

## Isaiah 15-16, The Burden of Moab

### Overview

These chapters are broadly chiasitic:

Destruction of Moab	15:1	16:13-14
Moab weeps	15:2-4	Moab's Sin of Idolatry, 16:12
		16:9-11
The Lord weeps	15:5-9	16:7-8
		Moab's Sin of Pride, 16:6
Moab and Israel	16:1-5	

The big idea can be stated in a single sentence: Faced with lamentable destruction, Moab refuses the salvation that God offers her because of her pride and commitment to her false gods.

The prophecy is filled with the names of various cities throughout Moab, far more than the other burdens. This list invites comparison with two other texts:

- Many of these cities are listed in Num 32:3, 34-38 as belonging to Reuben and Gad. Their territory lay north of the Arnon, and Moab lay to the south. That they are now here described as Moabite suggests that Moab conquered them.
- The Moabite Stone (sometimes called the Mesha Stele after its author)<sup>1</sup>, an inscription by Mesha king of Moab (2 Kings 3:4-5) about 800 BC, in which he boasts of having captured many of these cities for Kemosh his god.

This oracle reads like God's response to the Moabite Stone. "Mesha, you boasted of conquering all these cities for Kemosh, but the time will come when I will lay them waste." We can understand the main thrust of the oracle without knowing of the Moabite stone, but if we have read the stone, we can hear echoes of it throughout these chapters.

### 15:1, Initial Doom

**15:1 The burden of Moab.**--We return to the standard opening, which designates the nation concerning whom the prophecy is given.

**Because in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; because in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence;**--Moab will be destroyed. Note two details:

- Ar and Kir are not among the Israelite cities of Num 32, but are in the midst of Moab. We are

<sup>1</sup> For a general discussion, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesha\\_Stele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesha_Stele) . A superior translation is at <http://www.kchanson.com/ANCDOCS/westsem/mesha.html> .

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not looking at an enemy nibbling around the edges, but at an attack at the nation's heart.

- The repetition of “in the night” suggests the suddenness and unexpectedness of the judgment, “as a thief in the night.” Mesha boasts of a night-time attack against Israelite Nebo in which he killed the entire population, and this may be an echo.

When was this fulfilled? Moab suffered numerous defeats, and disappears historically during the Persian period (between the Babylonian empire and the Greeks). 16:13-14, written later than the main oracle, anticipates a catastrophe within Isaiah's time, but unfortunately we do not know what it is.

### 15:2-9, First Lament

vv. 2-9 are pervaded with weeping and crying. After Mesha's boast, the nation will be reduced to mourning.

The cities named in 2-4 are north of the Arnon. They are the territory of Reuben and Gad, which Moab had taken away. Now Moab mourns their loss.

**2 He is gone up to Bajith [the temple<sup>2</sup>], and to Dibon, the high places, to weep:**--Dibon is where Mesha began his boast, and where he claims to have taken the riches from the Israelite cities he conquered. Now the nation goes there to weep.

**Moab shall howl over Nebo, and over Medeba: on all their heads shall be baldness, and every beard cut off. 3 In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth:**--Shaving the hair and wearing sackcloth were universal symbols of mourning.

**on the tops of their houses, and in their streets, every one shall howl, weeping abundantly. 4 And Heshbon shall cry, and Elealeh: their voice shall be heard even unto Jahaz: therefore the armed soldiers of Moab shall cry out; his life shall be grievous unto him.**--Mesha boasted of his military conquests, but now his proud soldiers are reduced to weeping.

Two things change at v. 5.

1. The cities are now south of the Arnon, in Moab's proper territory. The nation loses not only the cities it had taken from Israel, but also its own territory.
2. More importantly, a new voice, in the first person, joins in the mourning.

**5 My heart shall cry out for Moab; his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old:**--That is, young and strong, now for the first time placed under the yoke. But who is speaking?

**for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction. 6 For the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate: for the hay is withered away, the grass faileth, there is no green thing. 7 Therefore the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have laid up, shall they carry away to the brook of the willows. 8 For the cry is gone round about the borders of Moab; the howling thereof unto Eglaim, and the howling thereof unto Beerelim. 9 For the waters of Dimon shall be full of blood: for I will bring more upon Dimon, lions upon him that escapeth of Moab, and upon the remnant of the land.**--

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<sup>2</sup> The mention of Beth-Bamoth in the Stele line 27 makes it tempting to identify Bajith with this site, but the presence of the article here urges us to prefer the generic translation, “the house” (i.e., temple).

Mesha boasted city by city of his conquest of Israel. Now city by city, his own territory is laid waste.

What is remarkable here is the repetition of the first person in v. 9. It identifies the first-person speaker as the one bringing judgment—the Lord! With the Gentiles, as with Israel, judgment is his strange work (28:21). He will certainly judge, but he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 33:11).<sup>3</sup>

## **16:1-5, Invitation to Salvation**

It is not entirely clear who is speaking throughout this section, but there are some clues to changes in speaker.

### ***1-3a, The Lord invites their tribute***

First, a series of plural imperatives surround a motivation. The plurals no doubt refer to the Moabites, perhaps their leaders. Isaiah, as the Lord's spokesman, is urging them to reach a decision to offer their tribute to Jerusalem.

**16:1 Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land from Sela to the wilderness, unto the mount of the daughter of Zion.**--David subdued Moab (2 Sam 8:2), and up until the time of Mesha, the nation sent lambs as tribute to Israel (2 Kings 3:4-5). But Mesha rebelled, as recorded both in Kings and on his Stele. Now the nation is being told to return to its submission to Israel. It need not send 100,000 lambs, as in the days of Ahab. Just one will do.

**2 For it shall be, that, as a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon.**--This command is motivated by the coming judgment.

**3 Take counsel, execute judgment;**--Isaiah urges the leaders to reach a decision before it is too late.

### ***3b-4a, He recommends their supplication.***

In the midst of v. 3, the imperatives change to feminine singulars. They are to send their tribute to “the mount of the Daughter Zion,” and here he frames for them the speech they should make as they address the city, asking for protection.

**make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth. 4 Let mine outcasts dwell with thee. [As for] Moab, be thou a covert to them [him] from the face of the spoiler:**

### ***4b-5, He describes the authority to which they shall submit***

Now the Lord motivates his invitation by describing the wonderful rule that will be established in Jerusalem, under the promised Davidic king (compare the description in 9:6-7).

**for the extortioner is at an end, the spoiler ceaseth, the oppressors are consumed out of the land. 5**

<sup>3</sup> Dave Nelson observes that this divine sympathy is not attested with other nations in these burdens, and suggests that the close relation of “righteous Lot” and his sons Moab and Ammon to the chosen people may have something to do with what we read here. Recall that they, along with Edom (another close relation of Israel), received special treatment during the Exodus (Deut 2:5, 9, 19).

**And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness.**

## **16:6-12, Second Lament**

Again we have mourning, first by Moab, then by the first-person speaker, but this time enclosed in two accusations. If Moab had heeded the invitation of 16:1-5, the lamentation of 15:2-9 would have been replaced with joy. But she would not, as vv. 6, 12 show. Compare our Lord's lamentation over Jerusalem,

Mat 23:37 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!

### **16:6, First Failing: Pride**

**6 We have heard of the pride of Moab;**--Perhaps here Isaiah is actually referring to the sentiments in the Moabite stone.

**he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so.**--The semantic emphasis of "lies" is "idle talk" rather than just falsehood. His boasts are empty.

### **16:7-11, Double Mourning**

As in 15:2-9, two voices join the mourning. The first is Moab itself, the second speaks in the first person. Unlike the first mourning section, now the cities are both north and south of the Arnon in both paragraphs.

**7 Therefore shall Moab howl for Moab, every one shall howl: for the foundations of Kirhareth shall ye mourn; surely they are stricken. 8 For the fields of Heshbon languish, and the vine of Sibmah: the lords of the heathen have broken down the principal plants thereof, they are come even unto Jazer, they wandered through the wilderness: her branches are stretched out, they are gone over the sea.**--Foreign powers have cut off the trade that formerly connected Moab with distant places.

**9 Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jazer the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears, O Heshbon, and Elealeh: for the shouting for thy summer fruits and for thy harvest is fallen. 10 And gladness is taken away, and joy out of the plentiful field; and in the vineyards there shall be no singing, neither shall there be shouting: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their vintage shouting to cease. 11 Wherefore my bowels shall sound like an harp for Moab, and mine inward parts for Kirhareth.**--Again, the speaker not only mourns for Moab, but (end of v. 10) takes credit for bringing the disaster upon them, leading us to identify him with the Lord.

### **16:12, Second Failing: Idolatry**

**12 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.**--Moab refused the gracious offer of salvation, not only because of its pride, but also because of its devotion to Kemosh, its false god. Both of these characteristics are prominent in the Mesha Stele.

### **16:13-14, Final Doom**

**13 This is the word that the LORD hath spoken concerning [to] Moab since that time [formerly].**--These last two verses are apparently written at a different time than the rest of ch. 15-16. The preposition suggests that Isaiah actually delivered these warnings to a Moabite delegation; recall his concern with “messengers of the nation” in 14:32, and his involvement with the court in the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

**14 But now the LORD hath spoken, saying,**--Then, God made a gracious offer of salvation, but Moab refused it. Now the door is closed.

**Within three years,**--We do not know the event of which Isaiah here writes.

**as the years of an hireling,**--An indentured worker watches the calendar carefully, and does not work a day longer than the agreement. God's promise of judgment will not linger past its appointed time.

**and the glory of Moab shall be contemned, with all that great multitude; and the remnant shall be very small and feeble.**--The nation will be humbled, and only a small remnant left.

## Notes

### ***Background on Moab***

#### **Religion**

Their chief god was Chemosh, who accepted human sacrifice (2 Kings 3:27). Israel fell into worshipping him and his pantheon in the time of the judges (Jud 10:6), and again under Solomon (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13).

#### **Patriarchs**

Gen 19:37, son of Lot by his elder daughter after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

#### **Exodus**

Num 22-24, Balak king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel

#### **Judges**

1 Sam 12:9, along with Philistines and Hazor, the memorable oppressors of this period.

Ruth, place of refuge during famine. The Moabite Stone shows that their language was very close to Hebrew, and people from one nation could make themselves understood to the other.

#### **Monarchy**

1 Sam 22:3,4, place of refuge for David's parents

2 Sam 8:2, subdued by David

2Ki 3:4-5 And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. 5 But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

Subdued by joint force of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat

#### **Antichrist**

Moab, along with Edom and Ammon, escapes his influence:

Dan 11:41 He shall enter also into the glorious land, and many *countries* shall be overthrown: but these shall escape out of his hand, *even* Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon.

## Millennium

Moab will be subject to Israel,

Isa 11:14 But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them.

Isa 25:10-12 For in this mountain shall the hand of the LORD rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill. 11 And he shall spread forth his hands in the midst of them, as he that swimmeth spreadeth forth *his hands* to swim: and he shall bring down their pride together with the spoils of their hands. 12 And the fortress of the high fort of thy walls shall he bring down, lay low, *and* bring to the ground, *even* to the dust.

(These are the only references to Moab in Isaiah, along with ch. 15-16)

## Place Names

Many of the places named here are in the inheritance of Reuben and Gad, Num 32:

Num 32:3 **Ataroth**, and **Dibon**, and **Jazer**, and **Nimrah**, and **Heshbon**, and **Elealeh**, and **Shebam**, and **Nebo**, and **Beon**,

Num 32:34-38 And the children of Gad built **Dibon**, and **Ataroth**, and **Aroer**, 35 And **Atroth-Shophan**, and **Jaazer**, and **Jogbehah**, 36 And **Bethnimrah**, and **Bethharan**, fenced cities: and folds for sheep. 37 And the children of Reuben built **Heshbon**, and **Elealeh**, and **Kirjathaim**, 38 And **Nebo**, and **Baalmeon**, (their names being changed,) and **Shibmah**: and gave other names unto the cities which they builded.

Here is Isaiah's list:

15:1 **Ar**, **Kir**

2 **Bajit (Beth-Bamoth?)**, **Dibon (9?)**, **Nebo**, **Medeba**

4 **Heshbon (16:8)**, **Elealeh (16:9)**, **Jahaz**

5 **Zoar**, **Luhith**, **Horonaim**

6 **Nimrim**

8 **Elgaim**, **Beerelim**

16:1 **Sela**

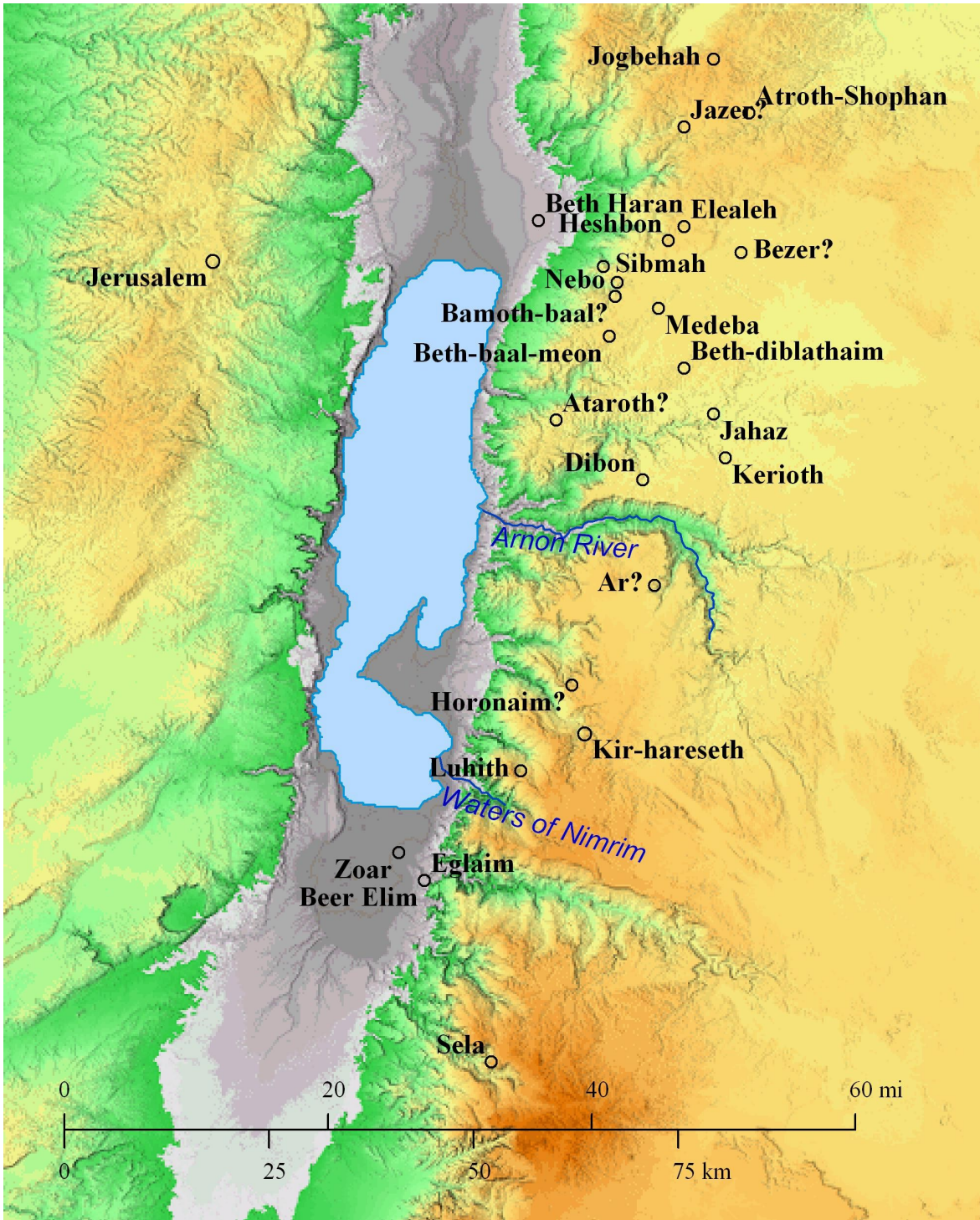
2 **Fords of Arnon**

7 (11)

8 **Sibma (9)**, **Jazer (9)**



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The map and following table present a unified list of place names from Isa 15-16, Num 32, and the Moabite Stone, ordered from N to S (except for two names for which I cannot find appropriate locations).



## Isaiah 15-16, The Burden of Moab

Name	Isa 15-16	Num 32	Stele
Jogbehah		35c	
Atroth-Shohan?		35a	
Jazer	16:8,9	3c, 35b	
(Beth) Nimrah	15:6 (Nimrim)	3d, 36a	
Elealeh	15:4; 16:9	3f, 37b	
Beth Haran		36b	
Heshbon	15:4; 16:8	3e, 37a	
Bezer <sup>4</sup>			27
Sibmah	16:8,9	3g, 38c	
Nebo	15:2	3h, 38a	15
Beth-Bamoth <sup>5</sup>	15:2 Bajit?		27
Kerioth, Kiriathaim		37c	10, 14
Madeba	15:2		8, 30
Baal Meon		3 (Beon), 38b	9, 30
Beth-Diblaten <sup>6</sup>			30
Ataroth		3a, 34b	10, 11
Yahaz	15:4		19, 20
Dibon	15:2	34a	2,3
Highway in Arnon	16:2		26
Aroer	15:1, Ar?	34c	26
Hauranen	15:5 Horonaim?		31, 32
Kir (Haresheth)	15:1; 16:7, 11		
Luhith	15:5		
Nimrim	15:6		
Zoar	15:5		
Eglaim	15:8		
Beer Elim	15:8		
Sela	16:1		
Sharon			13
Maharith			14

4 NetBible puts this at 32.51613616943359,36.48828887939453, in the Golan, but surely that is too far away from Moab.

5 In the vicinity of Heshbon and Dibon according to Josh 13:17; visited by Israel on their wanderings in Num 21:19, 20.

6 According to Num 33:46, 47, between Dibon and Nebo.

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Here are the names in the Stele, organized by their context:

Name	"I built"	Sanctuary of Kemosh	"I conquered"	Men of xxx
2,3 Dibon	x	x		
8, 30, Madeba	30		8	
9, 30, Baal Meon	x			
10, Qiryaten	x			
10, 11 Ataroth			x	
13 Qerioith		x		
13 Sharon				x
14 Maharith				x
15 Nebo			x	
19 Yahaz )(21, near Dibon)			x	
26, Aroer	x			
26, Highway in Arnon				
27, Beth-Bamoth	x			
27, Bezer	x			
30, Beth-Diblaten	x			
31, 32, Hauranen			x	

Here is the text, in the translation of Wikipedia (with a few of my corrections)

1. I am Mesha, son of Kemosh[-yat], the king of Moab, the **Di-**
2. **-bonite**. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reign-
3. -ed after my father. And I built this high-place for Kemosh in the 'citadel,' a high place of [sal-]
4. -vation because he saved me from all the kings, and because showed me the downfall of all my adversaries. Omr-
5. -i was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab for many days,because Kemosh was angry with his
6. land. And his son replaced him; and he also said, "I will also oppress Moab". In my days he spoke thus.
7. But I was victorious over him and his house. And Israel suffered everlasting destruction, And Omri had conquered the lan-
8. -d of **Madaba**, and he dwelt there during his reign and half the reign of his son, forty years. But Kemosh
9. returned it in my days. So I [re]built **Baal Meon**, and I the water reservoir in it. And I bu[ilt]
10. **Qiryaten**. The man of Gad had dwelt in **Ataroth** from of old; and the king of Israel
11. built **Ataroth** for him. But I fought against the city and took it. And I slew all the people [and]
12. the city became the property of Kemosh and Moab. And I carried from there its Davidic altar

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hearth and I

13. dragged it before Kemosh in **Qerioit**, and I settled in it men of **Sharon** m[en]
14. of **Maharit**. And Kemosh said to me, "Go! Seize **Nebo** against Israel." so I
15. proceeded by night and fought with it from the crack of dawn to midday, and I to-
16. -ok it and I slew all of them: seven thousand men and boys, and women and gi-
17. and maidens because I had dedicated it to Ashtar Kemosh I took [the ves-]
18. -sels of YHWH, and I dragged them before Kemosh. And the king of Israel had built
19. **Yahaz**, and he dwelt in it while he was fighting with me, but Kemosh drove him out before me.  
so
20. I took from Moab two hundred men, all his captains. And I brought them to **Yahaz**, And I seized  
it
21. in order to add (it) to **Dibon**. I (myself) have built the 'citadel', 'the wall(s) of the forest' and the  
wall
22. of the 'acropolis'. And I built its gates; And I built its towers. And
23. I built a royal palace; and I made the ramparts for the reservo[ir for] water in the mid-
24. -st of the city. But there was no cistern in the midst of the city, in the 'citadel,' so I said to all the  
people, "Make [for]
25. yourselves each man a cistern in his house". And I hewed the shaft for the 'citadel' with  
prisoner-
26. -s of Israel. I built **Aroer**, and I made the **highway in the Arnon**.
27. I built **Beth-Bamot**, because it was in ruins. I built **Bezer**, because it was
28. a ruin [with] the armed men of **Dibon** because all of **Dibon** was under orders and I ru-
29. -led [ove]r [the] hundreds in the towns which I have annexed to the land. And I bui-
30. -lt **Medeba** and **Beth-Diblaten** and **Beth-Baal-Meon**, and I carried there [my herdsmen]
31. [to herd] the small cattle of the land. And as for **Hauranen**, the [Ho]use of [Da]vid dwelt in it  
[wh]ile
32. [it fought with me and] Kemosh [s]aid to me, "Go down, fight against **Hauranen**". And I went  
down [and I fou-
33. -ght with the city and I took it and] Kemosh [re]turned it in my days. Then I went up from there  
te[n...]
34. [...a high] place of justice and I [...]