



The **Fiery** Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 48:1-47

Topic

Jeremiah uses a vineyard metaphor to describe the false pride of the Moabites

Title

"The Days of Wine & Posers"

Introduction

After pictures of Capri Sun juice pouches containing mold went viral on social media sites company officials released a statement. They said, in part,

Among the many, many millions of pouches we sell each year, **it does happen from time to time** because the product is preservative free. If mold does occur, we completely agree that **it can be unsightly and gross, but it is not harmful** and is more of a quality issue rather than a safety issue.

Regardless the relative safety of drinking moldy juice, it's a sign something went very wrong.

Something went very wrong with the Old Testament nation of Moab. Jeremiah will compare them to wine that has been fermenting too long in its container and has become full of dregs and lees - the unwanted sediments that settle to the bottom and can ruin the scent and taste of the wine.

As to the root problems Jeremiah will tell us there were two: The Moabites *exalted* themselves above God and they preferred a life of material *ease* to one of worshipping the living God.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions suggested by the text: #1 Would You Describe Yourself As Being Exalted Or As Exalting?, and #2 Would You Describe Yourself As Being At Ease Or As Emptied?

#1 Would You Describe Yourself
As Being Exalted Or As Exalting?

Verse one reads like an announcement in that weird Public Notices section of the classified ads.

"Against Moab. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Woe to Nebo! For it is plundered, Kirjathaim is shamed and taken; The high stronghold is shamed and dismayed..."

We are in a section of Jeremiah that is a series of prophecies against the Gentile nations surrounding Judah. Some are well known to us, like Egypt, the Philistines, Damascus, and Babylon. Others are little known to us, like Moab and Ammon and Edom. Some, I'd wager, are unknown to us, like Kedar, Hazor, and Elam.

The Moabites were mostly hostile to the Jews throughout their history. A couple of memorable incidents stand out.

- At the time of the Exodus the Moabites would not allow the Jews to pass through their land.
- A little later on their king, Balaak, hired a prophet named Balaam to curse the Jews. He couldn't do it but he did give the king a strategy to wreak havoc upon the Jews. Just send beautiful Moabite priestesses into the camp and the Jewish men would lie with them and bring a judgment from God upon themselves. He did; they did; twenty-four thousand Israelites were killed by God in a plague before it was over.

The prophecies of this chapter mention a slew of Moabite cities:

- The first ten verses of our chapter contain prophecies against certain Moabite cities. Scanning the verses, you see Kirjathaim, Heshbon, Madmen, Horonaim, and Luhith.
- Later in the chapter, in verses eighteen through twenty-five, you see Dibon, Aeror, Arnon, Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, Beth Gamul and Beth Meon, Kerioth and Bozrah.
- Later still, in verses thirty-one through thirty-four, you read of Kir Heres, Sibmah, Eleahleh, and Zoar.

In verses twenty-four and twenty-five, you read, "On all the cities of the land of Moab, Far or near. The horn of Moab is cut off, And his arm is broken," says the LORD."

His "horn," referring to strength, would be "cut off, and his arm broken," by Babylon. Drop down to verses forty through forty-six. They detail Moab's defeat at the hands of Babylon.

Jeremiah 48:40 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, one shall fly like an eagle, And spread his wings over Moab.

Jeremiah 48:41 Kerioth is taken, And the strongholds are surprised; The mighty men's hearts in Moab on that day shall be Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs.

Jeremiah 48:42 And Moab shall be destroyed as a people, Because he exalted himself against the LORD.

Jeremiah 48:43 Fear and the pit and the snare shall be upon you, O inhabitant of Moab," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 48:44 "He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit, And he who gets out of the pit shall be caught in the snare. For upon Moab, upon it I will bring The year of their punishment," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 48:45 "Those who fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon Because of exhaustion. But a fire shall come out of Heshbon, A flame from the midst of Sihon, And shall devour the brow of Moab, The crown of the head of the sons of tumult.

Jeremiah 48:46 Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh perish; For your sons have been taken captive, And your daughters captive.

"Chemosh" was the name of the Moabite's primary god. Like all idols, it was powerless to save them. God would exercise His prerogative to judge a nation for its wickedness and there was nothing they could do to stop it.

Well, there *was* something, but they didn't do it. They could have repented. Look at the last verse of the chapter:

Jeremiah 48:47 "Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab In the latter days," says the LORD. Thus far is the judgment of Moab.

God took no pleasure in judging them. It was His desire to save them and He would, in fact, spare a remnant. Commentators are divided as to whether "in the latter days" means at the time King Cyrus of Persia allowed nations taken captive by Babylon to return to their homelands, or if it is the future Millennial Kingdom. Either way, the heart of God to save is revealed alongside His holiness that requires He judge unrepentant sin.

The mention of all these cities got me thinking. Cities have their own characteristics. We think of Las Vegas, for example, as "Sin City." New Orleans, called "the Big Easy" officially, is unofficially referred to as "the Big Sleazy." Some of you are given to calling Berkley "Berzerkeley."

Moabite cities, taken together, had a distinct characteristic. We saw it in verse forty-two and it's repeated in verse twenty-six so we can't miss it.

Jeremiah 48:26 "Make him drunk, Because he **exalted himself against the LORD**. Moab shall wallow in his vomit, And he shall also be in derision.

In both verses Moab is personified as having "exalted himself against The Lord."

What does that mean? Well, it can mean two things and both of them are important.

First, when you "exalt [yourself] against The Lord," you reject God and go your own way. It means that the Moabites thought they were self-sufficient. They didn't think they had any need for God.

God calls this pride. In verse twenty-nine we read,

Jeremiah 48:29 "We have heard the pride of Moab (He is exceedingly proud), Of his loftiness and arrogance and pride, And of the haughtiness of his heart."

Jeremiah heaps up words as if to create a literary pedestal for Moab to be seen standing upon.

Regarding their pride, one researcher wrote,

The Moabites... were a lusty people, with sophisticated tastes and strong appetites. Moab was also financially secure... They were accustomed to plenteous harvests of "summer fruits" and an abundance of wine. As a result of their prosperity and their skill in satisfying the lusts of the flesh, Moab became exceedingly proud.

Not to pick on it, but you could substitute Las Vegas for the Moabites in that paragraph and it would be a spot-on description.

Truth is, you could substitute a lot of cities, even whole countries, and it would be accurate.

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There is a second meaning to the phrase "exalted himself against The Lord." There's a document called the Targum. It is a paraphrase of the Hebrew Scriptures in Aramaic. Jews began to use it when Hebrew was no longer commonly spoken among them.

In the Targum our words from verses twenty-six and forty-two are translated, "exalted himself against **the people** of The Lord." That is how Jews understand these verses.

The Bible does record Moab as refusing to acknowledge the unique relationship between Israel and God, arrogantly deriding Israel (Zephaniah 2:8-11) and saying that Judah was just like any other nation (Ezekiel 25:8-11).

In this very chapter you read, in verse twenty-seven,

Jeremiah 48:27 For was not Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves? For whenever you speak of him, You shake your head in scorn.

Though we are not Moabites, not by physical descent, **we can be by choice.** We can choose ease as our driving principle when God would have us willing to empty ourselves serving Him.

We would do well as a nation to acknowledge not just that Israel is our ally, but that she is in a unique relationship with the living God.

For exalting themselves above God and His people the Moabites were conquered. Though we are not Moabites, not by physical descent, **we can be by choice**. We can choose ease as our driving principle when God would have us willing to empty ourselves serving Him.

They were "a lusty people, with sophisticated tastes and appetites... financially secure... accustomed to plenty..."

Notwithstanding deficits and sequestration and the like, for the most part Americans could fit that description.

At the very least I'd have to say that the basic worldview of most Americans is skewed to secular things. In almost any poll ever taken, when Americans are asked, "What is the number one problem in America?," they invariably say "The economy."

The number one problem in America is sin. We need to humble ourselves before God. Instead of being exalted we must return to exalting Him.

#2 Would You Describe Yourself
As Being At Ease Or As Emptied?

Jeremiah also compared Moab to a vineyard and its wine, and the Babylonians to wine workers.

Look at verses eleven and twelve.

Jeremiah 48:11 "Moab has been at ease from his youth; He has settled on his dregs, And has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, Nor has he gone into captivity. Therefore his taste remained in him, And his scent has not changed.

Jeremiah 48:12 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I shall send him wine-workers Who will tip him over And empty his vessels And break the bottles.

Moabites were very proficient and sophisticated wine makers. In verses thirty-two and thirty-three you read,

Jeremiah 48:32 O vine of Sibmah! I will weep for you with the weeping of Jazer. Your plants have gone over the sea, They reach to the sea of Jazer. The plunderer has fallen on your summer fruit and your vintage.

Jewremiah 48:33 Joy and gladness are taken From the plentiful field And from the land of Moab; I have caused wine to fail from the winepresses; No one will tread with joyous shouting - Not joyous shouting!

This is the kind of language you'd use, for example, if the Napa Valley was conquered by some invading force.

There are a ton of competing opinions on the actual process in those days of making wine. What we can say for sure is that after the grapes had been trodden or somehow crushed, the resulting juice was poured into large storage jars which were sealed with clay, leaving only a small vent hole to bleed off the fermentation gases.

During that time certain solid byproducts of the fermentation would settle to the bottom; these were the dregs or the lees. In order to complete the wine-making process, the fermenting grape juice was poured from its original jars into fresh ones. This involved straining out the dregs and lees - the sediments that would ruin the wine if left settled in it.

Being sophisticated wine makers, the Moabites would *never* think to leave the wine fermenting on its lees indefinitely. It would ruin the vintage and they were too good as vintners to allow it.

It's a pretty potent illustration for folks dedicated to wine making.

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Like grape juice that had been neglected while fermenting, there was nothing to do but tip the jars, empty them out, and break them.

God intended this to communicate a spiritual truth. They had neglected spiritual things. They were content to live in relative ease, enjoying the bounty God provided but refusing to acknowledge that their prosperity came from God.

I especially like the phrase, in verse eleven, "Therefore his taste remained in him, And his scent has not changed." It's an insightful description of a nonbeliever.

Human beings are described as being born dead in trespasses and sins.

- A dead person, spiritually speaking, has certain "tastes" for sin.
- A dead person, spiritually speaking, has the spiritual stench of the world.

God is not content to leave you in that natural state. Jesus came into the world to die, then rise from the dead, to offer you the forgiveness of sins and make you a new creature in Him. The Holy Spirit is in the world seeking to convict men of sin, of righteousness, and of the judgment to come. Jesus, on the Cross, was lifted up so He could draw all men to Himself. He is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe.

Remain in your natural state and you're like grape juice left too long fermenting. You become settled in your pride - thinking you are self-sufficient or looking to some dead Chemosh as your god.

I think we can also use this wine making illustration to encourage believers.

Dregs and lees cannot be allowed to ruin wine. We said that as the dregs sank to the bottom, the wine makers would pour the liquid back into another vessel. They did this multiple times. Back and forth, from vessel to vessel, each time being careful not to pour out the dregs into the next container. This was their method of making the most excellent wine.

God is an excellent Vintner. We would expect, then, for Him to constantly pour us into new vessels so we are not too long settling on our dregs and lees.

Even after we are saved there are lots of ways we can become settled. In the church, for example, we can get settled into certain traditions and be closed to trying new methods of ministry.

Or we can borrow someone else's methods of ministry rather than seeking the direction and power of God the Holy Spirit.

Or we can utilize methods that have been developed in the world and seek to apply them to the church.

In our personal lives this settling has application to giving in to the flesh. Pastor Chuck Smith writes,

It's tragic when Christians get settled in the things of the flesh... At one time in their Christian walks they were shocked that people could do such evil things of the flesh. They'd say, "I would never do that!" After a while, you find them doing the same things and becoming settled in them. This impurity actually begins to permeate your whole life. Your life begins to be colored by the flesh. Your life begins to smell of the things of the flesh. Your life begins to... taste of the things of the flesh.

The "flesh" is that principle in our human bodies that remains after we are saved demanding we fulfill its sinful appetites; or that we satisfy its normal appetites in sinful ways. In keeping with our illustration we could say that as long as we are in these bodies, some dregs, some lees, will remain.

You ought to regularly ask The Lord to pour you out. Then don't be surprised when something unsettles your life.

Knowing this, you ought to regularly ask The Lord to pour you out. Then don't be surprised when something unsettles your life.

You don't need to ask; God will do it anyway! He's too good a Vintner to leave you alone. He has something better for you than the dregs and lees of the flesh. But it's better to cooperate.

You weren't born again to become a bottle of Ripple.

