

CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

Isaiah Chapter 15 — The Burden Against Moab

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

Isaiah Chapter 15 is a short chapter filled with:

Destruction.

Mourning.

Flight.

Fear.

Loss.

Grief.

The prophecy is directed against:

Moab.

Moab was located east of the Dead Sea and had a long, complicated history with Israel.

The Moabites were related to Israel through Lot, Abraham's nephew, yet throughout biblical history the two peoples often experienced:

Conflict.

Hostility.

Political rivalry.

Military tension.

Isaiah announces that Moab's judgment will come with shocking speed.

The chapter begins:

“In one night Ar of Moab is destroyed and silenced; in one night Kir of Moab is destroyed and silenced.”

The repeated phrase:

“In one night”

emphasizes suddenness.

Cities that seemed secure are devastated almost immediately.

Then the whole land begins mourning.

People go to their high places.

They weep.

They shave their heads.

They cut their beards.

They wear sackcloth.

They cry in the streets.

Even Moab’s soldiers tremble.

Refugees flee from city to city.

The land itself suffers.

Water disappears.

Grass withers.

Vegetation dies.

The wealth people spent years gathering must now be carried away.

The cries of sorrow spread across the entire country.

Yet one of the most striking statements in the chapter is Isaiah 15:5:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

Isaiah does not rejoice over judgment.

He grieves.

That is important.

Biblical prophecy does not teach us to enjoy the suffering of those under judgment.

God’s justice is real.

But compassion is also real.

Isaiah hears the cries of Moab and his heart responds.

The central truth of Isaiah 15 is:

Moab’s sudden downfall reveals that human strength, cities, religion, wealth, and military power cannot provide lasting security apart from God, while Isaiah’s sorrow over Moab reminds us that

divine judgment should produce sobriety and compassion rather than delight in another person's destruction.

I. MOAB'S CITIES FALL IN A SINGLE NIGHT

Isaiah 15:1 — Sudden Destruction

“This is the burden concerning Moab: In one night Ar of Moab is destroyed and silenced; in one night Kir of Moab is destroyed and silenced.”

The prophecy begins without delay.

Two important Moabite cities are named:

Ar.

Kir.

Both fall:

In one night.

This emphasizes how quickly apparent stability can disappear.

One evening:

Life continues.

By morning:

Everything has changed.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:1

The Lord announces judgment against Moab and declares that important Moabite cities will be ruined, captured, and put to shame.

Amos 2:2

God promises to send fire against Moab, consuming its strongholds while the nation falls amid the noise of battle and military alarm.

Numbers 21:28

Fire is poetically described as coming out from Heshbon and consuming the territory associated with Ar of Moab and its rulers.

Spiritual Principle

Circumstances that appear secure can change in a single night.

Key Truth

Never make temporary stability your ultimate security.

II. MOAB GOES TO ITS HIGH PLACES TO WEEP

Isaiah 15:2 — Religion Cannot Stop the Judgment

“They go up to the temple at Bajith and to Dibon’s high places to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and Medeba. Every head is shaved, every beard is cut off.”

Moab turns toward:

Temples.

High places.

Religious centers.

But its false worship cannot save it.

The people express grief through ancient signs of mourning:

Shaved heads.

Cut beards.

Public wailing.

The land that once expressed pride now expresses humiliation.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:37

Throughout Moab, heads are shaved, beards cut, hands marked by mourning, and sackcloth worn because grief has spread everywhere.

Jeremiah 48:22

God’s judgment reaches Moabite towns including Dibon and other important settlements throughout the land.

Numbers 21:30

Moab's strength is pictured as being destroyed from Heshbon toward Dibon and other regions of the country.

Spiritual Principle

False religion cannot rescue people from the consequences of rebellion.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A crisis often reveals whether worship is directed toward the living God or toward something powerless to save.

III. THE STREETS ARE FILLED WITH MOURNING

Isaiah 15:3 — Sackcloth and Bitter Weeping

“In the streets they wear sackcloth; on the rooftops and in the squares everyone wails, weeping bitterly.”

Grief fills public life.

The mourning is not hidden.

It appears:

In streets.

On rooftops.

In public squares.

Everyone is affected.

Sackcloth symbolizes:

Humiliation.

Sorrow.

Distress.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:38

There is widespread mourning throughout Moab, on rooftops and in public places, because God has broken the nation like a vessel no one wants.

Amos 8:10

God warns that celebrations can be turned into mourning and songs into lamentation, with sackcloth and grief replacing joy.

Jeremiah 6:26

God calls His people to put on sackcloth and mourn bitterly because sudden destruction is approaching.

Spiritual Principle

Sin may promise celebration, but its consequences can turn celebration into mourning.

IV. EVEN MOAB’S SOLDIERS TREMBLE

Isaiah 15:4 — Warriors Lose Their Courage

“Heshbon and Elealeh cry out; their voices are heard as far as Jahaz. Even Moab’s armed men cry out; their hearts tremble within them.”

The cry spreads from city to city.

Even soldiers are terrified.

These are the men trained to:

Fight.

Defend.

Stand firm.

Yet they cry out.

Military training cannot remove the fear created by national collapse.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:34

The cry of Moab spreads from one city to another until the sound of devastation is heard across the land.

Numbers 21:23

A Moabite-region king once gathered his forces for battle and went out against Israel at Jahaz.

Jeremiah 48:45

Fugitives from Moab seek shelter, but destruction reaches even the places where they hope to find safety.

Spiritual Principle

Human courage has limits.

Key Truth

Even warriors tremble when the foundation beneath them collapses.

V. ISAIAH’S HEART CRIES OUT FOR MOAB

Isaiah 15:5 — Compassion in the Middle of Judgment

“My heart cries out for Moab! Her fugitives flee as far as Zoar, like a three-year-old heifer on the run. They climb the ascent of Luhith with weeping; on the road to Horonaim they raise a cry of destruction.”

This verse is one of the most important in the chapter.

Isaiah does not say:

Good.

They deserve it.

Instead:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

The prophet announces judgment while grieving the suffering it brings.

Refugees flee.

People climb roads while weeping.

Their cries fill the countryside.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:5

People climb the road to Luhith weeping continuously, while cries of devastation are heard on the descent toward Horonaim.

Genesis 19:22

Lot was told to flee quickly to Zoar because judgment could not proceed until he reached the place of refuge.

Jeremiah 48:3

Cries are heard from Horonaim because devastation and great destruction have overtaken Moab.

Spiritual Principle

Truth and compassion belong together.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A faithful messenger may announce judgment without taking pleasure in the suffering judgment brings.

VI. THE LAND ITSELF BECOMES BARREN

Isaiah 15:6 — Nothing Green Remains

“The waters of Nimrim are dried up; the grass is withered, the vegetation is gone, and nothing green is left.”

The devastation affects:

Cities.

People.

Water.

Pasture.

Vegetation.

The judgment reaches the environment sustaining daily life.

Without water:

Grass dies.

Vegetation disappears.

Livestock suffer.

People suffer.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:34

Jeremiah also describes the waters of Nimrim becoming desolate as Moab's judgment spreads across the land.

Joel 1:18

Animals groan because pastures dry up, cattle wander in distress, and flocks suffer because the land has lost its food.

Amos 1:2

The Lord's voice in judgment causes pastures to mourn and productive areas to wither.

Spiritual Principle

Human life depends upon blessings we often take for granted.

VII. MOAB CARRIES AWAY ITS STORED WEALTH

Isaiah 15:7 — Years of Accumulation Must Be Abandoned

“So the wealth they have gathered and stored up they will carry away to the Brook of the Willows.”

Moab gathered wealth over time.

Now:

It must be carried away.

Possessions that once represented:

Security.

Success.

Stability.

Become burdens refugees attempt to transport.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:36

Jeremiah mourns for Moab because the wealth and resources the nation accumulated have been lost.

Psalms 137:2

The exiles in Babylon hung their musical instruments upon trees beside the rivers because grief had replaced celebration.

Amos 6:7

Those who lived in luxury and self-indulgence would be among the first taken into exile, and their carefree feasting would end.

Spiritual Principle

What takes years to accumulate can become impossible to keep.

Key Truth

Possessions can travel with us only so far.

VIII. MOAB’S CRY REACHES ITS BORDERS

Isaiah 15:8 — The Whole Land Hears the Wailing

“Their cry of anguish goes around Moab’s borders; their wailing reaches as far as Eglaim and echoes to Beer Elim.”

The sorrow is nationwide.

No small section is affected.

The crying reaches:

Borders.

Cities.

Regions.

The entire nation feels the disaster.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:20

Moab is told to mourn because the nation has been shattered and its downfall is being announced throughout the region.

Jeremiah 48:39

Moab wails in brokenness and becomes an object of horror and humiliation among surrounding peoples.

Ezekiel 25:9

God announces judgment against Moab’s frontier cities and the places in which the nation took pride.

Spiritual Principle

National sin can eventually produce national consequences.

IX. FURTHER DANGER AWAITS THE SURVIVORS

Isaiah 15:9 — Blood in the Waters

“The waters of Dimon are full of blood, yet I will bring still more upon Dimon: a lion upon the fugitives of Moab and upon those who remain in the land.”

The chapter ends without relief.

The waters are filled with blood.

People flee.

Some remain.

Yet danger continues.

The lion becomes a picture of:

Further destruction.

Threat.

Judgment.

Cross References

Jeremiah 48:44

The one who escapes from terror falls into another danger, and the person who escapes one trap encounters another because Moab's appointed judgment cannot simply be outrun.

Amos 5:19

Trying to escape the day of judgment is compared to fleeing from a lion only to meet a bear, or entering a house only to be bitten by a serpent.

2 Kings 17:25

When foreign settlers first occupied the former territory of Israel, lions attacked some of them because they did not understand the requirements associated with the land and its God.

Spiritual Principle

Running from consequences is not the same as turning to God.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Escape from one danger does not equal salvation if the deeper spiritual problem remains unresolved.

X. SEVEN GREAT LESSONS FROM ISAIAH 15

1. Judgment Can Come Suddenly

Moab's cities fall:

"In one night."

Principle:

Do not assume tomorrow will provide the opportunity you refuse today.

2. Earthly Strongholds Are Temporary

Cities fall.

Armies tremble.

Principle:

Human security is never absolute security.

3. False Worship Cannot Save

Moab runs to its religious high places.

Still:

Judgment comes.

Principle:

Religion without the true God cannot become a refuge.

4. Pride Can Be Turned Into Mourning

Moab once possessed confidence.

Now:

Sackcloth.

Baldness.

Weeping.

Principle:

Pride often learns too late how fragile human glory is.

5. God's Messengers Should Possess Compassion

Isaiah says:

“My heart cries out for Moab.”

Principle:

Truth should never make the heart cruel.

6. Wealth Cannot Save in the Day of Disaster

Moab's riches must be carried away.

Principle:

Possessions are poor saviors.

7. Human Escape Cannot Replace Divine Refuge

Fugitives run from one danger into another.

Principle:

The ultimate need is not merely escape from circumstances but reconciliation with God.

XI. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT JUDGMENT

Judgment is pictured as:

Sudden.

Extensive.

Painful.

Unavoidable.

It reaches:

Cities.

Soldiers.

Families.

Wealth.

Land.

Water.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Sin is never as small as it appears while judgment is delayed.

XII. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT MOAB

Moab's cities were:

Established.

Recognizable.

Populated.

Yet devastation comes rapidly.

The chapter emphasizes how quickly national confidence can collapse.

Spiritual Principle

A nation's history cannot guarantee its future.

XIII. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT FALSE RELIGION

The people go to:

Temple.

High places.

They weep.

But their religious centers cannot change the outcome.

Key Truth

Desperation does not automatically make false worship effective.

XIV. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT GRIEF

The chapter is saturated with mourning.

Words and images include:

Wail.

Weep.

Cry.

Sackcloth.

Shaved heads.

Trembling hearts.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

God's Word does not treat human suffering casually.

XV. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT COMPASSION

Isaiah's response stands out:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

He does not deny the justice of judgment.

Neither does he become emotionally cold.

Spiritual Principle

Biblical conviction should deepen compassion rather than destroy it.

XVI. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT WEALTH

Moab carries away what it spent years accumulating.

Suddenly possessions become:

Portable burdens.

Limited resources.

Things that cannot stop disaster.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Own possessions.

Do not let possessions become the thing you believe owns your future.

XVII. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT CREATION

Water dries.

Grass dies.

Vegetation disappears.

The effects of judgment reach everyday provisions.

Spiritual Principle

Water, food, fertile ground, and ordinary daily provision are blessings, not guarantees.

XVIII. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT FEAR

Even soldiers cry out.

Fear reaches people expected to be brave.

Key Truth

Courage based only upon strength will eventually meet a crisis stronger than itself.

XIX. WHAT ISAIAH 15 TEACHES ABOUT REFUGEES

The chapter vividly presents:

People fleeing.

Families moving.

Wealth being carried.

Roads filled with crying.

This reminds us that national conflict is experienced personally by ordinary people.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Never discuss war and judgment so abstractly that you forget the people walking the roads in tears.

XX. ONE NIGHT

The repeated phrase deserves attention.

“In one night.”

It expresses:

Sudden reversal.

No long warning once the moment arrives.

Spiritual Principle

Life can change more quickly than we expect.

XXI. THE HIGH PLACES CANNOT HELP

Moab goes upward:

To temples.

To high places.

Yet the nation continues downward.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Going to a religious place is not the same as going to the living God.

XXII. THE ARMED MEN CRY

Military strength was expected to produce courage.

Instead:

The warriors themselves panic.

Spiritual Principle

If our hope rests entirely in human strength, fear eventually exposes the foundation.

XXIII. “MY HEART CRIES OUT”

This may be the spiritual center of the chapter.

Judgment is real.

Compassion is real.

We do not have to choose between:

Truth.

Love.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The strongest warnings should sometimes come from the most compassionate hearts.

XXIV. THE DRIED WATERS

Nimrim dries up.

Something essential disappears.

Spiritual Principle

We often recognize the value of ordinary blessings only after they are gone.

XXV. THE WEALTH THEY GATHERED

Moab accumulated.

Stored.

Protected.

Then fled carrying what it could.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Do not spend your whole life collecting what you cannot keep.

XXVI. THE CRY AROUND THE BORDER

Moab's anguish spreads throughout the land.

Sin's consequences rarely remain contained within the location where rebellion began.

Spiritual Principle

What begins privately can eventually become public pain.

XXVII. THE LION WAITING FOR THE FUGITIVES

The chapter closes with additional danger.

That is intentionally sobering.

Running is not enough.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The safest direction is not simply away from trouble.

It is toward God.

XXVIII. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

What nation is the focus of Isaiah 15?

Moab.

Question 2

How quickly are Ar and Kir destroyed?

In one night.

Question 3

What does this sudden destruction teach?

It teaches that apparently stable circumstances can change with extraordinary speed.

Question 4

Where do the Moabites go to mourn?

They go to their temples and high places.

Question 5

How do they express grief?

They shave their heads, cut their beards, wear sackcloth, wail, and weep publicly.

Question 6

How do Moab's soldiers respond?

Even the armed men cry out and tremble with fear.

Question 7

How does Isaiah personally respond to Moab's suffering?

He says:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

Question 8

What does that teach us about preaching judgment?

Judgment should be proclaimed truthfully but not with delight in human suffering.

Question 9

What happens to the waters of Nimrim?

They dry up, leaving vegetation withered and the land barren.

Question 10

What happens to Moab's wealth?

The people attempt to carry away what they had accumulated and stored.

Question 11

How extensive is Moab's sorrow?

The cry spreads across the country and reaches its borders.

Question 12

Does fleeing automatically provide safety?

No.

The closing image shows further danger facing fugitives and survivors.

XXIX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

Isaiah 15 asks several searching questions.

What Am I Treating as Permanent?

Home?

Career?

Income?

Health?

Possessions?

Isaiah reminds us that circumstances can change quickly.

Where Do I Run in Crisis?

Toward:

God?

Or toward powerless substitutes?

Is My Religion Real?

Am I truly seeking God?

Or merely practicing outward forms?

How Do I Respond to Other People's Judgment?

With:

Self-righteousness?

Mockery?

Or compassion?

Does My Heart Still Break for People?

Can I tell someone the truth and still weep for them?

What Wealth Am I Trusting?

Would my faith survive if possessions disappeared?

Am I Grateful for Ordinary Blessings?

Water?

Food?

Shelter?

Safety?

Am I Merely Running from Consequences?

Or am I actually turning toward God?

XXX. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Never Preach Judgment With a Heart That Has Forgotten How to Weep”

Isaiah says:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

The prophet knows judgment is deserved.

Yet:

He grieves.

Principle:

Biblical truth should make us serious about sin and tender toward sinners at the same time.

XXXI. SUDDEN REVERSAL

Moab's chapter begins with cities falling overnight.

One day they appear:

Stable.

The next:

Destroyed.

Spiritual Principle

Do not postpone obedience because you assume life will remain unchanged.

XXXII. RELIGION IN A CRISIS

People often become religious when disaster arrives.

But Isaiah shows:

Not every religious response is saving faith.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Crisis may reveal spiritual hunger, but only the true God can satisfy it.

XXXIII. WHEN PRIDE BECOMES SACKCLOTH

The symbols of Moab's grief show complete humiliation.

Pride has disappeared.

Spiritual Principle

It is better to humble ourselves voluntarily before God than to wait for circumstances to humble us.

XXXIV. COMPASSION FOR THOSE UNDER JUDGMENT

Some people imagine that preaching strongly against sin requires emotional hardness.

Isaiah proves otherwise.

He announces:

Judgment.

And:

Weeps.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Compassion does not weaken truth.

It shows the spirit in which truth should often be spoken.

XXXV. WEALTH ON THE MOVE

What was stored securely now has to be:

Packed.

Carried.

Moved.

Possessions become evidence of how temporary earthly security can be.

Spiritual Principle

Material things are tools for life, not foundations for eternity.

XXXVI. WHEN THE LAND MOURNS

Dry water sources.

Dead grass.

No vegetation.

The landscape mirrors the nation's devastation.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Human life remains dependent upon God's ordinary provisions every day.

XXXVII. THE CRIES OF THE FUGITIVES

Isaiah makes us hear:

The refugees.

Their voices.

Their weeping.

Their footsteps.

Their fear.

Spiritual Principle

Compassion begins when we stop seeing only nations and begin seeing people.

XXXVIII. NO EASY ESCAPE

The lion at the end of the chapter is a final warning.

Moab cannot simply relocate and pretend everything is solved.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A changed location cannot heal an unchanged relationship with God.

XXXIX. FIVE GREAT MOVEMENTS IN ISAIAH 15

1. Destruction

The cities fall.

2. Mourning

The people weep.

3. Flight

The fugitives flee.

4. Loss

The land and wealth disappear.

5. Continuing Judgment

Further danger remains.

Key Truth

Moab's collapse reaches every level of national life because false security cannot withstand divine judgment.

XL. FINAL APPLICATION

Isaiah Chapter 15 is not an easy chapter.

There is no great military victory for God's people.

No triumphant song.

No dramatic rescue.

Instead:

We hear crying.

We watch people flee.

We see cities destroyed.

We see water dry up.

We see wealth carried away.

We hear soldiers trembling.

And we hear Isaiah say:

“My heart cries out for Moab!”

That may be the most important lesson for us.

We can believe strongly in God's holiness and still possess compassion.

We can preach against sin and still weep for sinners.

We can believe judgment is righteous and still grieve when people experience the consequences of rebellion.

Never allow biblical conviction to become:

Cruelty.

Arrogance.

Coldness.

Isaiah also warns us about false security.

Moab had:

Cities.

Soldiers.

Religious centers.

Water.

Vegetation.

Wealth.

None of them could save the nation.

That should cause us to ask:

What are we trusting?

A bank account can disappear.

A job can disappear.

A government can change.

A city can fall.

Health can change.

Possessions can be left behind.

Life itself can change:

In one night.

Therefore:

Build upon God.

Seek Him before the crisis.

Do not wait until everything around you is collapsing before asking where your true refuge is.

Isaiah also makes us see refugees.

People climbing roads while crying.

People carrying what they can.

People leaving home.

That should soften our hearts toward those who experience:

War.

Disaster.

Displacement.

Loss.

Finally, Moab discovers that running from danger is not enough.

Further danger awaits.

That teaches us the difference between:

Escape.

And:

Salvation.

You can escape one circumstance and still need God.

You can move to another place and still carry the same spiritual problem.

You can outrun one enemy and still remain unable to outrun sin.

Therefore:

Do not merely run from destruction.

Run to God.

Do not merely fear consequences.

Seek repentance.

Do not merely protect possessions.

Prepare your soul.

And when others suffer:

Do not stand at a distance with pride.

Say with Isaiah:

“My heart cries out.”

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

You are holy and just.

Your judgments are righteous.

Yet You are also compassionate.

Teach us to hold:

Truth.

And:

Mercy.

Together.

Father, forgive us when we take security for granted.

We often assume:

Tomorrow will look like today.

Our possessions will remain.

Our plans will succeed.

Our strength will continue.

Remind us that life can change quickly.

Teach us to build upon You.

Protect us from trusting in:

Money.

Cities.

Government.

Military strength.

Religious forms.

Anything other than You.

Father, give us compassionate hearts.

When others suffer, keep us from:

Mocking.

Judging proudly.

Celebrating their pain.

Give us the heart of Isaiah:

A heart that cries out.

Help us speak truth without becoming cruel.

Help us warn people because we love them.

Father, remember refugees and displaced people.

Remember those who have lost:

Homes.

Possessions.

Family.

Safety.

Comfort them.

Provide for them.

Protect them.

Use Your people to show mercy.

Thank You for every ordinary blessing we possess:

Water.

Food.

Shelter.

Safety.

Family.

Health.

Help us never treat them as guaranteed.

And above all:

Teach us not merely to run from consequences.

Teach us to run toward You.

You alone are our true refuge.

You alone are our lasting security.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Key Verse

“My heart cries out for Moab! Her fugitives flee as far as Zoar.” — Isaiah 15:5

Central Truth

Moab's sudden destruction reveals the fragility of cities, wealth, military strength, false religion, and earthly security, while Isaiah's sorrow for the suffering nation teaches that God's righteous judgment should move His people toward humility, compassion, repentance, and deeper trust in Him alone.

Isaiah 15 in One Sentence

Isaiah announces the sudden devastation of Moab, describes its cities mourning, soldiers trembling, refugees fleeing, waters drying, and wealth disappearing, while revealing through his own grief that righteous judgment should never eliminate compassion for those suffering its consequences.