let the Moabite fugitives stay with you; be their shelter from the destroyer.'* (Isa 16:1-4a)

We can imagine the Moabite government in their cabinet meeting, arranging envoys to take lambs as tribute to Judah, 'to the mount of the daughter of Zion.' These rulers have escaped, maybe 60 miles from the advancing foe, but they are not heartless. They know in war, it's the women who are most pathetic, 'like fluttering birds pushed from the nest, <sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>so are the women of Moab at the fords of the Arnon.' They are desperate and insistent in their appeal to Judah's King - hide the fugitives, do not betray them (by granting extradition), let them stay with you, be their shelter.

But there is no promise of asylum from the present rulers of Jerusalem. Instead God's promise is much bigger and better.

*The oppressor will come to an end, and destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. <sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it - one from the house of David - one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.* (Isa 16:4b-5)

In love, God will end all oppression and establish a permanent rule of righteousness, not subject to the caprice and self-interest of human governments. A faithful King from David's dynasty will rule the world and all nations, including the Moabites, can come under his loving protection.

Now that's what I call asylum!

But tragically the Moabites' overweening pride means that they do not seek the security of God's righteous King in Zion and her false religion is

to no avail. Moab's gods are no gods and there is no salvation in them.

*We have heard of Moab's pride - her overweening pride and conceit, <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>her pride and her insolence - but her boasts are empty...When Moab appears at her high place, <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>she only wears herself out; <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>when she goes to her shrine to pray, it is to no avail.*  
(Isa 16:6,12)

Shockingly, the God who weeps for Moab is also the God who sends this bloody horror. God is executing judgment with tears in his eyes.

*Dimon's waters are full of blood, but I will bring still more upon Dimon - <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land.* (Isa 15:9)

What do we learn about God from this history of Moabite refugees?

God sees and understands and feels the plight of the oppressed. If we are not stirred in our inmost being at the sight of the fugitive, we do not have the heart of God. And if we see a brother or sister without clothes or daily food and only wish them well, what good is it? Faith without deeds is dead (James 2:14-17).

But the God of Israel is not some kind of cosmic welfare provider, mopping up after humanitarian disasters. He is in absolute control of all human history and government. With Assyria, he used one nation to punish the pride of another. The God who weeps is the same God who destroys the wicked.

The ultimate hope for the Moabites and all refugees is not in human sanctuary, which is uncertain and temporary. The nations will only find security as they align themselves at last with the God who rules in Zion. God's own eternal Son, oppressed by Roman rule and abandoned by his

Father on the cross, is our refuge. This greatest son of David 'disarmed the powers and authorities ... [and] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Col 2:15). And people from all nations are streaming to this King of Zion to live forever under his righteous rule. Pride will keep us from enjoying his refuge.

As believers we are all God's elect, strangers in the world. The hope of the gospel is certain but there is grief for a little while.

*To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered...In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. (1 Peter 1:1-6)*

The refugee highway leads to God's King on Mount Zion – Jesus.