

Jeremiah's Prophecy Against Moab

Jeremiah 48

Jeremiah 48:1-10 – *“Against Moab. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:*

“Woe to Nebo! For it is plundered; Kirjathaim is shamed and taken; the high stronghold is shamed and dismayed—² No more praise of Moab. In Heshbon they have devised evil against her. ‘Come, and let us cut her off as a nation.’ You also shall be cut down, O Madmen! The sword shall pursue you.³ A voice of crying shall be from Horonaim: ‘Plundering and great destruction!’⁴ “Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard;⁵ for in the Ascent of Luhith they ascend with continual weeping; for in the descent of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction.

⁶ “Flee, save your lives! And be like the juniper in the wilderness,⁷ for because you have trusted in your works and your treasures, you also shall be taken. And Chemosh shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together.

⁸ And the plunderer shall come against every city. No one shall escape. The valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the Lord has spoken.

⁹ “Give wings to Moab, that she may flee and get away; for her cities shall be desolate, without any to dwell in them.

*¹⁰ Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully,
And cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood.”*

Background Notes

Jeremiah 46 began the last major division of Jeremiah, in which Jeremiah recorded his prophecies of judgment against the foreign nations surrounding Israel: the prophecy against Egypt in chapter 46, and the prophecy against the Philistines in chapter 47.

Chapter 48 contains Jeremiah's prophecy against the nation of Moab, which was a part of the modern nation of Jordan. Moab had given Israel problems many times in the past. During Israel's travels in the wilderness, Moab seduced them to take part in an immoral idolatrous feast (Numbers 25). During the time of the Judges, Moab was one of the nations that suppressed Israel. Remember King Eglon of Moab? Eglon was killed by valiant Ehud, who became a judge in Israel (Judges 3).

Moab was subdued during the time that Israel was united under the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon, but during the divided kingdom Moab once again became a problem. A significant archaeological find, known as the “Moabite Stone,” which has been dated to about 840 BC, described the tempestuous relationship between Moab and the northern kingdom of Israel. It mentioned King Omri and his sons (that would include King Ahab of Israel). The Moabite Stone also mentioned a number of the cities of Moab that were included in Jeremiah 48. It also mentioned Chemosh, the chief Moabite deity (v7). The Moabite Stone can be seen in the British Museum.

This prophecy of judgment by Jeremiah was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies defeated Moab in 581 BC. During King Jehoiakim's reign, bands of Moabites attacked Judah (2 Kings 24:2), and that is certainly part of the background for this prophecy against Moab. Jeremiah would have been well aware of those border attacks. However, a very interesting aspect of this prophecy is that Moab was not denounced for its military attacks on Judah - but rather for its complacency and pride!

Doctrinal Points

1. God must judge the sin of complacency.

Moab was likened to a spoiled child who had never had to face the hardships of the real world (v11). As a result, Moab was complacent and content in her idolatrous worship of Chemosh. She was like wine that had not been properly processed, and sat undisturbed. But the days will come when she would be thrown over and spilled out as wine no longer fit to drink: *"Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I shall send him wine-workers who will tip him over and empty his vessels and break the bottles."*

An interesting fact about verse 11 is that part of this verse in Hebrew was found stamped on the handle of a wine jug. Archaeologists dated the jug to the 1st or 2nd century AD. It is known as the "Jeremiah Seal." Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Jeremiah Seal was one of the earliest extant texts of Hebrew Scripture.

Moab's false worship of Chemosh would be shown to be as futile as Israel's false worship of the golden calf shrine in Bethel. Verse 13: *"Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence."* As Bethel and Israel were destroyed and defeated by the Assyrians, so Moab would be defeated by the Babylonians. Verses 14-17: *"How can you say, 'We are mighty and strong men for the war'? ¹⁵ Moab is plundered and gone up from her cities; her chosen young men have gone down to the slaughter," says the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts. ¹⁶ The calamity of Moab is near at hand, and his affliction comes quickly. ¹⁷ Bemoan him, all you who are around him. And all you who know his name, say, 'How the strong staff is broken, the beautiful rod!'"*

God hates the sin of complacency - smug self-satisfaction. Even Christians can commit the sin of complacency. In Revelation, the Laodicean church was rebuked for being apathetic, lukewarm, smug and **complacent**. **God must judge the sin of complacency.**

2. God must judge the sin of pride.

Jeremiah 48:18-20 - *"O daughter inhabiting Dibon, come down from your glory and sit in thirst; for the plunderer of Moab has come against you. He has destroyed your strongholds. ¹⁹ O inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way and watch. Ask*

him who flees and her who escapes; say, 'What has happened?' ²⁰ Moab is shamed, for he is broken down. Wail and cry! Tell it in Arnon, that Moab is plundered.

In these verses we see that proud Moab would be defeated, brought down from her self-glory, and made ashamed. The word of Moab's destruction would go out through the refugees trying to escape past the Arnon River in the north. Eleven Moabite cities that would be destroyed were mentioned (v21-24). Moab would lose her strength: *"The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken," says the Lord*" (v25). And verse 34 named more towns of Moab that would mourn the nation's destruction.

Why would Moab lose her strength? Verse 26 gave the answer: *"...because he exalted himself against the Lord."* God must judge the sin of pride. In smug complacency and pride, Moab mocked the northern kingdom of Israel when Assyria conquered it. Now Moab would be conquered, and her people would have to escape to the hills and caves (v27-28). The answer as to why Moab would be judged was repeated in verse 29: *"We have heard the pride of Moab. (He is exceedingly proud). Of his loftiness and arrogance and pride, and of the haughtiness of his heart."*

But God does not delight in judgment. God was saddened that Moab's success and her joy and gladness would come to an end. *"Therefore I will wail for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab. I will mourn for the men of Kir Heres. ³² O vine of Sibmah! I will weep for you with the weeping of Jazer. Your plants have gone over the sea. They reach to the sea of Jazer. The plunderer has fallen on your summer fruit and your vintage. ³³ Joy and gladness are taken from the plentiful field and from the land of Moab. I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses. No one will tread with joyous shouting—not joyous shouting!"* (v31-33).

Verse 35 stated another reason why God would destroy proud Moab – her idolatry: *"Moreover," says the Lord, "I will cause to cease in Moab the one who offers sacrifices in the high places, and burns incense to his gods"* (v35).

In verses 36-39, the Lord continued to mourn the necessary destruction of Moab. Flutes were used in funeral dirges. Shaving the head and cutting the body were signs of grief.

In verses 40-41, Nebuchadnezzar was likened to a swift eagle coming down upon its prey. Moab and the mighty men of Moab would be like women in labor. *"For thus says the Lord: "Behold, one shall fly like an eagle, and spread his wings over Moab. ⁴¹ Keriath is taken, and the strongholds are surprised. The mighty men's hearts in Moab on that day shall be like the heart of a woman in birth pangs."*

The reason for Moab's destruction was given once again in verse 42: *"Moab shall be destroyed as a people, because he exalted himself against the Lord."* God must judge the sin of pride.

Escape from the battle would be difficult. Verses 43-44: *"Fear and the pit and the snare shall be upon you, O inhabitant of Moab," says the Lord. ⁴⁴ "He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit, and he who gets out of the pit shall be caught in*

the snare. For upon Moab, upon it I will bring the year of their punishment,” says the Lord.” The once proud and boisterous revelers of Moab would experience woe, as their children would be taken into captivity. Many people would perish - and their god Chemosh would not be able to save them (v45-46).

In verse 47 there was some good news: *“Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days,” says the Lord. Thus far is the judgment of Moab.* We believe that this prophecy will be fulfilled in the future, when the Lord returns and establishes His worldwide earthly kingdom. There will be a spiritual restoration of the nation of Egypt (Jeremiah 46), and there will be a spiritual restoration of this area of modern Jordan. The area may even be called Moab once again.

In this chapter we’ve seen that God hates the sin of pride and must judge the sin of pride. James 4:6 says, *“God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* **God must judge the sin of pride.**

Practical Application

Don’t ignore context for the sake of practical application.

Verse 10: *“Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully [or, who does not do the work of the Lord diligently], and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood.”*

This practical application is a lesson in hermeneutics, or proper biblical interpretation – specifically in the principle of **remembering the context** of a verse of Scripture. I must admit that I’ve actually used this verse as an exhortation to be diligent in Christian service in a church or in a ministry. That *sounds* good - but that application actually used the verse **way out of the context** of this chapter - and so it was **bad hermeneutics!**

The context here, as we’ve seen, was the judgment of Moab. The work of the Lord here was the cutting down of Moab because of her sins of complacency and pride. So the **best applications** made from this verse would have to do with judgment or discipline - because **those applications would be in line with the context**.

For example, an appropriate application of this verse would be the responsibility of church leaders to do the work of the Lord diligently by properly judging, disciplining and excommunicating an unrepentant person who persists in heresy or immorality. Another good application would be the responsibility of parents to not neglect the work of the Lord of disciplining their proud and rebellious teenager.

But being diligent to serve the Lord and diligently evangelize the world (which we should do!) would not be the **best** way to apply this particular Scripture.

So remember, **don’t ignore context for the sake of a good practical application!**