

"The Lord Almighty Has Sworn"
Isaiah 14:24 – 16:14
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Last week we learned of the prophecy against Babylon. This week the prophecy of judgment is against Assyria, the Philistines and Moab; all countries like Judah who would come under the chastisement of God.

It is amazing to me that the Lord of Hosts has actually sworn by His own oath that He would break the Assyrians. This is all about judgment. What you sow, you will reap.

Soon after Isaiah announced this prophecy, Assyria launched a military campaign against the western world at that time including Judah. King Sennacherib conquered 46 fortified cities as well as small towns of Judah. He took greater than 200,000 captives and put a siege on Jerusalem trapping King Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 19:34 God says, "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant." How? Vs. 35, "That night the angel of the Lord went out and put death 185,000 men in the Assyrian camp." That certainly gives meaning to the prophecy in Isaiah 14:25 "His yoke (that of the Assyrian king) will be taken from my people and his burden removed from their shoulders."

Isaiah 14:26-27 goes on to say that God has a plan for ALL the nations. It's a vivid word picture – God's hand touching the entire world. He really does hold the whole world in His hand. There is no question that God will judge us as a nation too. It's not a possibility or a probability. This is a fact.

God has told us so in 2 Peter 3:10-11, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief . . . The earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Seeing that all these things will be destroyed, what manner of people should we be in our holy conversations and godliness."

Before we all cringe in fear, we must realize and remember that God gave us these warnings to protect us and guide us to ever increasing trust in Him. Just as Jerusalem was freed from the Assyrian bondage by God's intervention, so too we are set free from the bondage of sin by God's intervention in sending His Son, Jesus, to pay for our sin with His blood on the cross.

The prophecy against the Philistines in vs. 18-32 came in the year King Ahaz died, 715 B.C. Remember Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah, so this prophecy involved the Assyrian king before Sennacherib. His name was Shalmaneser. Shalmaneser had attached the northern kingdom and deported all the survivors and then was killed in a rebellion. In vs. 29 Isaiah warned the Philistines not to rejoice because the new king, Shalmaneser, was a viper more cruel than his father. The people had chosen a very

poor time to rebel against what they considered a weakened Assyria. God would use Assyria to destroy the Philistines. We know this because their root would be destroyed by famine and war as the Philistines wailed at the invading Assyrians approaching from the north like uncontrollable smoke.

Once again, we see the mercy and compassion of God. He reached out and protected Judah and specifically told Jerusalem that they had a refuge and not to fear the messengers from Assyria. Deuteronomy 33:27 tells us "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms, He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, destroy him!"

Those words and promises are just as true today as they were in ancient times because God does not change. His promises are eternal and everlasting. Proverbs 14:26 gives me hope as it states, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and His children have a place of refuge."

Those two prophecies focus on God's judgment and God's compassion through His promises and His Word. As the song states, "A mighty fortress is our God" and in Him there is no failing. A. W. Tozer could sum up these two prophecies very well when he writes, "Whoever defends himself will have himself for his defense, and he will have no other. But let him come defenseless before the Lord and he will have for his defender no less than God Himself."

While the prophecies against Assyria and the Philistines were contained in two paragraphs, the prophecy against Moab takes two chapters – Isaiah 15 and 16. I think I'd like to subtitle this portion of my lecture "American Idols." No, not the American Idol TV program that is one of the most worldly successful TV programs in U.S. history, but rather the reality of what we share in common with the Moabites that led to their dramatic fall.

Moab was a land bordered by the Dead Sea and Judah on the west and the Arabian Desert on the east. It was bordered by Edom on the south and Mt. Nebo on the north. Moab occupied a plateau 4300 feet above the Dead Sea and was covered by grass and grain.

The economy of Moab was booming due to the material resources of salt, balsam and limestone. It was situated on the Kings Highway that was a trade route from Egypt to Mesopotamia, Syria and Anatolia; therefore, it had considerable revenue.

The Moabites were kinsmen of Israel. You probably remember that Lot was a nephew of Abraham and lived in Sodom when it was destroyed. As the family escaped before the destruction, Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Lot found refuge in a cave with his two daughters and fathered a child with each of them. From those children came the two nations of the Moabites and the Ammonites.

In 1868 historians unearthed an ancient stone called the Mesha Stone. On it was an image of Chemosh, god of Moab. In 2 Kings 3:27 we find that human sacrifice – child sacrifice – was a part of the rites of Chemosh. The Moabites had been long time enemies of God's people. Remember how the Moabites refused food and drink to the Israelites during the exodus and how they even hired Balaam, son of Boer to curse them but God turned the curse around? In Deuteronomy 23:3-6 Moses wrote, "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord... Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live." But did the Israelites always do what they were told to do? No! We read that Ruth, the grandmother of King David, was a Moabite.

Isaiah begins his oracle against Moab by informing us of the absolute destruction of many large cities by the Assyrians. We're further told that the Moabites went to their temple, to its high places to weep and wail over the destruction of Nebo and Medeba. The mention of all these cities by Isaiah speaks of the total devastation prompting national mourning. This would be similar to saying that the American cities from New York to LA and all the areas in between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans had been destroyed.

As a sign of mourning the entire population shaved their hair and beards and girded themselves with sackcloth. Sackcloth was made from dark or black goat's hair and, therefore, very uncomfortable. Of course, their mourning didn't alter their circumstances as their god could not, and would not, protect them or even hear them in spite of their wailing. They were without hope. They were crushed! They believed that Chemosh was a destructor, a subduer and a god of fertility. These beliefs proved to be thoroughly wrong. Where was their god at this crucial time? Their destruction was so great Isaiah and God lament over Moab's plight.

The enemy had burned all the vegetation and dammed up the rivers. Vs. 6 says, "The waters are dried up and the grass withered; the vegetation is gone and nothing green is left." That would be similar to saying the enemy had burned the San Joaquin Valley and all of our fruit orchards across America and dammed up the Colorado River and all the rivers in the country so that no life-giving water reached us.

How sad that the Moabites were fleeing with the possessions they could carry. What would you or I try to carry if we had to flee? Even if they should escape from the enemy, the lion would follow them and the wild beasts would devour them. How ironic that the Moabites at one time boasted that their soldiers were like fierce lions; now lions were not their defense but a part of their demise.

In vs. 5 God had said, "My heart cries out over Moab: . . ." No doubt He grieved over a people who had rejected Him and been rebellious. Rebellion in its root is sin. Judson Cromwell in his book LET US ENJOY FORGIVENESS states, "Why is God so

extremely severe in dealing with sin? Simply, because sin is a broken law, a broken relationship, and it produces a broken life."

Where do you turn when your world collapses? Would you accept help from those you've always considered an enemy to survive? God's compassion pleads with Moab in chapter 16 – "Send lambs to the mount of the Daughter of Zion." Lambs we know were a traditional tribute paid by the Moabites and other cultures. But this would mean approaching Judah and being ready to accept the throne of David as their overlord. Certainly, it would provide protection for the Moabite women. Women always suffer the worst in times of attack – rape and violence and loss of security (like birds pushed from the nest).

The oracle continues with hope . . . the oppressor will come to an end, destruction will cease; the aggressor will vanish from the land. God will establish one of David's descendants on the throne and that he will rule in mercy and truth and be just and eager to do what is right. Isaiah 9:7 told us, "Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Was this a final plea of God's grace? Was He giving a promise to the oppressed but not stating how soon this would happen? J. Alec Martyer comments, "The promises of God do not ensure immunity from life's trials and the Bible does not entice by unrealistic expectations." This is a lesson we should remember in the midst of our own earthly life.

In verses 6-12 we find these phrases: "I weep," "I drench you with tears!", "My heart laments." God takes no pleasure in judging His creatures. But judgment is not without cause. Vs.6, "We have heard of Moab's pride – her overwhelming pride and conceit, her pride and her insolence – but her boasts are empty." Jeremiah 48:29-30 repeats the same charge, "We have heard of Moab's pride . . ." It is apparent that the Moabites were unwilling to accept the King of Zion. Therefore, they continued on in misery. Why? It was their own demonstration of pride, conceit and rage.

Before I say, "What were they thinking!" Is that not reminiscent of myself? I must lay down my pride and conceit including my rage as it rears its ugly head due to my mask being pulled off exposing what I really am inside.

Verses 7-12 provide a picture of a land that was once fertile, full of orchards and vineyards, now destroyed. Joy has turned to sorrow. Their boasting is silenced. As Stuart Briscoe informs us, "God has never heard of anything as ludicrous as the empty boasting of human beings who are rebelling against Him." The Moabites continue to search for meaning but will not find it in their temples, pagan shrines or idols.

Isaiah 16 finishes with the dramatic pronouncement that in exactly three years the glory of Moab will be ended forever. Only a remnant of its people will remain.

What strikes me so strongly is the Moabites pride. Pride is defined as "at its root, independence from God." As Matthew Henry wrote, "Take heed of pride, it is a sin that turned angels into devils." Proverbs 8:13 states that God hates pride and arrogance.

So, what are the lessons to be learned from chapters 15 and 16? In my opinion, the overarching theme is that of false worship of idols and its ultimate consequences. Tim Keller in his book COUNTERFEIT GODS defines idols as "anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, or anything you seek to give yourself that only God can give." You might say how silly to talk about worshiping idols. Surely, we don't do that today, or do we? I would tell you that idols may not look the way they did in ancient times, but they are most assuredly present today. Based on previous definitions, let's look at the numerous possibilities.

Has a person or persons been at the center of your life as if they had cast a spell on you?

Would you do whatever was necessary to gain their approval?

How about intellect or knowledge? Beth Moore states, "If in our pursuit of higher knowledge God seems to be getting smaller, we are being deceived."

How about the media in all its forms? How much time do we spend on our electronic devices, or on TV, or the movies, or the printed word? Ravi Zacharias points out, "The constant bombardment of images shapes our perceptions of a whole generation and results in altered beliefs and lifestyles that make even the aberrant seem normal."

How about power? How is it used today? Is it worshipped? Would we pounce over anybody get what we wanted? Do we see power grabs today by politicians? Do they bend the truth to get elected?

What about sports? Does it take the place of the kids, the family, family time, or church? Do we eat, drink, and sleep sports to the extreme? What sports heroes do the kids worship? Will they become like them?

Has work become our ultimate goal? Do our children suffer or our spouses as we place our lives at the altar of success? James Dobson cautioned us that, "we lack the discipline to limit our entanglements with the world, choosing instead to be dominated by our work and the materialistic gadgetry it will bring. What is sacrificed in the process

are the loving relationships of wives, children, and friends who actually give life meaning. God, the ultimate provider, is also replaced."

What about sex? Has that become a god? Do we sacrifice our souls in someone else's bed or on the images of pornography on a computer? Or do we, as a well-known governor, state "I screwed up" and repeat this same act and excuse time and time again.

How about money? I was thinking of Mrs. Marcos of the Philippines who had over 1,000 pair of shoes. Did she really need that many? Has fashion become your idol? What about the billion-dollar industry of beauty aids? Is your worth fashioned by what you wear on your body and what you put on your face?

I would be the biggest hypocrite on earth if I did not say that I have succumbed to idols and have reaped the consequences. I did not see it as rebellion against God, but it was. There was no joy in the vineyard for me.

What about the church? George Barna states that, "one of the dangers facing the church in the decades to come hinges upon the dangers of seeking size in the church over the quality of its spiritual life and depersonalizes the ministry to provide a broader range of programs." What are other idols in the church? How about tradition? If it is not done this way, it's wrong.

We must acknowledge that we do worship idols. Samuel in 1 Samuel 12:21 declares, "Do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty." Psalm 115:4-8 tells us, "Their idols are merely things of silver and gold shaped by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak and eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, and noses but cannot smell. They have hands but cannot feel, and feet but cannot walk and throats but cannot make a sound. And those who make idols are just like them, as are all those that trust in them."

Idolatry can function inside religious communities when a doctrinal truth is elevated to the position of a false god. Mark Driscoll, Senior Pastor of Mars Hill Church, states, "Sadly worship has too often been considered merely a style of music or an event such as a church service. Worship is never reduced to only these things. In many ways, to speak of worship is to speak of all life in its fullness lived to God's glory and our joy."

Tim Keller explains how we have put the American system of individual self-fulfillment at the forefront. Putting our nation above God is an idol. Putting our nation under God is not. Another idol we must realize is self. We delude ourselves into thinking we are in control. A.W. Tozer said that, "self is the unique veil that hides us from the face of God. If I am not worshipping God, then I must be worshipping what I want or desire."

So, if I confess that I have other gods or see God in my own making, what can I do about it? First, I must find my idols. How do I go about doing this? We need to ask ourselves who or what are your external idols, your internal idols, your functional heaven, your functional savior, and what good thing has become a God thing?

The last point is how can I nurture my worship? (Please see the handout).

If only the Moabites had put aside their pride and were not blinded by their idols, there would have been more of a remnant. In our lives we must replace these idols with the joy that only God can give. I will rejoice that I am bound to Jesus Christ and do not need to be enslaved as the Moabites were. Harold Best said it best, "We begin with one fundamental fact about worship: as long as the world endures everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving someone or something. Everybody is being shaped thereby and growing up toward some measure of fullness, whether of righteousness or evil. We are unceasing worshippers and will remain so forever, for eternity is an infinite extrapolation of one of two conditions: surrender to the sinfulness of sin to the ultimate loss of my soul or to the commitment of personal righteousness through Jesus our Savior for infinite gain."

As for me and my house, we will follow the Lord.