

Isaiah 16:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it shall come to pass, when it is seen that Moab is weary on the high place, that he shall come to his sanctuary to pray; but he shall not prevail.

Analysis

When Moab appears at high places, exhausting themselves in prayer to false gods, it proves ineffective—"he shall not prevail." Desperate religious activity reveals idolatry's impotence. They go to sanctuary to pray but accomplish nothing. Religious zeal directed toward false gods is futile—sincerity doesn't validate falsehood. Reformed theology emphasizes only prayer directed to the true God through Christ avails. All other religious activity, however earnest, fails to turn aside judgment. Moab's frantic but futile prayers contrast with effective prayer rooted in covenant relationship with Yahweh.

Historical Context

Moab's high places were outdoor worship sites dedicated to Chemosh, their national deity. Archaeological excavations reveal altars, standing stones, cult objects. In crisis, Moabites intensified worship of traditional gods—the human instinct toward religion in trouble. However, Chemosh couldn't deliver (1 Kings 11:7 calls him "the abomination of Moab"). This prophecy mocks religious activity disconnected from truth. The failure of Moabite prayer vindicated Yahweh as the only true God.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What does futile prayer at high places teach about religious sincerity versus truth?
2. How does false gods' failure in crisis demonstrate only the true God provides refuge?
3. How do people today exhaust themselves in ineffective religious activities rather than coming to Christ?

Interlinear Text

וְהָיָה H1961	כִּי H3588	וְנָתַן H7200	כִּי H3588	נִלְאָה H3811	בְּ H4124
		And it shall come to pass when it is seen		is weary	that Moab
עַל H5921	הַבֶּמֶה H1116	וְכִי H935	אֵל H413	מִקְדָּשׁוֹ H4720	לְהִתְפַּלֵּל H6419
	on the high place	that he shall come		to his sanctuary	to pray
וְלֹא H3808	יִכָּלֵל H3201				
	but he shall not prevail				

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 15:2 (Parallel theme): 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.

Jeremiah 48:35 (Parallel theme): Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, saith the LORD, him that offereth in the high places, and him that burneth incense to his gods.

1 Kings 18:29 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when midday was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

Numbers 23:28 (Parallel theme): And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.

Numbers 22:39 (Parallel theme): And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjath-huzoth.

Numbers 23:14 (Parallel theme): And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.