



• The plight of Philistia and Moab

Isaiah chapters 13–20 are a cycle of oracles that point to the desperate needs of the nations. Babylon and Assyria are destined to be exterminated, says Isaiah 13:1–14:27. Now in two more units of prophecy the prophet goes on to point to the terrible plight of Philistia¹ and Moab².

14:28-32
15:1-16:14

1. In times of crisis, God's people find their refuge in God's city

1. In times of crisis, God's people find their refuge in God's city. It seems the Philistines were pleased when Ahaz died in 715 BC, for the Philistines were enemies of Assyria and Ahaz was a pro-Assyrian neighbour. Assyria and Egypt were the two great powers, each wanting to conquer the world. It seems (if we may understand verse 32 this way) that a delegation came to Judah to ask them to be no longer supporters of the Assyrians but to become (like the Philistines) supporters of Egypt. First Isaiah told them not to rejoice in the death of Ahaz.

• The Philistines came to Judah to ask them to switch allegiances to Egypt

*28 This oracle came in the year King Ahaz died:
29 Do not rejoice, all you people of Philistia, that the rod that struck you is broken; from the root of that snake will spring up a viper; its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent.*

• It would be folly to seek help from Philistia

The Philistines are in no position to offer help to God's people. They need help themselves from God's anger against sin. Among God's people the 'poorest of the poor will find pasture' but God's enemies are doomed. It would be folly to seek help from Philistia.

*30 The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But your root I will destroy by famine; I will slay your remnant.
31 Wail, O gate! Howl, O city! Melt away, all you Philistines! A cloud of smoke comes from the north. There is not even one person remaining who remains on duty.*

• Judah's help will come from God

Judah's help will come from God and his plans for Zion.

32 What answer shall be given to the envoys of that nation? 'Yahweh laid the foundations of Zion, and in Zion his afflicted people will find refuge.'

If they are willing, even the ungodly may find their refuge in God's city

If they are willing, even the ungodly may find their refuge in God's city. Isaiah turns from Philistia to Moab. Moab was a nation distantly related to Israel¹. Isaiah 15:1 speaks of a recent crisis in Moab, almost certainly something to do with one of the Assyrian invasions of the area in and around Israel. Two Moabite towns, Ar and Kir, suffered badly at that time.

¹ as Genesis 19:37 shows

• The Assyrian invasion of Moab caused great sorrow and grief

1 An oracle concerning Moab. Ar in Moab is silenced, destroyed in a night! Kir in Moab is silenced, destroyed in a night.

The Assyrian invasion (whatever it was) caused great sorrow and grief.

*²People go up to the House and to Zibon,
to its high places to weep;
Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba.*

'The House', Zibon, Nebo and Medeba are all places in the territory of Moab.

*Every head is shaved
and every beard cut off.*

• Shaving was a sign of grief

Shaving was a sign of grief.

*³In the streets they wear sackcloth; on
the roofs and in the public squares
they all wail,
with tears pouring down.
⁴Heshbon and Elealeh cry out,
their voices are heard all the way to Jahaz.
Therefore the armed men of Moab cry out,
and their hearts are faint with trembling.*

• The whole of Moab is in mourning, and so is God

Heshbon, Elealeh and Jahaz are more place-names. The entire territory of Moab is in mourning. But it is not only the people who are in distress. God is in mourning also.

God cares about refugees

God cares about refugees.

*⁵My heart cries out for Moab;
her fugitives flee as far as Zoar,
as far as Eglath Shelishiyah.
For they are going up the way to Luhith,
weeping as they go.
For on the road to Horonaim
they lament their destruction.*

God cares about the environment

God cares about the environment

*⁶For the waters of Nimrim are
dried up, for the grass is withered;
the vegetation is gone and nothing
green is left.*

• A time of drought coincided with the Assyrian invasion

The Nimrim is a small river in Moab. It looks as if a time of drought in Moab coincided with a time of invasion by the Assyrians. Both men and nature were striking at Moab. God was concerned about both situations.

God cares about financial struggles

God cares about financial struggles. True, it is not at the top of his agenda. Righteousness is more important to him. But he sympathizes with those who are about to lose what they have spent many years in acquiring.

*⁷So the wealth they have acquired and stored up
they carry away over the Ravine of the Poplars.
⁸For their outcry echoes along the border of Moab;
their wailing reaches as far as Eglaim,
their lamentation as far as Beer Elim.*

God cares about saving those under his own judgement

God cares about saving those under his own judgement. The sufferings are God's expression of anger at their sins. God is punishing the nation, and will do so even more. Yet he is a God of mercy at the same time.

• He is still a God of mercy

*⁹For Dimon's waters are full of blood,
for I will bring still more upon Dimon –
a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and
upon those who remain in the land.*

• Will the Moabites ask for mercy?

The crying heart of verse 5 and the fierce wrath of verse 9 are both aspects of God's character. He hates the sinner in his sins; he loves the sinner in his sufferings. He has mixed emotions for the wicked. The question is: will the wicked Moabite ask for mercy? In Isaiah 16:1–4a, the Moabites are considering the possibility of asking for mercy. Someone says:

Mercy is available for them if they will seek it

¹Send lambs as tribute
to the ruler of the land,
from Sela, across the desert,
to the mount of the Daughter of Zion.

• Even the wicked may find mercy if they submit to God

Mercy is available for them, if they will seek it. Isaiah has told us that the nations are under the judgement of God. Babylonians and Assyrians are doomed¹. Philistines and Moabites also have a record of wickedness and hatred towards God's people. Isaiah 15 lets us know that Isaiah 13–14 is not the whole story. Even the wicked may find mercy if they submit to the ruler who reigns in Zion, the forerunner and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again, and sent out salvation from Zion.

¹ 13:1-14:27