

Isaiah 15:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He is gone up to Bajith, and to Dibon, the high places, to weep: Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off.

Analysis

The cascade of place-names (Bajith, Dibon, Nebo, Medeba) traces Moab's grief from temple to high places to cities. "Going up" to weep suggests both geographical movement to elevated worship sites and spiritual seeking in crisis—yet Moab seeks help at idolatrous shrines, not from the true God. The shaving of heads and cutting off of beards represents extreme mourning in Ancient Near Eastern culture, often forbidden to Israel (Leviticus 19:27-28) as it resembled pagan mourning rites. Moab's desperate grief reveals the inadequacy of false gods in genuine crisis. Reformed theology emphasizes that mankind instinctively seeks the transcendent in suffering, yet apart from revelation in Christ, these religious impulses lead to empty ritual rather than redemption.

Historical Context

Nebo and Medeba were significant Moabite cities mentioned in the Mesha Stele. High places (bamot) served as outdoor worship sites throughout the region. Archaeological excavations at these sites reveal altars, standing stones, and cult objects. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh as their national deity (Numbers 21:29), engaging in practices including child sacrifice (2 Kings 3:27). Isaiah prophesied during a period when Assyrian military pressure forced vassal states into desperate political and religious responses.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Why do people instinctively turn to religion in crisis, yet often fail to find genuine help?
2. How does Moab's futile weeping at false shrines illustrate the emptiness of idolatry?
3. What distinguishes genuine repentance from mere crisis-driven religious activity?

Interlinear Text

נָבּוּ	עַל	לִבּוֹ כִּי	הַבָּמֹת	וְדִיבֹן	הַבַּיִת	עָלָה
over Nebo	to weep	the high places	and to Dibon	to Bajith	He is gone up	
H5015	H1065	H1116	H1769	H1006	H5927	
רָאשָׁם יוֹ	בְּכָל	יִלֵּל יֵל	מוֹאָב	מִיִּדְבָּא	וְעַל	
on all their heads	shall howl	Moab	and over Medeba			
H7218	H3605	H3213	H4124	H4311	H5921	
גְּרוּעָה:	זָקָן	כָּל	קִרְיָתַיִם			
and every beard	shall be baldness					
H1639	H2206	H3605	H7144			

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 48:1 (Parallel theme): Against Moab thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded and taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed.

Leviticus 21:5 (Parallel theme): They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in their flesh.

Isaiah 3:24 (Parallel theme): And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness; and instead of a stomacher a girding of sackcloth; and burning instead of beauty.

Jeremiah 48:18 (Parallel theme): Thou daughter that dost inhabit Dibon, come down from thy glory, and sit in thirst; for the spoiler of Moab shall come upon thee, and he shall destroy thy strong holds.

Deuteronomy 34:1 (Parallel theme): And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the LORD shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan,

Numbers 21:30 (Parallel theme): We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba.