

ISAIAH^a 15
What Price Salvation?^b
(Isaiah 16)

Isaiah 16 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

An Oracle concerning Moab

16 They have sent lambs
to the ruler of the land,
from Sela, by way of the desert,
to the mount of the daughter of Zion.^c
² Like fluttering birds,
like scattered nestlings,
so are the daughters of Moab
at the fords of the Arnon.^d
³ “Give counsel,
grant justice;
make your shade like night
at the height of noon;
hide the outcasts,
betray not the fugitive;^e
⁴ let the outcasts of Moab
sojourn among you;
be a refuge to them
from the destroyer.
When the oppressor is no more,
and destruction has ceased,
and he who tramples under foot
has vanished from the land,^f
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.”^g
⁶ We have heard of the pride of Moab,
how proud he was;
of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence—
his boasts are false.^h
⁷ Therefore let Moab wail,
let every one wail for Moab.
Mourn, utterly stricken,
for the raisin-cakesⁱ of Kir-har’eseth.^{j,k}
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^l
and strayed to the desert;
its shoots spread abroad
and passed over the sea.^m
⁹Therefore I weep with the weeping of Jazer
for the vine of Sibmah;
I drench you with my tears,
O Heshbon and Ele-a'leh;
for upon your fruit and your harvest
the battle shout has fallen.ⁿ
¹⁰And joy and gladness are taken away
from the fruitful field;
and in the vineyards no songs are sung,
no shouts are raised;
no treader treads out wine in the presses;
the vintage shout is hushed.^o
¹¹Therefore my soul moans like a lyre for Moab,
and my heart for Kir-he'res.^p
¹²And when Moab presents himself, when he wearies himself upon the high place, when he comes to his sanctuary
to pray, he will not prevail.^q
¹³This is the word which the Lord spoke concerning Moab in the past.^r ¹⁴But now the Lord says, "In three years,
like the years of a hireling, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all his great multitude, and
those who survive will be very few and feeble."^s

Revised Standard Version (RSV)

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^a The Titles of the lessons in this study are borrowed from those given by **Jhan Moskowitz** of Jews for Jesus to the chapter titles in his recorded study of Isaiah upon which much of this study is based. I owe a great debt to Jhan, my late friend and brother in the Lord, who was called Home before his time, not only for much of the work in this study, but also for giving me a whole new perspective on the Scriptures and the Jewish Messiah. Jhan's original recordings may be downloaded from the Jews for Jesus web site. <http://jewsforjesus.org/jhan-moskowitz>

We must approach our study of Isaiah from the standpoint of humility, and recognize that we study from faith and not knowing all the answers. While there are parts that seem fairly clear, there are other parts that are debated. This study will attempt to identify where the scholarship is essentially in agreement, and where there are debated passages and meanings.

There are a number of recurring images or "motifs" in Isaiah, including (1) the Holiness of God, (2) David's City, Jerusalem, Zion or God's Holy Mountain, (3) a restoration to the conditions of the Garden that will reverse the curse of Original Sin (Gn 3), (4) the "seed" or descendant of Abraham and David, and judgment upon the nations, and (5) faith in God. Isaiah's overall theme appears to be that God will judge sin, but at the end of the day, He will use His Messiah to bring reconciliation and healing and establish the Messianic Kingdom.

While there is some debate among scholars regarding the date and authorship of the Book, this study will assume that Isaiah is the primary author, and that it is relatively contemporaneous with the times it describes. Even if others had a hand in authoring some parts of the Book, or in editing, arranging and copying the Book, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit need not be limited to those men and women who actually wrote the text of Scripture. It can extend also to those who may have edited or

copied the original text, those who compiled it, and those who decided which texts were to be included within the Scriptural Canon. There is good reason to believe that Isaiah may be a sort of “greatest hits”, with various writings of Isaiah throughout his ministry arranged in the final form to make a point about Judah, Jerusalem, the coming Jewish Messiah and the plan of salvation. It is also likely that much of Isaiah was first spoken, or recited, in the form of sermons or prophetic statements, and then written down and collected into the form we have today.

We cannot know whether we have, in the compiled book, the complete original sermons or poems. Nor do we know the context in which they were preached or recited, though in some cases we can make a good guess about that context. It is possible, even likely, that at least some of them were created in a specific context of time and place, endowing them with a specific contemporary meaning, but that when recombined into the final product we have today, the individual pieces take on a new meaning in this new context. Thus we may find multiple meanings for the same passage, including, e.g. a meaning in the original context in which it was spoken (if that can be determined), a meaning in the context of the short term history of the Judah, Assyria and Babylon, and a Messianic or eschatological meaning.

Much of the Book is in the form of Hebrew poetry. While the translation into English causes a loss of many of the poetic elements, some of those that remain will be identified as we go along. One thing that is apparent is that poetry, in Hebrew and English, allows the use of images which can paint a powerful picture of what is going on without being a literal description. Isaiah will make liberal use of these images. When God speaks in verse, it helps to elevate the dignity of what He says. Poetry also casts a much larger shadow than prose. If an historical event is described in prose, it would normally be just a description of that event. But by putting it in verse that single historical event can have a much bigger meaning in a larger context. In addition, verse, even unaccompanied by music, is easier to remember, and recite, than is prose. These two aspects of poetry may help explain why many of the Prophets, including Isaiah, wrote in verse. It is not clear that Isaiah’s verse was ever set to music, though music was an aspect of at least some of the Prophets, 1Sm 10:5; 2Ki 3:15. If any of Isaiah’s verse were set to music, none of the actual music has survived.

Isaiah himself does not appear in the Book until Chapter 6 when the beginning of his ministry is described. In verse 1:1 he tells us that his ministry began in the year King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.; 2Ki 15:1-7, 2Ch 26:1-23) died and continued through the time of Kings Jotham (742-735 B.C.; 2Ki 15:32-38, 2Ch 27:1-9), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.; 2Ki 16:1-17:41, 2Ch 28:1-27) and Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.; 2Ki 18:1-20:21, 2Ch 29:1-32:33). In 721 B.C., the Assyrian army captured the Israelite capital at Samaria and carried away the citizens of the northern kingdom into captivity. The virtual destruction of Israel left the southern kingdom, Judah, to fend for itself among warring Near Eastern kingdoms. At the time of Samaria’s fall, there existed two kings in Judah — Ahaz and his son Hezekiah — who ruled as co-regents. After the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the kings of Judah tried to extend their influence and protection to those inhabitants who had not been exiled. They also sought to extend their authority northward into areas previously controlled by the Kingdom of Israel. The latter part of the reign of Ahaz, and most of that of Hezekiah were periods of stability during which Judah was able to consolidate both politically and economically. Although Judah was a vassal of Assyria during this time and paid an annual tribute to the powerful empire, it was the most important state between Assyria and Egypt. In 715 B.C., following the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah became the sole regent of Judah and initiated widespread religious reforms, including the breaking of religious idols. During 2016 archaeological evidence of these reforms was discovered in Israel. <http://www.foxnews.com/science/2016/09/28/archaeologists-unearth-ancient-gate-shrine-in-israel.html>. Hezekiah built Hezekiah’s tunnel, still in existence today, to insure that water was available during a siege, <http://www.biblicalarchaeologytruth.com/hezekiahs-tunnel.html>. He re-captured Philistine-occupied lands in the Negev desert, formed alliances with Ashkelon and Egypt, and made a stand against Assyria by refusing to pay tribute. In response, Sennacherib attacked Judah, laying siege to Jerusalem in 701 B.C. God destroyed Sennacherib’s army outside Jerusalem and the siege was broken. The records of royal Assyria state that while Sennacherib captured many cities in Judah, Jerusalem was only besieged, not captured, thus agreeing with the Biblical account. Archaeologists have recently uncovered the ruins of Sennacherib’s palace in Nineveh under the ruins of Jonah’s Tomb, <http://www.foxnews.com/science/2017/03/06/biblical-kings-palace-uncovered-beneath-shrine-destroyed-by-isis.html>. Archaeologists have also discovered a royal seal of Hezekiah picturing a winged sun which may refer to the events of Is 38:8 in which the sun appeared to move backward in the sky, <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/jerusalem/king-hezekiah-in-the-bible-royal-seal-of-hezekiah-comes-to-light/>. After being saved from the Assyrians, Judah survived until c. 600 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the City and carried the leaders into exile. The Exiles were first allowed to return to Jerusalem in 539 B.C. after Babylon fell to the Persians.

The entire Book of Isaiah is identified in 1:1 as a “vision” meaning, in a broad sense, divine revelation, 2Ch 32:32, Ob 1, Nah 1:1, Am 1:1, Mi 1:1, Hab 1:1. The visions in Isaiah are not arranged chronologically. In order to understand Isaiah, we always need to ask how the text relates to the rest of the text of the section in which it appears, how the sections of the Book are connected, and why they are arranged the way they are. The central theme of Chapters 1-39 is the “King.” Chapters 40-55 have to do with the “Suffering Servant.” And Chapters 56-66 have to do with a restored Jerusalem, with the key theme in those chapters being the “Conqueror.”

The initial section on the “King” may also be divided into separate sections. Chapters 1-5 describe the overall background of a sinful time in Judah of greed, hypocrisy, and judgment. Even in these chapters, there were hints of a restoration. Isaiah 6 is Isaiah’s call. Chapters 7-12 (the Book of Emmanuel) are all about the birth of a son, explicitly in 7-9 and 11 and implicitly in 6 and 10, who will be Emmanuel. Chapter 12 is a hymn of thanksgiving for what God has done, and has promised to do. The other sub-sections are Chapters 13-23 and 24-37.

The **first 5 chapters** could have taken place during any, or all, of the time of Isaiah's ministry and are perhaps best understood as setting the scene, or painting a picture, of the spiritual condition of Judah during Isaiah's ministry. In **Chapter 6**, Isaiah is given his ministry by God, a ministry to preach to a people who will not hear, and who will continue to be estranged from God and His law, that is, an unsuccessful ministry. Indeed, in some way, the failure to respond to Isaiah's preaching will be used to help convict the people of Judah, Rm 10:14-21. Yet even here, there is a hope of redemption for the remnant. The context for **Chapters 7 and 8** are a rebellion by Syria and Israel against their overlord Assyria. Syria and Israel wish to attack Judah, remove Ahaz of the line of David, and replace him with a King who will join them in an alliance against Assyria. Isaiah warns Ahaz against doing so, but Ahaz chooses to protect himself against Syria and Israel by making an alliance with Assyria thus becoming a vassal of Assyria. Thereafter except for brief periods, Judah will have lost its existence as an independent state. In Chapter 7, Emmanuel is referred to, but remains a mystery. We learn a little more about in in **Chapter 8**, and in **Chapters 9** and 11 we get a much fuller picture. **Chapter 11** ends with images from the Exodus which is the touchstone of the salvation history in the Hebrew Scriptures. By using that image, Isaiah calls up the story of God as redeemer of Israel, and all of its implication for salvation history.

Chapter 12 is a Psalm of thanksgiving for God's help and rescue and the conclusion of, or coda for, the Book of Emmanuel, which was introduced in Chapter 6. In some way, not clearly defined because this is poetry, the song expresses that the wrath of God is turned away and the relationship with God restored in joy and thanksgiving. This Psalm should be compared to Chapter 6, in which Isaiah himself confesses his sin to God (a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips), and God brings forgiveness for Isaiah through the touch of a hot coal to his lips. Now, in Chapter 12, for the remnant, something of the same sort has happened, the sin of the remnant has been forgiven so that the relationship with God can be restored. Similar to the Passover itself, where God saw the blood on the doorposts and stayed His hand, God will recognize His people and leave a remnant. Although the details are not clear, we know from the intervening chapters that this child, Emmanuel, will be instrumental in this restoration.

Chapter 13 begins a new subsection of the "King" section of the Book which will run through Chapter 24. The theme of this section is the goyim, or the Nations, including Judah, and contains prophecies about various nations. In this subsection judgment upon individual nations are linked with scenes of universal and cosmic Doom and assurances of better times for God's people. The link with 8th Century Judah is not broken altogether, but the historical horizon is extended far into the future. The first nation, in **Chapters 13 and 14**, is Babylon. Isaiah in Chapter 13 prophesies the conquest and eventual destruction and abandonment of Babylon, an event, over a century in the future, in 539 BC, with several specific details about that event including that the destruction will be at the hands of the Medes. During Isaiah's time, the Medes were allied with Babylon against Assyria. The Chapter consists of two poems, vs. 2-16, which do not mention Babylon, and vs. 17-22 which makes specific reference to conquest by the Medes. There is debate about whether the first poem is about Babylon specifically, or has a more general application. Both poems share, however, the fact that they describe the coming Day of the Lord. The end of Chapter 14 (vs. 24-32) and **Chapter 15** are, on their face, prophecies against Assyria, Philistia and Moab, ancient neighbors and adversaries of Israel. They continue Isaiah's underlying theme in this section of the preservation of the House of David even as disaster happens all around. But they are also portents of the final Day of the Lord to come when God judges the entire Earth.

Jhan reminds us that the meaning of most stories is found in its end. We know the end of the story is Jesus, which allows us to interpret Isaiah in light of that ending. The central theme of Isaiah, and indeed all of Scripture, is that, after the Fall, God still desired to live with mankind, but could not do so because of Sin. Scripture discloses that Jesus the Messiah is that plan by which God will bring us back from corruption and sin, and His anger will turn to comfort.

^b Chapters 13 through 24 are about the destruction of all the nations around Judah. Isaiah used these stories of judgment against these nations as illustrations of what God will do in the Eschaton. **Chapter 16** is the second half of the prophecy against Moab which began in Chapter 15. In Chapter 16, the exiles of Moab will seek shelter in Judah but be denied because of their arrogance, in this case the refusal to reject Moab's own gods and submit to the God of Abraham. As a result of that refusal, they are destroyed.

^c (1) 2Ki 3:4; Ez 7:17; 2Ki 14:7; Is 2:1-5, 42:11, 10:32. **Sela** is generally thought to be Petra, the capital of Edom, located in present day Jordan, Jdg 1:36. It can accessed only through a narrow canyon, and so is easy to defend. These verses are written as if Isaiah were eavesdropping on the leaders of Moab. We don't know if this actually happened, or whether it is how the prophet imagined it had happened, or it is entirely imagined since there is nothing in the historical record of this embassy having actually happened. Prior to its fall to Assyria, Israel was the protector of Moab. Without Israel to protect them, the Moabite refugees sent an emissary to Jerusalem seeking asylum which included a symbolic "tribute" in the form of a lamb. The Septuagint reads, "I will send as it were reptiles on the land: is [not] the mount of the daughter of Sion a desolate rock?"

^d (2) Pr 27:8; Jr 48:20, 48:46; Nu 21:13-14, 28:12-14; Jdg 11:18. The Fords of Arnon, the Wadi el-Mujib, represented the border of Moab. The Septuagint reads, "For thou shalt be as a young bird taken away from a bird that has flown: [even] thou shalt be [so], daughter of Moab: and then do thou, O Arnon . . ."

^e (3) Is 25:4, 32:2; 1Ki 18:4. The Septuagint reads, ". . . take farther counsel, and continually make thou a shelter from grief: they flee in darkness at mid-day; they are amazed; be not thou led captive." Verses 3-4a show Moab asking Judah to make a decision

to accept them and give them shelter (shade at high noon in the desert), but whatever you do, don't tell the Assyrians where they are. This may or may not be the actual petition, but rather advice Isaiah is giving them.

^f (4) Is 9:4, 14:4, 49:26, 51:13, 54:14; 1Sm 22:3. The historical record does not clearly reveal who the destroyer of Moab was. Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria invaded Moab in 732 B.C., three years after the death of King Ahaz, Is 14:28. Sennacherib invaded Moab in 701 B.C., the same year that he besieged Jerusalem. It is also likely that Babylon conquered the region of Moab at or around the same time that Jerusalem was captured and its people taken into exile, c. 600 B.C. The Septuagint reads, "The fugitives of Moab shall sojourn with thee; they shall be to you a shelter from the face of the pursuer: for thine alliance has been taken away, and the oppressing ruler has perished from off the earth."

^g (5) Is 9:6-7, 32:1-2, 55:4; Dn 7:14, 7:27; Mi 4:7; Lk 1:32-33; Is 9:7. As part of their petition the fugitives of Moab express submission to, and confidence in, the House of David in many ways similar to the ways in which Isaiah writes of them. In some sense this verse looks forward to the time of the Messiah. The King James Version of the first five verses reads, "Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion. ²For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon. ³Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray [i.e. betray] not him that wandereth. ⁴Let mine outcasts dwell with thee, Moab; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler: for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. ⁵And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness." In the Revised Standard Version used above, verse 5 begins "then" indicating that the Thrown of David would be established *after* the oppressor is removed. The KJV and other older translations lack that word implying that the establishment of the Thrown of David will happen as part of the destruction of the oppressor. Similarly, the Septuagint reads, "And a throne shall be established with mercy; and one shall sit upon it with truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and earnestly seeking judgements, and hasting righteousness." Ostensibly this poem is about seeking shelter from Assyria with the House of David. But looking at this poem more eschatologically, in light of the Judgement to come, it may mean that in the coming judgment there will be shelter in the House of David. The future for all of us is bleak unless we turn to the House of David for shelter.

^h (6) Jr 48:29-30, 48:49; Am 2:1; Ob 3-4; Zep 2:8-10; Jdg 3:14; 2Ki 13:20; 2Ch 20:1. Notwithstanding the Scriptural mandate to treat foreigners well (Dt 10:19, 14:29, 26:10-11, 24:19-21, 26:12-13; Lv 19:34, 19:10, 23:22; Jb 31:32, Mt 25:35), Moab's request for asylum was denied by Judah, or Moab never asked for asylum, because of Moab's pride. Moab was willing to pay tribute to Judah to obtain shelter. But they were unwilling to abandoned their own gods, or submit to the God of Abraham and the House of David. Ultimately, pride is the root of the rebellion against God, Gn 3:5. Judgement is coming and there is shelter in the House of David, but pride may prevent us from claiming that salvation. We can try to buy off trouble, but in the end the only real shelter is trust in God. The Septuagint reads, "We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud. I have cut off his pride: thy prophecy shall not be thus, [no] not thus."

ⁱ **Raisin cakes** are used for offerings and festivals, 2Sm 6:19; Song 2:5; Hos 3:1; Jr 7:18, 44:19; Is 16:12. An older NIV translation of this verse reads, "Therefore the Moabites wail, they wail together for Moab. Lament and grieve for the men of Kir Hareseth" with a note indicating that "raisin cakes" is a wordplay. The Septuagint reads, "Moab shall howl; for all shall howl in the land of Moab: but thou shalt care for them that dwell in Seth, and thou shalt not be ashamed." The Hebrew is difficult here because the same root word in Hebrew can mean either a food item or man. The Septuagint equivalents of the word include both senses, in this case referring to men. Many, more recent, translations, including the NIV, use "raisin cakes" though there is no clear reason why this meaning should be substituted for the one adopted in the Septuagint, Vulgate and King James Bibles. While verse 8 does refer to grapes, a more natural translation would have the people of Moab grieving for their lost soldiers rather than a food item.

^j **Kir-har'eseth** is the same place as **Kerak**. Is 15:1; 2Ki 3:25.

^k (7) Is 15:1-3; 2Sm 6:19; 1Ch 16:3; 2Ki 3:25; Jr 48:29-33. The consequence of being unwilling to trust in Zion is wailing and destruction.

^l **Jazer** is located beyond the northern border of Moab. Nu 21:32; Is 13:25; Nu 21:24 LXX.

^m (8) Is 15:4; Nu 32:38; Jr 48:32. Heshbon and the other places mentioned in verses 8 and 9 are grouped in the northern part of Moab, at the time a rich agricultural and wine growing region. The vines of Moab will be destroyed by the leaders of the nations, perhaps the Assyrians, indicating the end of prosperity and agriculture. The Hebrew of verse 8a also allows for the translation that the vine will destroy the nations by making them drunk. But the vine appears to be something more than simply an agricultural product in that it "reache[s] to Jazer and stray[s] to the desert," and "its shoots spread abroad and [pass] over the sea" The Septuagint reads, "The plains of Esebon shall mourn, the vine of Sebama: swallowing up the nations, trample ye her vines, even to Jazer: ye shall not come together; wander ye in the desert: they that were sent are deserted, for they have gone over to the

sea.” Most commentators view this as a reference to the cultivation of the particular variety of vine outside of Moab, but that explanation is not entirely satisfactory.

ⁿ (9) Jr 48:32; Is 15:3-5; Jr 40:10-12. Many commentators, particularly Jewish commentators, interpret this verse as Isaiah weeping over the destruction of Moab, but this would not fit with verses 10-11 in which it God is acting to cause the destruction. The Septuagint reads, “Therefore will I weep as with the weeping of Jazer for the vine of Sebama; Esebon and Eleale have cast down thy trees; for I will trample on thy harvest and on thy vintages, and all [thy plants] shall fall.” One can picture God himself weeping for the Lost, for those who refuse to seek Him for shelter (1Tm 2:3-4).

^o (10) Is 24:7-8; Jr 48:33, 48:5; Is 9:3; Jdg 9:27; Is 63:3; Jr 25:30; Am 5:11-17; Jb 24:11; Am 9:13; Is 5:2. “[T]he cheering has ceased” is literally “the shout has fallen.” The NIV reads, “Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting.” The Septuagint reads, “And gladness and rejoicing shall be taken away from the vineyards; and they shall not at all tread wine into the vats; for [the vintage] has ceased.” The Hebrew for “shout” or in some translations “military shout” (הָדָד, *hedad*) is the same word that is used for the shouting and rejoicing that follows a successful harvest.

^p (11) Is 15:5, 63:15; Jr 48:36; Hos 11:8; Ph 2:1. The Septuagint reads, “Therefore my belly shall sound as a harp for Moab, and thou hast repaired my inward parts as a wall.”

^q (12) Nu 22:39-41; Jr 48:35; 1Ki 18:29; Is 15:2; Nu 23:14, 23:28. Moab is going to the wrong place because all their prayers to their gods will avail nothing because an idol can do nothing. Is 44:9-12; Jr 10:2-5. Instead they should trust in Zion and the God of Abraham.

^r (13) Am 2:1-3.

^s (14) Jb 7:1, 14:6; Is 21:16-17, 25:10, 10:22; Jr 48:42. There were strict rules governing how a contract worker’s term was to be calculated, emphasizing that this time deadline will be strictly computed. Others note that a hired man would hope that work time would pass more quickly, indicating a shorter time. The Septuagint reads, “And now I say, in three years, of the years of an hireling, the glory of Moab shall be dishonoured [with] all his great wealth; and he shall be left few in number, and not honoured.”