

Micah

Micah returns to the “in your face” style of the prophets

- Micah doesn't mince words toward the nations of Israel and Judah regarding their sin

Most of the time, Micah is well-known for his prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ in the city of Bethlehem³¹

- We will return to that later in the lesson

Micah's name means “Who is like Yahweh”

- He hints at his own name in 7:18 when he writes, “Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love” (emphasis mine)³²

Micah's predominant focus is on the southern kingdom of Judah³³

- However, he also includes the northern kingdom of Israel³⁴

This prophet ministers during the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1)

- This helps us to date the timing of this prophecy
- This is confirmed by Jeremiah 26:18

Uzziah stands out as a king who enjoyed a long and prosperous reign over Judah

- His death caused Isaiah to go to the Temple to mourn in Isaiah 6

Uzziah's son, Jotham, came to power and followed in his father's footsteps

- Yet Jotham failed to remove the idolatry from the land

Ahaz was the next king

- He was a wicked king

But Hezekiah was king after Ahaz

- He was a very good king who sought to honor the LORD
- He helped to guide the people back into a right relationship with God
- Several reforms were used of God to bring this about

It was during these days that Micah ministered

- We can see the spiritual up and down of these kings

This was the plight of Judah

- But what was happening to Israel during this time?

³¹ Dr. Alan B. Stringfellow, *Through the Bible in One Year*, 97.

³² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, 247.

³³ Mentioned 11 times (1:5; 2:7, 12; 3:1, 8, 9; 4:2; 5:7, 8; 7:20)

³⁴ Mentioned 12 times (1:5, 13, 14, 15; 2:12; 3:1, 8, 9; 5:1, 2, 3; 6:2)

During the ministry of Judah, Israel continued to crumble until its destruction in 722 BC

- The Assyrians reached the apex of their might and power during this time in world history

As a matter of fact, Babylon was still under the control of the Assyrians

- But Micah prophesied that Babylon would take Judah captive in the near future
- “Writhe and labor to give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth, for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies” (4:10)

This must have seemed rather far-fetched at the time

- The Assyrians were the dominant figure in the world
- Yet Micah prophesies that Babylon, not Assyria, would overthrow Judah
- He was right!

It would be about 136 years after the destruction of Israel for Babylon to rise in power and destroy Judah

- 586 BC marks the destruction of Judah by Babylon
- Just as Micah had predicted

We have studied the OT enough to know that God would use these two different nations to take Israel and Judah into exile

- Assyria would overthrow Israel in 722 BC
- Babylon would overthrow Judah in 586 BC

The prophet Micah was the last prophet – from a chronological standpoint – to write before the fall of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC

- Micah’s prophecy was probably written between 735 and 710 BC³⁵
- Obviously before the fall of Israel

This made Micah’s ministry around the same time as Hosea in the northern kingdom of Israel and Isaiah in the southern kingdom of Judah

Micah issues yet another warning call to the nations for their sin

- If they continue to live in unrepentant sin, God will send them away to exile

This prophecy helps to put things into perspective

- Micah points out several sins that caused the nations to go into exile
 - o Exploitation
 - o Pride
 - o False religion
 - o False prophecies

³⁵ Gerard Chrispin, *The Bible Panorama*, 376.

You could divide Micah into three major divisions

- 1st message: Judgment Will Come (1-2)
- 2nd message; Blessing Will Follow Judgment (3-5)
- 3rd message; An Indictment of Sin and a Promise of Blessing (6-7)

Each one of these divisions begins with a call to “hear”³⁶

- “Hear, O peoples, all of you; listen, O earth and all it contains, and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple” (1:2)
- “Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice?” (3:1)
- “Hear now what the LORD is saying, ‘Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice’” (6:1)

The language here is that of a court session

- The Judge is calling for a verdict on the sins of the people
- And we are allowed to be witnesses of the LORD’s court

Each one of these three major divisions ends on a note of hope

- 2:12-13
- 5:2-15
- 7:7-20

There are different foci for each of these divisions³⁷

- Chapters 1-2 – various sins of the people
 - o Oppression
 - o Bribery among the judges
 - o Ungodly priests and prophets
 - o Exploitation of the powerful
 - o Covetousness
 - o Cheating
 - o Violence
 - o Pride
- Chapters 3-5 – judgment would come on the people because of these sins
- Chapters 6-7 – God’s complaints against His own people
 - o Yet the book would end on a note of hope and consolation
 - o God’s justice would triumph!

³⁶ MacArthur, 248.

³⁷ Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Bible*, 263.

As you can tell by reading this prophecy, Micah is much like Amos

- Both are from the country
- Both speak in very black & white language, without mincing words

Micah's hometown was Moresheth Gath (1:14)³⁸

- This was about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem
- It was on the border of Judah and Philistia

Micah is very burdened over the sins of the people who claim to be God's people³⁹

- The poor were mistreated by the rich
- The people were misled by the false prophets

Even though he was from the country, Micah still had a very clear call from God to the prophetic ministry, "On the other hand I am filled with power – with the Spirit of the LORD – and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin" (3:8)

- He knew that he had been given a message to proclaim
- His confidence and courage were from the LORD, not himself

The false prophets of Micah's day were putting words in God's mouth⁴⁰

- Words that God never intended for His people

These false prophets were promising that everything would be ok and the land would be full of good things for everyone

- But in reality, these false prophets were intentionally ignoring the issue of sin and its consequences

The situation with these false prophets was really not much different than what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths."

- People will want teachers to tickle their ears
- They won't choose teachers who will talk about sin

Also in chapters 3-5, Micah tackles the sins of the leaders

- Oftentimes, these leaders abused the people for their own selfish ends

Other sins of the leaders were evident⁴¹

- Not respecting human life
- Despising justice

³⁸ Wilkinson & Boa, 262.

³⁹ Wilkinson & Boa, 262.

⁴⁰ Mark Dever, *The Message of the Old Testament*, 797.

⁴¹ Dever, 798.

- Distorting the rights of others
- Bribing judges

In 3:2, Micah puts his finger on the real issue, “You who hate good and love evil”

- This is totally opposite of what they should have been loving and hating!

This backward mentality was a by-product of their distorted view of God

- They had failed to love God
- Therefore, it shouldn't surprise us to see that they failed to love the things that God loves and hate the things that God hates

In their time of distress, the nation would cry out to God, but He would not listen

- Look at 3:4, “Then they will cry out to the LORD, but He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have practiced evil deeds”

Isn't this descriptive of the very nature of sin?

- Sin separates
- Primarily, sin separates us from the holy God

The leaders of Israel would seek God in prayer

- However, God “will not answer them”
- God “will hide His face from them at that time, because they have practiced evil deeds”

“God will treat the corrupt leaders as they have treated their people: by not hearing them when they come for help”⁴²

- The leaders had mistreated God's people
- Now God would treat these leaders with the same level of compassion that they displayed toward the people

Yet it is amazing to see how much of this prophecy is related to the restoration of God's people!

- Despite the fact of their sin, God's faithfulness is evident!

“I will surely assemble all of you, Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel. I will put them together like sheep in the fold; like a flock in the midst of its pasture they will be noisy with men” (2:12)

- God is the Shepherd Who would regather His sheep
- He would spare the remnant

The exile was a means of disciplining His people

- After 70 years of exile, He would bring them back to the land

⁴² Dever, 798.

The prophet Micah is perhaps best known for its reference to the place of Christ's birth in 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity"

- Let's look at Matthew 2:1-6, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.' ³ And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he *began* to inquire of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ And they said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet, ⁶ "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a Ruler, Who will shepherd My people"'"

This prophecy was made over 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ

- The Magi knew the truth of Micah well enough to discern that the Messiah would come from this small, insignificant place

This prophecy speaks of a coming Messiah and Deliverer Who would rescue God's people

- Of course, this is yet another reference to Jesus Christ

Christ would be the perfect Judge

- He would rule and reign with justice and righteousness

The last two chapters of Micah describe a courtroom scene

- God brings up an issue with His people, "Listen, you mountains, to the indictment of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth, because the LORD has a case against His people; even with Israel He will dispute" (6:2)

Imagine hearing these words!

- This is no human judge who can help
- This is the holy, righteous, and omnipotent Judge of the Earth!

And this great Judge has a case against Israel

- After reading Micah, we can see why Israel is in trouble!
- Their sins are plenty

Who is allowed to witness this courtroom setting?

- 6:1, "Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice"
- Nature itself would be witness against God's people

God walks Israel through an overview of their history, pointing out how He had been gracious to them

- "My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Answer Me" (6:3)

The LORD brings up the event of the Exodus, “Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (6:4)

- God delivered them in a time of distress
- God provided good leaders for the nation

God also brings up the example of Balak and Balaam, “My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and from Shittim to Gilgal, in order that you might know the righteous acts of the LORD” (6:5)

- Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel
- But Balaam could only bless Israel
- God was certainly overriding the plans of sinful mankind!
- He was displaying His sovereignty!

Then the Lord reminds the nation of Israel of their heartless worship, “With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? ⁷ Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (6:6-7)

- This is the language of sacrifice

Israel made the mistake of thinking that religion consisted of just going through the motions of worship

- Worship had become just a shell – hollow and empty

How sad that Israel had bought into the lie that God would be pleased with just externals

- Mere posture (physically bowing down)
- Lots of sacrifices
 - o Thousands of rams
 - o Ten thousand rivers of oil
 - o Presenting first-born

The nation Israel had become gifted at worshipping without their whole heart

- They could “do” the right things without dealing with sin

Then God tells Israel what He wants and expects from His people, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (6:8)

- This verse has been made into a song that is probably familiar to us

But this verse stands out as God’s own instruction for what He expected from Israel

- It is foundational because of what it says and what it does not say

Notice that God states what He wants

- To do justice
- To love kindness
- To walk humbly

There is no mention of sacrifice or external actions

- All three actions listed above deal with internal issues
- All three actions listed above deal with heart issues

Israel had become focused on externals instead of internals

- Jesus Christ dealt with the Pharisees over these same issues

They had become experts at externalizing worship

- But Jesus called them white-washed tombs

But all hope was not lost for Israel

- Even though they had failed to worship God properly, there was still hope for them
- If they would repent of their sins

“But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me” (7:7)

- Micah looked to the LORD for hope and assistance
- He modeled what it means to wait for the LORD

“Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ Thou wilt give truth to Jacob *and* unchanging love to Abraham, which Thou didst swear to our forefathers from the days of old.” (7:18-20)

- What a tremendous promise of hope!
- What a great assurance of God’s character!
 - o Forgiving
 - o Loving
 - o Faithful
 - o Trustworthy

Micah could just as well as been written to 21st century Christians

- We have oftentimes neglected the heart of worship
- We have oftentimes substituted ritualism for repentance
- We have oftentimes substituted external acts for internal change

The same temptation that Judah faced is the same temptation that the Pharisees faced

- And that same temptation is repeated in our lives

Micah 6:8 is a verse that needs to be inscribed on our minds, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

- This verse realigns our priorities
- This verse refocuses our heart to where it needs to be

I trust that you will look at your own heart to see if there is any empty ritualism taking place in your worship

Next month, we will discuss three more minor prophets

- Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah