

Text: Isaiah 16:1-14

Title: "Moab on the wrong side of grace"

Time: 2/22/2026 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Benedict Arnold's name has gone down in history as a synonym for *traitor*. Arnold's military career, however, did not start out with treason to the cause of the Revolutionary War. Previously, he had served the cause with sacrifice and distinction.

Arnold was allied with Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys in their victory over Fort Ticonderoga in 1775. He valiantly led a failed attempt to capture Quebec City for the Colonists, where he earned the loyalty of his men for his perseverance. He famously fought in the Battle of Lake Champlain until all his ships were destroyed, but that sacrificial battle delayed British forces long enough to enable Colonial forces to organize and continue to fight.

Serving under a reluctant leader in General Horatio Gates, Arnold disobeyed his superior's orders and struck British forces at Saratoga, causing the surrender of Britain's General Burgoyne. The victory was a turning point in the war and convinced France to join with the Colonials. Arnold was shot in the leg during this battle and almost lost his life.

But Arnold is not remembered today for his heroism as one of our cherished founding fathers. While in command of the fort at West Point on the Hudson River, he arranged with the British to surrender the fort in exchange for money and a high-ranking position in the British army. His plot was discovered when a courier carrying its details was

captured by the Americans. Arnold escaped to Britain, but his treacherous choice put him on the wrong side of history.

In our passage, Moab makes a treacherous choice that puts them on the wrong side of God's grace. To be on the wrong side of God's grace is even worse than being on the wrong side of history.

This chapter rehearses again what Isaiah calls *the burden for Moab* in 15:1. The end of chapter 15 speaks of Moab's tragic remnants, and chapter 16 does as well. Chapter 15 focuses on what happened to Moab under God's judgment, categorizing them with the many other nations, like Assyria and Philistia, that ended on the ash-heap of history. Chapter 16 tells us exactly why a nation like Moab ended up there.

The reason is that Moab rejected God's gracious offer of salvation. They made a treacherous and consequential choice. This is the same tragic choice many unbelievers are making today. If we see ourselves in the example of Moab this morning, we must repent of our unbelief and trust David's King, the Lord Jesus, to save us from our sin.

We will see three things about Moab's tragic example from the passage – (1) the grace that Moab lost, (2) the reason Moab lost this grace, and (3) the Lord's reaction to Moab's loss.

I. The grace that Moab lost (vv. 1-5).

Illustration: Perhaps you remember that years ago we had a drama team from Dublin Christian Academy with us one Sunday night to perform the account of Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis 22.

The hero of that story, of course, was a ram that had got its horns caught in a nearby thicket. God tested Abraham, who believed God would raise up his son of promise if he had to kill him as God directed, but then God stopped Abraham once he had passed the test. The ram then took the place of Isaac on the altar, and the Dublin team correctly pointed out that this event was a great prophecy of the way in which Jesus would take our place on the cross to bear our judgment and to save us from our sins.

Application: Our passage begins with a command to Moab to send a ram to the mountain of the house of Zion (v. 1). Some commentators see here merely a command that the Moabites pay tribute in the form of livestock to the Israelites. But because of the way Isaiah speaks elsewhere about *the mountain of the house of Zion*, I believe he is not referring here to the sinful Jerusalem that was Moab's contemporary in Isaiah's day, but rather to the eschatological Jerusalem that holds out the promise of eternal salvation for all those who believe.

Isaiah 2:3 is one such Zion passage: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

It is to this place that Moab must send a ram, and the sending of a ram to this place would be act of worship from Moab, symbolizing their faith in the salvation message of Genesis 22. The ram symbolizes the provision of salvation like a bird escaping danger and a bird's nest beyond reach of a predator (v. 2a).

This command to send the ram and trust in Zion comes to Moab at a time of great need. It is a time when the daughters of Moab are suffering as defenseless refugees, asking to enter Israel at the fords of the Arnon, a river marking the northern border of Moab (v. 2b).

God's offer of salvation in Zion comes to sinners in their desperate need. Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Mark 2:17, "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.")

If you are not sick, the physician cannot heal you. If you are righteous, you cannot be called to repentance. But the Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Each of us is part of this "all have sinned."

It is in this place of need that the daughters of Moab are taking counsel and making a decision in Isaiah's poem (v. 3a). What they must decide is whether or not to receive the salvation that God has prepared for them in Zion. The preparations that the Lord has made there for them are described next by Isaiah. They include shade in the midst of noontime heat, a hiding place in the midst of danger, and deliverance from oppression and destruction (vv. 3b-4).

Best of all, those who choose salvation in Mount Zion will find there the King who is the Son of David and the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (v. 5). Isaiah has already told us about this Messiah. We know that He would be born of a virgin and named Emmanuel, meaning *God with us* (7:14), and that He would be a child born unto us, a Son given to us (9:6). He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. His is an eternal kingdom.

In Isaiah 16, the saved in Zion find this promised child on David's throne. His throne is established. It will never undergo the destruction Moab suffered. His heart is a heart of covenantal love – *hesed*. Motyer defines *hesed*: “Love is the Lord's covenanted love for his people, prompting all he is and all he does towards them, guaranteeing that he will never let them go, steadfast in all his obligations” (152).

The King judges in truth and faithfulness, cares for justice, and makes righteousness happen speedily (no more will court cases drag on forever).

So this is grace's offer of a blessed future place called *Zion*, presented to needy sinners at the fords of their own refugee river-crossing. Our entrance is made possible by the Lamb of God whose death took away the sins of the world. To send a ram is to believe on Him.

The question for our hearts this morning is, “Will we enter?” “Will we cross the river and receive by faith the blessings of salvation's grace?” “Will we become a subject of this great King?” “Will we be found on the right side of grace?” Tragically, Moab's answer was “no,” and the reason for their answer is the reason Moab lost this grace.

II. The reason Moab lost this grace (vv. 6-8).

Illustration: Benedict Arnold's treasonous choice was the fruit of two key factors in his life. One was his marriage to a wife from a loyalist family. Her influence eventually turned his heart against the cause of the Revolution.

The second influence was a series of events that made him feel slighted and mistreated by the Continental Army. For example, at the glorious victory at Saratoga, where he almost lost his life to obtain the victory, it was the reluctant

General Gates who received all the praise and credit for Britain's surrender. Arnold had been passed over for promotions that went to others whom he felt were less worthy than he. Ultimately, it was pride that caused Arnold to find himself a traitor on the wrong side of history.

Application: Pride causes Moab, and every other unbeliever with them, to find themselves on the wrong side of grace (v. 6). In verse 5 four words are used to describe the great King of Zion – covenantal love, truth/faithfulness, justice, and righteousness. Here in verse 6, four words comprise four synonyms for the pride of Moab's unbelief.

The last word translated *his lies* in the KJV and *idle boasting* in the ESV is a word that comes from a verb meaning to *invent* or to *devise*. Motyer explains: "*Boasts* is from a verb meaning 'to invent, devise', and therefore to live in a world of unreality. Isaiah's implication is that the way of faith is the way of realism, of facing facts as they are. To reject the way of faith for self-confidence is to retreat into a dream world – except that its consequences (7-8) are far from dreamlike" (153).

The dream world of Moab is the world of the unbeliever today. Unbelievers imagine vain, untrue things when it comes to the reality of their Creator and His creatures. Only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes to see what is true and real. As Motyer says, the consequences for being so self-deceived cannot be imagined away (vv. 7-8).

III. The Lord's reaction to Moab's loss of grace (vv. 9-14).

Illustration: After three years of largely rejected gospel ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ lamented over Jerusalem with these words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the

prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Similarly, the Apostle Paul, who had seen many Gentiles saved from his preaching but very few of the fellow Jews, whom he loved, wrote, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:1-3).

Application: This is the burden of gospel ministers for those who do not believe. It is a burden that the Lord Himself feels. In our passage, the Lord's reaction to Moab's loss of grace is a burden. We read that in 15:1. We read about God's heart-cry in 15:5. And now we read about God's weeping over Moab (16:9-10), about His feelings responding like the moan of a sad lament on a cello (16:11).

God determined to give them three more years to choose grace, perhaps prophetic of the three years of Jesus's ministry on earth, but for Him they would be years of endurance like the slow-moving years of a hired hand (vv. 13-14). The passing of the years would be slow because God knew that Moab would continue to look to their idolatrous ways and man-made religious pursuits instead of to Zion (v. 12).

Conclusion: And so in the end, Moab chose to be on the wrong side of grace. What shall we choose? How many years do we have left to choose correctly? Isaiah's burden for Moab reminds us that a day is coming when we will hear God's final call of grace.

John W. Peterson was a WW2 Airforce pilot whom God used to write many songs we sing today. One is titled, "God's final call":

"Someday you'll hear God's final call to you to take His offer of salvation true. This could be it, my friend, if you but knew. God's final call. God's final call.

"How can you live another day in sin, thinking someday with Christ you will begin? O will you hear above the world's loud din, God's final call, God's final call?"

"If you reject God's final call of grace, you'll have no chance your footsteps to retrace. All hope will then be gone, and doom you'll face. O hear His call, God's final call."

This is Isaiah's message to us this morning in his sermon about Moab: "O hear God's call of gracious salvation through Zion's King. This may be God's final call."

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*