

Jeremiah 48:1-47 “Politics and the Kingdom of God II: The Pride of Moab” July 17, 2016

The “jeremiad” is a political sermon in which an author bitterly laments the state of society, with a warning against the imminent downfall of society due to its moral degradation.

It is (appropriately) named after the prophet Jeremiah.

Who are the Moabites?

Moab was one of the sons of Lot, Abraham’s nephew.
After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
Lot and his daughters fled into the hills.
Isolated and alone, Lot’s daughters got their father drunk
and slept with him – both getting pregnant.
From one came the Ammonites – from the other the Moabites.
#6 in your outline will include echoes of the story of Lot (“make him drunk.”)

Over the next several hundred years, while the Israelites were in Egypt, the Ammonites and Moabites became the dominant powers in the area where Sodom and Gomorrah had been (the east side of the Dead Sea).

When Israel came out of Egypt they had to go around the Dead Sea – through the land of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites.

In Numbers 21-25, a Moabite king (Balak) was the one who summoned Balaam in an attempt to curse Israel.
Balaam *refused* to curse Israel – but blessed Israel instead –
and yet Balaam still *advised* Balak how to curse Israel! (Numbers 31)
Balaam was the one who suggested that Balak send the women out to sleep with Israelite men and convince them to worship Moabite gods.

In Deuteronomy 2, God tells Israel not to attack the Moabites
“because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession.” (2:9)

This is one of the passages that establishes the biblical teaching that God has given to each nation its own territorial integrity.

How do you know the proper boundaries for each nation?

The simple answer is: whatever they *are right now* – that's what God has given them.

God is not saying that every nation obtained those boundaries justly!
(and if there is a boundary dispute,

you can't just say “We're taking it by force – therefore God gave it to us!”)

But, as Paul will say in Romans 13 –

“the authorities that exist have been instituted by God.” (Romans 13:1)

But God clearly tells Israel that *he* has given boundaries to every nation.

So God tells Israel not to invade the Moabites –

but he also tells Israel that no Moabite or Ammonite may enter the assembly of the Lord
“even to the tenth generation,
none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever.” (Dt 23:3)

Why?

“because they did not meet you with bread and water on the way,
when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam...
You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.” (23:6)

The Moabites remain largely hostile to Israel throughout the centuries.

During the times of the Judges, Eglon, King of Moab, ruled Israel for 18 years,
before Ehud arose and rescued Israel from his hand (Judges 3).

That’s what makes it so curious that Elimelech and Naomi would go to *Moab*
during a famine (in the days of the Judges).

The idea that their sons would marry Moabite women – Orpah and Ruth –
is deeply disturbing,
because Moabite women were the ones who corrupted Israelite men
in the days of Moses and Balaam.

And yet, the story of Ruth reminds us that God’s purpose is the redemption of all nations.
Even the Moabites!

When Ruth’s descendant, David, is fleeing from King Saul,
he will ask the King of Moab to protect his family (1 Samuel 22).
And for some unknown reason, David pursues vengeance against Moab in 2 Sam 8.

From the time of David until the days of Ahab,
the Moabites would be under the rule of Israel.

Solomon will get in trouble for building a high place for Chemosh –
in order to please his Moabite wife (1 Kings 11).

But in 2 Kings 1 and 3 we hear about Moabite rebellions in the days of Ahab,
and after those days, the Moabites continue to reappear
as enemies of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah 15-16 contain Isaiah’s oracles against Moab – in the time of Hezekiah.
Ezekiel 25 and Amos 2 also include oracles against Moab.

Zephaniah 2:9-11 says that Moab will become like Sodom and Gomorrah:

⁹ *Therefore, as I live,” declares the LORD of hosts,
the God of Israel,*

*“Moab shall become like Sodom,
and the Ammonites like Gomorrah,
a land possessed by nettles and salt pits,
and a waste forever.
The remnant of my people shall plunder them,
and the survivors of my nation shall possess them.”*
¹⁰ *This shall be their lot in return for their pride,
because they taunted and boasted
against the people of the LORD of hosts.*
¹¹ *The LORD will be awesome against them;
for he will famish all the gods of the earth,
and to him shall bow down,
each in its place,
all the lands of the nations.*

Moab had its roots in the ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And Moab will end like them.

Why?

“Because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts.”

Their pride and their arrogance will result in their destruction.

While in one sense, this is a particular story with a particular judgment,
the pattern is one that applies to all nations.

The rulers of the nations need to learn humility!
With power come all the temptations of pride.

And *that* is the central point of Jeremiah 48.

Some scholars say that Jeremiah 48 is “disordered” (Brueggemann, 442).

Whenever I read a scholar saying “this passage is a jumble that makes no sense,”
I immediately look for a chiasm!

It didn’t take long to see it – because it is unmistakable!

The outside frame – the #1s in the outline – emphasize both the destruction of Moab,
and the exile – the captivity of the Moabites *and their god*, Chemosh.

The 2s use the language of “wings” – in the first case, wings to fly away,
in the second case (v40-42) wings against Moab – as one comes to destroy.

The 3s use the language of shame – and the image of a broken vessel –
in the first case God says that he *will* break the jars of Moab,
as Moab is compared to Israel (the northern kingdom)

and their shame over Bethel (the shrine to the golden calf);
in the second case Moab has become the broken vessel – and is ashamed.

The 4s focus on the theme of lament,
as verses 14-20 call for a lament over Moab –
and then, shockingly, in verse 36, the LORD himself moans over Moab.

The 5s describe a list of cities that come under judgment.

The 6s use the theme of drinking –
Moab shall be made like Israel – a drunk who is mocked and ridiculed –
why “because he magnified himself against the LORD.”
And in the second case, the wine is cut off –
gladness and joy have been taken away.

And at the heart of chapter 48 is the reason for all of this (v29-30):
“We have heard of the pride of Moab – he is very proud –
of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance,
and the haughtiness of his heart.
I know his insolence, declares the LORD;
his boasts are false;
his deeds are false.”

The focus of points 1-6 is that judgment is coming – concluding in point 6,
“because he magnified himself against the LORD” –
and then shifting into the first plural in verse 29 for the centerpiece –
the focus on the pride of Moab.

Then the focus shifts in points 6-1 – the back side of the chiasm.
Now judgment has come, and the coming judgment is spoken of as already present.

But this is a *very well crafted chiasm!*
Because not only do you have this symmetry of language and purpose,
but you also have a repeated phrase at the end of point 6 (on the way up)
and at the end of point 2 (on the way down) –
“because he magnified himself against the LORD.”

Just before reaching the center of the chiasm we were told that this is happening to Moab
because Moab exalted himself against the LORD.
And then just before concluding the oracle, the same phrase comes back.

The nation that magnifies itself against the LORD –
the nation that tries to make itself look big – and tries to make God look small –
will be humiliated – put to shame before their enemies.

1. “Moab Is Destroyed” – The Exile of Chemosh and His People (v1-8)

2. “Give Wings to Moab” – Her Cities Shall Become a Desolation (v9-10)
 3. “Moab Shall Be Ashamed of Chemosh” – the Broken Vessels of Moab (v11-13)
 4. “Grieve for Him” – the LORD Calls for Lamentation Over Moab (v14-20)
 5. Judgment Upon the Cities (v21-25)
 6. “Make Him Drunk” – Because He Magnified Himself against the LORD (v26-27)
 7. The Reason for God’s Judgment: The Pride of Moab (v28-30)
 - 6’. “I Have Made the Wine Cease” – Gladness and Joy Are Taken Away (v31-33)
 - 5’. Judgment Upon the Cities (v34)
 - 4’. “My Heart Mourns for Moab” – the LORD Laments Over Moab (v35-36)
 - 3’. Moab Put to Shame – God Breaks Moab Like a Useless Vessel (v37-39)
 - 2’. “Wings Against Moab” – Because He Magnified Himself against the LORD (v40-42)
 - 1’. Moab Destroyed – the Captivity of Chemosh and His People (v43-46)
- P.S., “I Will Restore the Fortunes of Moab” (v47)

1. “Moab Is Destroyed” – The Exile of Chemosh and His People (v1-8)

48 Concerning Moab.

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:

“Woe to Nebo, for it is laid waste!

*Kiriathaim is put to shame, it is taken;
the fortress is put to shame and broken down;*

² the renown of Moab is no more.

In Heshbon they planned disaster against her:

‘Come, let us cut her off from being a nation!’

*You also, O Madmen, shall be brought to silence;
the sword shall pursue you.*

Concerning Moab.

What does the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel say about Moab?

“Woe to Nebo.”

Woe to the mountain where Moses stood – looking into the Promised Land.

Numbers 21 had said that fire came out from Heshbon –

and now in verse 45, Jeremiah takes over that image in his prophecy.

Much of the language of Jeremiah 48 is modeled on Isaiah’s oracles against Moab in Isaiah 15-16.

There are also echoes of Numbers 21:29 –

“Woe to you, O Moab! You are undone, O people of Chemosh!

He has made his sons fugitives, and his daughters captives...”

Of course, in those days it was Sihon of the Amorites
who had defeated Moab!

Jeremiah doesn’t explain *who* bring this judgment or *when* it will happen.

Who or when is not the point.

The point is that nations that exalt themselves against the LORD and against his people will be brought to desolation and destruction.

³ *“A voice! A cry from Horonaim,
‘Desolation and great destruction!’*

⁴ *Moab is destroyed;
her little ones have made a cry.*

⁵ *For at the ascent of Luhith
they go up weeping;^[a]
for at the descent of Horonaim
they have heard the distressed cry^[b] of destruction.*

⁶ *Flee! Save yourselves!
You will be like a juniper in the desert!*

⁷ *For, because you trusted in your works and your treasures,
you also shall be taken;
and Chemosh shall go into exile
with his priests and his officials.*

⁸ *The destroyer shall come upon every city,
and no city shall escape;
the valley shall perish,
and the plain shall be destroyed,
as the LORD has spoken.*

“Because you trusted in your works and your treasures, you also shall be taken.”

Wealth and power cannot save a nation.

We saw that last time!

Egypt thought that they would never be cast down.

But the pride of nations will be their downfall!

2. “Give Wings to Moab” – Her Cities Shall Become a Desolation (v9-10)

And the devastation is called “the work of the LORD.” (v10)

⁹ *“Give wings to Moab,
for she would fly away;
her cities shall become a desolation,
with no inhabitant in them.*

¹⁰ *“Cursed is he who does the work of the LORD with slackness, and cursed is he who keeps back
his sword from bloodshed.*

This can be a hard saying.

But think about how Paul says it in Romans 13:

The ruler “is God’s servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.

For he is the servant of God,
an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." (v4)

This is the same sort of language that Jeremiah had used of Nebuchadnezzar –
as the servant of the LORD who carries out God's wrath on Jerusalem.

And when God sends judgment against Moab –
then God will curse the one who keeps back his sword from bloodshed.

How do you know when this refers to you?

You don't.

That's not the point of this curse!

The agent of God's judgment against Moab will not know that he is God's agent!

This oracle is not intended for Moab to hear –

nor does it specify who will bring the judgment.

This oracle is given for *Israel* to hear!

The people of God need to know that there *is* a day

when those who have oppressed them will be overthrown.

As the souls under the altar cry out to the LORD in Revelation 6:10

"O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge
and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

3. "Moab Shall Be Ashamed of Chemosh" – the Broken Vessels of Moab (v11-13)

Verse 11 then introduces the theme of wine and pottery into the passage:

¹¹ *"Moab has been at ease from his youth
and has settled on his dregs;
he has not been emptied from vessel to vessel,
nor has he gone into exile;
so his taste remains in him,
and his scent is not changed.*

In other words, Moab has not been greatly afflicted in the churning of the nations.

Moab is a tiny country on the wrong side of the Dead Sea!

The great powers (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon) never cared about Moab!

But all that will change:

¹² *"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I shall send to him pourers
who will pour him, and empty his vessels and break his^[e] jars in pieces. ¹³ Then Moab shall be
ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.*

In verse 13, God says that Moab's relationship to their god (Chemosh)
is the same as Israel's relationship to the shrine at Bethel.

Israel worshiped *Yahweh* at Bethel.

This was the sin of Jeroboam!

Jeroboam refused to allow the northern kingdom of Israel

to go to Jerusalem and worship at the temple –

because the temple was under the rule of the sons of David.

Why is this important?

Because it can be tempting to think that just because we believe in the true God,

therefore we can never be put to shame!

But if you are putting your confidence in the true God *in the wrong way* –

in a way contrary to what God has said! –

then you *will* be put to shame!

At the beginning of the Civil War, both the North and the South

were very confident that God was on their side –

and that therefore this would be a very short war –

which they would very easily win –

because, after all, God was on their side!!

I've been seeing a lot of references to 2 Chronicles 7:14 lately.

2 Chronicles 7:14 was part of God's response to Solomon's dedication of the temple.

Starting in verse 12, we hear the LORD say to Solomon,

"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice.

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain,

or command the locust to devour the land,

or send pestilence among my people,

if my people who are called by my name humble themselves,

and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways,

then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

But don't stop there:

"Now my eyes will be open

and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made *in this place*.

For now I have chosen and consecrated this house

that my name may be there forever." (v15-16)

Jeremiah is saying that the northern kingdom of Israel

was trying to apply this prayer to *their* holy place – Bethel.

The problem is that it only may be rightly applied to Jerusalem

(and, as we now see in Jesus – the *heavenly* Jerusalem).

If you try to apply 2 Chronicles 7:14 to the United States,

then you are putting your trust in Bethel.

What God said about Jerusalem cannot be applied to any earthly nation.

Yes, when we repent and turn from our sin, then God *will* prosper his people.
But there are *no promises* that God will restore America.

Do *not* say that the golden calf at Bethel is the *same* as the temple in Jerusalem.

4. “Grieve for Him” – the LORD Calls for Lamentation Over Moab (v14-20)

- ¹⁴ “How do you say, ‘We are heroes
and mighty men of war’?
¹⁵ The destroyer of Moab and his cities has come up,
and the choicest of his young men have gone down to slaughter,
declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.
¹⁶ The calamity of Moab is near at hand,
and his affliction hastens swiftly.
¹⁷ Grieve for him, all you who are around him,
and all who know his name;
say, ‘How the mighty scepter is broken,
the glorious staff.’

But just because this is *God’s* judgment against Moab,
does not mean that we should be giddy with delight!
Indeed, God says that we should *grieve* for Moab.
This may seem odd.
Why should Jerusalem grieve for Moab?
We are not told yet.

That awaits the back side of the chiasm!

- ¹⁸ “Come down from your glory,
and sit on the parched ground,
O inhabitant of Dibon!
For the destroyer of Moab has come up against you;
he has destroyed your strongholds.
¹⁹ Stand by the way and watch,
O inhabitant of Aroer!
Ask him who flees and her who escapes;
say, ‘What has happened?’
²⁰ Moab is put to shame, for it is broken;
wail and cry!
Tell it beside the Arnon,
that Moab is laid waste.

5. Judgment Upon the Cities (v21-25)

²¹ “Judgment has come upon the tableland, upon Holon, and Jahzah, and Mephaath, ²² and Dibon, and Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim, ²³ and Kiriathaim, and Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon,

²⁴ and Kerioth, and Bozrah, and all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near. ²⁵ The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, declares the LORD.

6. “Make Him Drunk” – Because He Magnified Himself against the LORD (v26-27)

But as we approach the center of the chiasm –
in verses 26-27 we hear of the drunkenness of Moab.

²⁶ “Make him drunk, because he magnified himself against the LORD, so that Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he too shall be held in derision.

Perhaps there is a reference to the drunkenness of Lot – Moab’s father –
though the rest of the picture here does not connect with Genesis 19.

Certainly the focus here is on how Moab magnified himself against the LORD.

What does this mean?

How do the nations magnify themselves against the LORD?

Look at how they treated Israel – the people of God:

²⁷ Was not Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves, that whenever you spoke of him you wagged your head?

We saw earlier that Moab mocked and scorned Israel.

And so we come to the center of the chiasm –

the reason for God’s judgment against Moab (v28-30):

7. The Reason for God’s Judgment: The Pride of Moab (v28-30)

²⁸ “Leave the cities, and dwell in the rock,
O inhabitants of Moab!

Be like the dove that nests
in the sides of the mouth of a gorge.

²⁹ We have heard of the pride of Moab—
he is very proud—

of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance,
and the haughtiness of his heart.

³⁰ I know his insolence, declares the LORD;
his boasts are false,
his deeds are false.

We are not given much in terms of specific events –
just the basic sin of *pride* – haughtiness of heart – arrogance – loftiness.

His boasts are false – and his deeds are false.

He talks big – and his deeds are just as empty.

Last time, when we talked about Egypt –
we saw a nation that overflowed its bounds
and tried to overrun other nations.

That wasn't especially Moab's flaw.
Moab was too small and weak.
Moab's pride and insolence was revealed in Moab's mockery and derision.
Moab was the petty little country who laughed at everyone else's misery.

You might think that God would just thumb his nose at petty little Moab.

But no – in verses 31-33, it is *still* Yahweh speaking:

6'. "I Have Made the Wine Cease" – Gladness and Joy Are Taken Away (v31-33)

³¹ *Therefore I wail for Moab;
I cry out for all Moab;
for the men of Kir-hareseth I mourn.*
³² *More than for Jazer I weep for you,
O vine of Sibmah!
Your branches passed over the sea,
reached to the Sea of Jazer;
on your summer fruits and your grapes
the destroyer has fallen.*
³³ *Gladness and joy have been taken away
from the fruitful land of Moab;
I have made the wine cease from the winepresses;
no one treads them with shouts of joy;
the shouting is not the shout of joy.*

Yes, it is God who makes the wine cease from the winepress.
It is God's judgment that turns the shouts of joy to the shouts of war.

But that doesn't mean that God rejoices in this alien work.
The LORD himself weeps and wails over Moab.
God does not delight in the death of the wicked –
no matter who that wicked man may be!

Why should we grieve over the destruction of the nations?
Because God does.
When we look at the devastation of the nations due to sin –
we should not gloat over their demise!
Who are we that we should gloat?
What nation among the cities of man can claim to be right before God?

Surely not the nation who has overflowed its bounds time and again!
What is the standard for the nations?

Do unto others as you would have them do to you.
That same standard must be applied in every other walk of life!
To the police officer facing a difficult situation:
“do unto others as you would have them do to you.”
To the president of Turkey dealing with the leaders of a failed coup:
“do unto others as you would have them do to you.”

How do you exercise authority?
The same way you would want someone else to exercise it toward you –
if *you* were on the other side!

How do we learn to do this?
We have to learn how to listen – how to understand with empathy –
those who are on the other side.
And God teaches us how to do this!
After all, what did *he* do?

5'. Judgment Upon the Cities (v34)

³⁴ *“From the outcry at Heshbon even to Elealeh, as far as Jahaz they utter their voice, from Zoar to Horonaim and Eglath-sheleshiah. For the waters of Nimrim also have become desolate.*

4'. “My Heart Mourns for Moab” – the LORD Laments Over Moab (v35-36)

³⁵ *And I will bring to an end in Moab, declares the LORD, him who offers sacrifice in the high place and makes offerings to his god. ³⁶ Therefore my heart moans for Moab like a flute, and my heart moans like a flute for the men of Kir-hareseth. Therefore the riches they gained have perished.*

What will God do to idolaters? He will bring them to an end (v35).
But then what?
The LORD says in verse 36 that his heart moans for Moab like a flute.

God teaches his people to mourn for the nations.
When we see the idolaters of the earth perishing, we should weep.
When we see their riches destroyed, we should mourn.

All these things – and all these people – were supposed to be serving and loving God!
And so we weep.

3'. Moab Put to Shame – God Breaks Moab Like a Useless Vessel (v37-39)

³⁷ *“For every head is shaved and every beard cut off. On all the hands are gashes, and around the waist is sackcloth. ³⁸ On all the housetops of Moab and in the squares there is nothing but lamentation, for I have broken Moab like a vessel for which no one cares, declares the LORD. ³⁹ How it is broken! How they wail! How Moab has turned his back in shame! So Moab has become a derision and a horror to all that are around him.”*

God has broken Moab like a vessel for which no one cares.

This is another reason why Moab is not the US.
Everyone cares about the US (whether they love it or hate it!).
But Moab is a nobody.
This is like the Eritrea of the ancient world!
If Eritrea got swallowed by Ethiopia – who cares?!

(Most of you probably have no idea what I'm referring to!)
Exactly! That's my point!

2'. "Wings Against Moab" – Because He Magnified Himself against the LORD (v40-42)

⁴⁰ *For thus says the LORD:*
"Behold, one shall fly swiftly like an eagle
and spread his wings against Moab;
⁴¹ *the cities shall be taken*
and the strongholds seized.
The heart of the warriors of Moab shall be in that day
like the heart of a woman in her birth pains;
⁴² *Moab shall be destroyed and be no longer a people,*
because he magnified himself against the LORD.

But whereas Moab tried to fly away in verse 9,
now the wings are spread *against* Moab –
and the cities are taken – the strongholds seized.

And for a second time we hear the reason given:
"because he magnified himself against the LORD."

1'. Moab Destroyed – the Captivity of Chemosh and His People (v43-46)

⁴³ *Terror, pit, and snare*
are before you, O inhabitant of Moab!
declares the LORD.
⁴⁴ *He who flees from the terror*
shall fall into the pit,
and he who climbs out of the pit
shall be caught in the snare.
For I will bring these things upon Moab,
the year of their punishment,
declares the LORD.
⁴⁵ *"In the shadow of Heshbon*
fugitives stop without strength,
for fire came out from Heshbon,
flame from the house of Sihon;
it has destroyed the forehead of Moab,
the crown of the sons of tumult.
⁴⁶ *Woe to you, O Moab!*
The people of Chemosh are undone,

*for your sons have been taken captive,
and your daughters into captivity.*

As our passage began with a “Woe to Nebo” (v1)
so also it ends with a “Woe to you, O Moab” (v46).

And as we started with Chemosh going into exile with his priests and officials (v7),
so also we end with the people of Chemosh undone – their sons taken captive,
and their daughters to captivity.

And yet precisely when it appears that there is no hope for Moab,
Jeremiah ends with a sudden reversal:

P.S., “I Will Restore the Fortunes of Moab” (v47)

*⁴⁷ Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab
in the latter days, declares the LORD.”
Thus far is the judgment on Moab.*

It’s a really short message of hope.

I will restore the fortunes of Moab – I will return the captivity –
in the latter days.

This should make sense now.

After all, if God laments the destruction of his enemies,
then there must be something more to the story.

God’s enemies are not dehumanized.

They remain men – created in the image of God –
and thus men who share both the honor and the shame of Adam.

And because the Word became flesh –
because God has joined himself to humanity –
therefore there is a future for Moab,
and indeed a future for all nations,
as Jesus commanded the church to *go*, disciple all nations.

What does all this mean for us?

It means that there is no place for national pride and arrogance.

As Christians, we do not care whether America is great or small.

And as Americans, we should perform our civic duty in such a way

as to ensure that our country treats others the way that we would like to be treated!