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BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
SINGAPORE**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 15
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTER 15**

Theme: “The sad end of a Gentile nation!”

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 15:3 (KJV) “In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth: on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly.”

INTRODUCTION

Moab was not a city unrelated to Israel. Moab was one of two sons born to Lot out of an incestual relationship between Lot's daughter and himself. Moab means “Who is my father?” This is a very apt name given to the poor son as Lot was his grandfather as well as his father. This name conjures bad memories of the time when the LORD had to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because their sins of homosexuality and fornication were full.

Since that fateful day, Moab grew to become a nation of its own. However, Moab was not friendly toward Israel. When God led Israel from Egypt into the Promised Land, Israel was told by God not to touch

three nations that were related to Israel. They were Edom (from Esau), Ammon (from Lot) and Moab. But these nations did not leave Israel alone. For example, Balak, the king of Moab, purchased the services of Balaam, a false prophet, to curse Israel when Israel was en route to the Promised Land. Israel did not do anything to justify such an attack. God turned the curses into a blessing. Then Balaam counselled Balak to get Israel to sin. When Israel sins, the LORD will surely punish Israel. Balaam taught Balak who sent in many “loose” women to tempt Israel. Israel sinned against the LORD and 24,000 died (see Numbers 25).

The hatred Moab had against Israel was more spiritual than carnal. Although Ruth, the grandmother of King David came from Moab, there was only animosity that existed between Moab and Israel all their days. There was no love lost between the two nations. In Isaiah's time, the judgement of the LORD will also include this enemy of Israel. Like all Gentile nations, the end will come. Chapters 15 and 16 of Isaiah describe this end. There is no man-made nation on earth that will exist for eternity. There is no exception to this immutable law of God. The only nation that will exist forever is the nation of Jesus Christ!

OUTLINE

1. The Destruction (v.1);
2. The Mourning (v. 2-5);
3. The Deaths (v. 6-9).

COMMENTARY

The Destruction – 15:1

The burden of Moab is the same for the other Gentile nations mentioned earlier. The word for burden means heavy weight. The message for Moab was heavy as it describes her total destruction. The suddenness of Moab's destruction is seen in the use of the phrase "in the night". The night is less than half a day. Two major cities that belonged to Moab were suddenly destroyed within the same night. The swiftness of the destruction is also emphasized here. Ar (means "city") and Kir (means "fortress") were both laid waste i.e. ravaged. They were totally destroyed and the destruction was total and swift.

"The city of Ar is named in a snatch of ancient song (Num. 21:15), literally "the site of Ar". It is identical with "Ar of Moab" (Num. 21:28; Isaiah 15:1). This is probably the place called the City of Moab in Num. 22:36, where the Hebrew is `ir mo'abh. It is probably also intended by "the city that is in the middle of the valley" (Deu. 2:36; Jos 13:9,16; 2Sa 24:5). It lay "on the border of the Arnon, which is in the utmost part of the border" (Num. 22:36)." [ISBE, Swordsearcher 6.1]

The city of Kir – "The name, at least in this form, appears only once (Isaiah 15:1) as that of a city in Moab. It is named with Ar of Moab, with which possibly it may be identical, since `ar or `ir is the Hebrew equivalent of the Moabite Qir. The Targum hence reads "Kerak in Moab". There can be no doubt that the Kerak here intended is represented by the modern town of that name, with which, consequently, Kir Moab is almost universally

identified. It must always have been a place of importance. It is mentioned as Charakmoba (Karakmoba) in the Acts of the Council of Jerusalem (536 AD) and by the early geographers. It dominated the great caravan road connecting Syria with Egypt and Arabia. The Crusaders therefore directed attention to it, and held possession from 1167 till it fell again into the hands of the Moslems under Saladin, 1188. The Chroniclers speak of it as in el Belqa, and the chief city of Arabia Secunda. Under the title of Petra Deserti the Crusaders founded here a bishop's see. The Greek bishop of Petra still has his seat in Kerak.

"Kerak stands upon a lofty spur projecting westward from the Moab plateau, with Wady `Ain Franjy on the South, and Wady el-Kerak on the North, about 10 miles from the Dead Sea. The sides of the mountain sink sharply into these deep ravines, which unite immediately to the West, and, as Wady el-Kerak, the great hollow runs northwestward to the sea. It is a position of great natural strength, being connected with the uplands to the East only by a narrow neck. It is 3,370 ft. above the level of the sea. The mountains beyond the adjacent valleys are much higher. The place was surrounded by a strong wall, with five towers, which can still be traced in its whole length. The most northerly tower is well preserved. The most interesting building at Kerak is the huge castle on the southern side. It is separated from the adjoining hill on the right by a large artificial moat; and it is

provided with a reservoir. A moat also skirts the northern side of the fortress, and on the East, the wall has a sloped or battered base. The castle is then separated from the town. The walls are very thick and are well preserved. Beneath the castle is a chapel in which traces of frescoes are still visible. In days of ancient warfare, the place must have been practically impregnable. It could be entered only by two roads passing through rock-cut tunnels. The main danger must always have been failure of water supply. There are springs immediately outside the city; but those alone would not be sufficient. Great cisterns were therefore constructed in the town and also in the castle. The half-nomadic inhabitants of Kerak today number some 1,140 families (Musil, Arabia Petrea, III, 97). The Greek church claims about 2,000 souls; the rest are Moslems. They are wild and fearless people, not greatly inclined to treat strangers with courtesy and kindness. In the spring of 1911, the town was the center of a rising against the government, which was not quelled until much blood had been shed." [ISBE, Swordsearcher 6.1]

The totality of the destruction of the two cities is deduced from the phrase "brought to silence". The cities became deserted. The inhabitants left their ruined cities in haste to escape with their lives.

The Mourning – 15:2-5

The destruction of homes and lives are hard to bear. We are people who cling on to familiarity to provide stability and strength for our existence on a daily basis. The "He" refers to the Moabites who fled from the cities of Ar and Kir. They have gone up to Bajith (means "house") and Dibon (means "pining"), which were their high places for worshipping their gods, to weep. The word for weeping is "overflowing sorrow". The weeping was loud and desperate. They cried to their gods for help for the destruction was great and the loss sorrowful.

The Moabites also wept for two other cities. The word used here is worse than the previous word. The word "howl" literally means "to yell with a wailing tone." The first city was Nebo (means "prophecy" in Hebrew). This was probably near the place where Moses was brought by the LORD to see the Promised Land before his death (see Deu. 32:49). The other city was called Medeba (means "water of quiet"). Apparently these two cities were also destroyed.

The intense mourning of the Moabites was described using baldness and beard shaven off. This was their way of mourning as opposed to the Jews who would wear sackcloth and put ashes on their heads.

This city is first mentioned along with Heshbon and Dibon in an account of Israel's conquests (Num. 21:30). It lay in the Mishor, the high pastoral land of Moab. The district in which the city stood is called the Mishor or plain of

Medeba in the description of the territory assigned to Reuben (Jos 13:9), or the plain by Medeba (Jos 13:16). Here the Ammonites and their Syrian allies put the battle in array against Joab, and were signally defeated (1Ch 19:7). This must have left the place definitely in the possession of Israel. But it must have changed hands several times. It was taken by Omri, evidently from Moab; and Mesha claims to have recovered possession of it (M S, II. 7,8,29,30). It would naturally fall to Israel under Jeroboam II; but in Isaiah 15:2, it is referred to as a city of Moab. It also figures in later Jewish history. John, son of Mattathias, was captured and put to death by the Jambri, a robber tribe from Medeba. This outrage was amply avenged by Jonathan and Simon, who ambushed a marriage party of the Jambri as they were bringing a noble bride from Gabbatha, slew them all and took their ornaments (1 Macc 9:36 ff; Ant, XII, i, 2, 4). Medeba was captured by Hyrcanus "not without the greatest distress of his army" (Ant., XIII, ix, 1). It was taken by Janneus from the Nabateans. Hyrcanus promised to restore it with other cities so taken to Aretas in return for help to secure him on the Judean throne (ibid., xv, 4; XIV, i, 4). Ptolemy speaks of it as a town in Arabia Petrea, between Bostra and Petra. Eusebius and Jerome knew it under its ancient name (Onomasticon, under the word). It became the seat of a bishopric, and is mentioned in the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), and in other ecclesiastical lists.

The ancient city is represented by the modern Madeba, a ruined site with an Arab village, crowning a low hill, some 6 miles South of Heshbon, with which it was connected by a Roman road. The ruins, which are considerable, date mainly from Christian times. The surrounding walls can be traced in practically their whole circuit. There is a large tank, now dry, measuring 108 yds. X 103 yds. and about 12 ft. in depth. In 1880 it was colonized by some Christian families from Kerak, among whom the Latins carry on mission work. [ISBE, Swordsearcher, 6.1]

They shall wear sackcloth in the streets and howl and weep abundantly (combination of the earlier two verbs) from their roof tops for the whole nation to hear and know that great destruction had befallen Moab! They were not ashamed of their show of sorrow. They were bereaved on their might and strength. They knew the final days of Moab's existence are pending.

Two new cities located east of the River Jordan are added to this weeping. Heshbon (means "contrivance" shall cry (i.e. shriek in pain). Elealeh (means "God is going up") shall weep so loudly that it is heard by another city called Jahaz (means "to stamp"). The armed soldiers were described as crying out that his life is grievous unto him. They were not able to help and defend Moab. The destruction was too overwhelming even their armed soldiers were crying out for help!

The city of Jahaz – "This is the place where in a great battle Israel overwhelmed Sihon king of the

Amorites, and then took possession of all his territory (Nu 21:23, etc.). It is named along with Beth-baal-meon and Kedemoth (Jos 13:18), with Kedemoth (Jos 21:37) pointing to a position in the Southeast of the Amorite territory. It was given to Reuben by Moses, and was one of the cities in the portion of that tribe assigned to the Merarite Levites. Mesha (MS, Il. 18 if) says that the king of Israel dwelt in Jahaz when at war with him. Mesha drove him out, and the city passed into the hands of Moab. It is referred to as a city of Moab in Isaiah 15:4; Jer 48:21,34." [ISBE, Swordsearcher, 6.1]

Isaiah is described as weeping for Moab. He witnessed Moab's utter destruction and he could not help himself but wept as he brought this prophetic judgement against her. This is the heart of a true prophet. He tempers justice with mercy. There was no glee to bring such judgement upon Israel's enemies no matter how deserving Israel's enemies were. The Moabites will flee to Zoar (means "small") and they will weep loudly like a three-year-old heifer for all to hear!

The city of Zoar – "The name of the city to which Lot escaped from Sodom (Ge 19:20-23,30), previously mentioned in Ge 13:10; 14:2,8; where its former name is said to have been Bela. In 19:22, its name is said to have been given because of its littleness, which also seems to have accounted for it being spared. The location of Zoar has much to do with that of the cities of the Plain or Valley of Siddim, with which it is always connected. In Deuteronomy 34:3, Moses is said to

have viewed "the plain of the valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, unto Zoar" while in Isaiah 15:5 and Jer 48:4 (where the Septuagint reads unto "Zoar" instead of "her little ones"), it is said to be a city of Moab."

The Deaths – 15:6-9

The Moabites mount up to a high place called Luhith (means "glisten"). They weep as they climb up to Luhith. As they arrived at a place called Horonaim (means "double cave town), they shall raise up a cry of destruction. The waters of Nimrim (means "clear waters") shall be desolate i.e. dried up. Apparently Nimrim was a place of plentiful waters. But it will dry up. Hence the crops of the Moabites were destroyed. The hay withers. The grass fails. There is no green thing in Moab. Famine follows very closely behind drought. These were catastrophes because of the destruction sent by the LORD.

The food that the Moabites stored up for themselves were carried away by their enemies, the Babylonians. The word for "the willows" is used in Psalm 137 to describe Babylon. **Psalms 137:2 (KJV)** "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof." The cities of Moab were destroyed and plundered by the Babylonians at will. The cry has gone all round the borders of Moab. The howling has reached the cities of Eglaim (means "a double pond") and Beerelims (means "well of heroes"). Beerlim was a city located north of Moab and Eglaim was located to the South of Moab. The length and breadth of Moab was covered by the

crying of the Moabites because of the destruction by the Babylonians.

When the days of destruction come, blood will flow. The waters of Dibon shall be full of blood. Those who escape will be eaten by lions sent by the LORD. The remnant in Moab would also be eaten by these lions. The destruction of Moab shall be total and thorough!

PRACTICAL VALUE

Helplessness? – Do you ever feel helpless at times when nothing you do could change anything in life? Moab experienced her total destruction helplessly. Their gods did not and could not help. The people suffered terribly and many died and lost everything! Their nation was destroyed and there was nothing any of them could do. Their armed soldiers could only wait to die themselves. There was no help at all from all quarters. God would not help them because He does not know them and did not enter into any covenant with them. He was not obligated to help them at all.

For the believer, there is no such thing as helplessness. His God is all powerful. Nothing can happen to him without His heavenly Father's permission. The believer can always cry to the LORD for help and He hears and will surely help as He has promised.

Loss of all things! – The Moabites lost everything. They lost their homes. They lost their families. They lost their freedom. They lost their health. They lost their security. They lost their

homeland! This loss was devastating that one has to experience it to know the full impact of what it means like the South Vietnamese who left their country because they lost the war to the Vietcongs i.e. the North Vietnamese. They fled as non entities on boats. They became the boat people with no nationality begging for countries to take them in. They were at the mercy of others to survive. They came with their families or what was left of their families.

Christians do not have to fear the loss of all things because all things to the believer is Christ. As long as he has Christ, he has everything. This means that if he loses everything else including his health, job, family, freedom and even his life, he has lost nothing. With Jesus Christ as the believer's Lord and Saviour, he has nothing to fear or worry about. This world is not his home and can never be his home. He will leave this world one day for heaven. AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 15:1-9;

TUESDAY: Isaiah 15:1-9;

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 15:1-9;

THURSDAY: Isaiah 15:1-9;

FRIDAY: Isaiah 15:1-9.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes you cry the most?

2. If CPBPC is destroyed i.e. turns liberal, would you weep and cry? Please explain your answer.

3. If Singapore comes under attack and is about to be captured by a foreign power, would you weep and cry? Please explain your answer.

4. What are some of the things in life that is worthy of crying over and what is not? Please explain.

5. Would you weep when this world is destroyed? Explain your answer.

6. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
