

Micah 1:1-16

“Capital Cities, Capital Punishment”

Micah has a message for all of humanity. But his scope narrows quickly (he speaks primarily) to Israel & Judah. So, though much of the *interpretation* belongs to Israel/Judah specifically, I trust there will be plenty of *application* to be found for you & me personally.

Now, the reason we speak of “Israel & Judah” is because after the death of Solomon the kingdom of Israel was divided in 2. The 10 northern tribes formed the territory of Israel & the 2 southern tribes (Judah & Benjamin) formed the territory of Judah. & Micah is rather unique in that though God would send prophets to warn & serve in the northern kingdom & prophets to warn & serve in the southern kingdom, Micah is the only prophet who ministered to both... Let’s look at Vs 1.

Vs 1

A few things the prophet establishes for us right off the bat. We learn “What” we have, “Who” is giving it & “When” it’s being given. & It’s super important that we understand what we have from the very start. The very 1st thing Micah wants to establish for us is that what we’re being given here is, “The Word of the Lord”.

& I can’t stress strongly enough that we understand what that means... Micah is saying, “Look, what I’m bringing to you is not the opinion of the prophet...” (or the personal persuasion of the pastor), what we have before us is the inerrant, infallible, Holy Spirit inspired Word of God! The reason I stop to emphasize that is because when we’re subjecting ourselves to scripture, when we find ourselves under the waterfall of God’s word, it necessarily *anticipates* an appropriate course of action.

Anything other than that (when we hear God’s word [meaning we hear w/understanding] & *don’t* respond w/an appropriate course of action), that’s called... “sin”. Because we know what God has said; we *understand* the good course of action He would have us take, we simply choose not to do it. & What does the Bible say about that? (James 4), “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”¹ & It brings about certain disastrous ramifications into our lives. Jesus said that like this, “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”²

I’ve discovered that many times, we’ll listen to God’s Word & treat it more like a matter of opinion, & one (btw) w/which we *don’t* agree!

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jas 4:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Mt 7:26-27]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Truth be told (to state the obvious), you don't *have* to agree w/*me*, your opinion is as good (maybe better) than mine! But when we're talking about "the word of the Lord" it's not opinion, it's truth, it's directive, perhaps corrective, & when we don't give it any more credence/authority than anything else we read or listen to, there's a problem.

We've drawn attention before to the fact that we can't approach God's word like a buffet of sorts... "I'll take love, I'll take lots of mercy, grace looks good, forgiveness & favor... Think I'll pass on righteousness, go easy on the holiness, not feeling the obedience, pile on the blessings..." It doesn't work that way. We're to be hearers of the Word & as hearers we're then held accountable to be doers. So that when the Bible says, "Do not be drunk w/wine," but then I proceed to get lit... or let not filthy language proceed from your mouth, but I continue to cuss or use profanity when the situation seems to (in my mind) justify it.... Or the Bible says, *"...speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."*³ But then we choose to not encourage, edify or "do our share" so as to bless the body in anyway... I mean we're hearers... but are we doers? Are we truly giving way to what we read as, "The word of the Lord"? Marinate in that for a minute...

& I point that out because we err (many times) on both the negative & the positive. Meaning, we not only *do* the things God's word tells us not to do, but we *don't* do, what it says we *should* do... I'm so grateful that we serve a merciful God! A gracious God! But let's not use grace as a cloak for vice, a covering to justify our sin, our disobedience, but rather let's humble ourselves, confess our sin & seek the Lord to give us hearts/lives of obedience to Him, that bring honor & glory to Him...

So that's the "What" we're being given. As for "Who" it is that's giving it? "Micah of Moresheth". Moresheth would be where Micah hailed from, where he lived. Which means he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, about 25(ish) miles S.W. of Jerusalem. *What that tells us is that he wasn't from some big important city, storming onto the scene from the influential "who's who" of society. He lived on the borderlands between Judah & the Philistines. He lived out in a little town out in the country & seems to appear out of nowhere from the "common people" otherwise known as the "who's he"? ☺*

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 4:15-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We don't really know much of anything about him. We don't know his "pedigree", anything about his ancestry... Evidently, he doesn't consider that to be essential information. What's important is that God has entrusted His word to him & he has a responsibility to make it known to the people...

But what I love about this is the fact that it's another reminder to us that you don't have to be "someone" for God to use your life. That's not to say that God can't or won't at times take a high-profile figure & use them in a tremendous way. But most commonly, God will take the average, or least likely candidate & use them for His glory. He doesn't want people to gravitate toward the mentality of, "Oh, makes sense people would respond, when you consider who that guy is!" He wants people to come to the conclusion, "To God be the glory, great things *He* has done." So He grabs the man from the countryside, Micah...

As for the "When", it's in the days of Jotham, Ahaz & Hezekiah. Which places him on the scene w/Isaiah & Hosea somewhere between about 739 B.C. & 686 B.C. (After Jotham began to reign but before the end of Hezekiah's reign). & Since Hezekiah was a noted reformer, it's probably safe to assume that the sin Micah confronted was prior to the reforms of Hezekiah.

& We note that the sins he confronted specifically concerned "Samaria & Jerusalem" which were the capital cities of Israel & Judah. & He would actually be God's final prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel before it fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Vs 2

God has a word for Samaria, for Jerusalem (& of course all the respective territory they represent) but He wants it to be heard, duly noted & appropriately responded to by all of humanity. "Hear, *all you peoples!* Listen, *O earth, & all that is in it!*"

& To kind of build upon what we developed in Vs 1 regarding the appropriate response to the "word of the Lord", we see God calling attention to the imperative need for everyone to *pay attention* (resulting in a right response) to all that He's about to say & do! Because the principles that He establishes/highlights here directly affect me & you (every individual upon the face of the earth)!

When God issues a warning; or draws attention to a certain course of action that results in a certain ramification, He's not bluffing. God doesn't bluff, He doesn't ignore & He doesn't condone nor approve of sin (much less willful rebellion). We serve a holy & righteous God, & as such He *must* & will deal w/sin. But it's a common problem that we as people often repeat.

We confuse the patience of God for a lack of *awareness*. Or even worse, the *approval* of God... “I know that God has said that homosexuality &/or immorality is sin, that drunkenness & depravity is sin, but I’ve been partying regularly, I’ve engaged in all kinds of immoral activity & God hasn’t done anything about it... So either He doesn’t notice it or He’s ok w/it...” Meanwhile people are storing up judgment for themselves. God gives us a season to repent, but people prefer to perceive His absence of activity as a sign that He approves of them. It’s not that they don’t know what God has said, it’s that they think they’re the exception, or somehow God understands in their case... Yet they’re filling up the winecup of the wrath of God w/their unrepentant iniquity & when it’s filled to the brim God forces that person, those people to drink it down to the dregs in His judgment.

So when it comes to the word of the Lord. When we’re called upon to “hear” & to “listen”, let’s not be deceived, God is wanting to warn us because He desires to spare us, but His righteousness, His holiness demands *justice*.

Vs 3-5

We’re seeing here the “*results*” of the coming judgment, the “*reason*” for the coming judgment, & when we get to Vs 6-7 it’s the “*reality*” or the “*certainty*” of coming judgment.

Back in Vs 3 Micah perceives w/vivid imagery, the LORD “coming out of His place”, descending from heaven to the earth to interfere in the affairs of man. He’s coming w/judgment. & He sees great cataclysmic upheaval, things like we have in Rev 6-19. *Mts melting like wax from the heat of a fire, valleys splitting as God storms through the earth in judgment... The sins of Israel/Judah have “awakened” Him to action, have set Him in motion against them. & The judgment that’s to come upon Israel & Judah is merely a foreshadow of what will be fulfilled in God’s coming judgment of all the earth.*

He will tread on the high places, those places where His people have worshipped other gods, placed priorities in their lives higher than Him... Every “high place” will be thrown down & trampled beneath Him...

“All this for the transgression of Jacob... for the sins of the house of Israel.” Not only has Israel sinned against God, meaning they’ve missed the mark, they’ve fallen short of the holy standards of God... They’ve “transgressed”, meaning they’ve willfully/knowingly rebelled against Him.

But what I want you to realize is that for all of this coming judgment, the sins of the “ungodly” aren’t even mentioned! What’s about to happen is the result of the sins of the people of God!

To me, this is very telling! Because we tend to think, “Listen, I know that Your people were really blowing it, but what about Assyria? What about Babylon? What about Egypt? What about the Philistines? All these ungodly nations surrounding them, surely they’re much worse? Shouldn’t You consider them 1st?”

God says, “No”. When it comes time to settle accounts, God says, “I’m going to start w/My own house 1st...” We see the principle here; Peter puts it plainly. He says, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God;”* However, we do well to remember the last ½ of the verse as well, don’t we? He goes on, *“...and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*⁴

If God will take whatever measures necessary to set His own house in order (of those who are His), what will be the end of the ungodly? Those who have rejected Him & spitefully rebelled against Him?

Now; look at this (Vs 6). “What is the transgression of Jacob (Israel)? Is it not Samaria? & What are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?” Now we could speak of the topography of these areas, but ultimately what’s being said here is that the root of Idolatry (spiritual adultery) in these nations was set in their capital cities. Not necessarily that it started there, but that it’s influence in the nation permeated most readily from there.

Here’s the point, the city in which is the seat of government has tremendous influence upon its nation, & in some cases the entire world. Corruption in the leadership leads to corruption in the land... Something the leaders in Washington D.C. would do well to take note of. This would be a great read for our leaders... As goes D.C. so goes the nation (& its effect will ripple across all the world). *Prayer breakfasts by morning, parties by night... Corruption & hypocrisy in the seat of power, God takes notice & holds a nation to account. Government exists to preserve the common good of the people, not feed upon & enrich yourself off the people. Now, it doesn’t excuse the sins of the people. But he’s pointing to the root of the problem. God’s speaking to the governing bodies, those who set the standards & uphold the example...*

But let’s not forget Vs 2. God’s dealings w/His people are a witness & a warning to *all nations!* Again, if God so deals w/His people, how will He handle those far more guilty?... Of course, as we get toward the end of the book God will speak of restoration & reconciliation. Another testimony of the grace that awaits those who will repent of their sin & turn to Him...

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Pe 4:17]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But again, the reason I remind you of Vs 2 is because I want you to glean an application, not only for our country, but for your life personally. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds us why these things were recorded. & It wasn't so we could scoff at how horrible they were, or feel better about who we are, but so that we might learn from them & not follow after the same kinds of errors... 1 Cor 10:11, *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*⁵

& As for you me, our idolatry may not include little statues of ivory, or gold, silver, wood or stone. But we still often live for the manufacturing of our own hands... cars, clothes, money, homes... we're a materialistic people... be careful. What you serve & sacrifice for is the object of our worship. I think a timely word for our generation is found in Luke's gospel. Jesus said, *"Take heed and beware of covetousness (which is idolatry btw), for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."*⁶ Micah is warning that the day will come when God will destroy the idols of the people, beat them to pieces & burn them w/fire...

Vs 6-7

Micah would actually see this fulfilled when Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. To this day you can still see the ruins of Samaria, heaps of ruins in a field.

God brought His judgment upon the Northern Kingdom 1st. When you study they're history you discover that though Judah had a few God fearing kings upon its throne. Israel never had so much as 1. Every king that ruled in the north was a wicked, ungodly king.

But here we see the idea of idolatry & spiritual adultery being intertwined. God chose Israel to be His own, but in going after other gods, they were unfaithful to Him, "cheating" on Him as it were. & It's not to say there wasn't literal harlotry happening, there certainly was. But the money they spent on idols would be spiritually/politically worthless to them. The Assyrians would break them in pieces, melt them down & use them to pursue their own acts of sin...

The point here is that those material things we serve, those things in which we seek satisfaction won't save us in the day of trouble. –

Vs 8-9

Assyria would invade & conquer several cities in Judah, right up to the gate of Jerusalem, but they wouldn't conquer Jerusalem because God protected them.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 10:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Lk 12:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But notice how Micah laments... What's your response when you think about the judgment of God? Micah was not dispassionate. He wasn't like Jonah. "40 days & judgment is coming" & then he was disappointed that they repented & God relented.

Micah wept & wailed over the judgment of God upon the people. Like Jeremiah (who is commonly referred to as "the weeping prophet"). Like Jesus, who looked over Jerusalem & wept because of the destruction that was to come upon them... There was an agony that he experienced in announcing judgment upon the nation... He refused to keep 2 degrees of separation... In many ways his heart reflected the heart of God to the people.

It's true that the holiness, the righteousness of God demands justice. But God takes no pleasure in judging sin. His vengeance is not vindictive...

However, there comes a point whereby God can't simply sit by & allow a person, or a people to continue down a particular path. God has said, *"My Spirit shall not strive* (or argue, or plead) *with man forever..."*⁷ God will convict a person, strive w/a person, plead w/them to turn from their wicked ways, their fleshly appetites, their sin... He's sent them prophet after prophet... *But there comes a time, there is a line whereby God says (& I don't know when that time is, my suspicion is that it may be different for everyone, & on a national level... who knows... perhaps we're already there) "I'm finished striving w/you, there's nothing left but judgment to fall upon you."* People simply refuse to respond to the *Word of God...* The proverbs put it this way, *"He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."*⁸ Her wounds are incurable.

Vs 10-16

Micah's lament. & We don't really see it in the English translation but he's using a play on words to communicate to these cities that will come under judgment. But the 1st thing he says is, "Tell it not in Gath..." He's actually referring back to the song that David wrote when king Saul was killed. Gath was a Philistine city, an enemy of Israel. (Goliath was from Gath). So, he's essentially saying, "Don't spread this around to the enemies of Israel..." He can't stand the idea of God's enemies rejoicing over the judgment of His people.

People like to spread it around when a pastor or church leader falls. Micah says, "Hey, don't do that. Why should the pain of another bring pleasure to you, weep w/those who weep, bear one another's burdens & fulfill the law of Christ."

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ge 6:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Pr 29:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“Beth Aphrah” means, “house of dust.” So he says, “House of dust, *roll yourself* in the dust.” Lament, repent...

“Shaphir” or “beautiful”, pass by in naked shame. You’ll be carried away in a manner that’s contrary to what your name suggests. Paraded in naked shame...

“Zaanah” means “going out”, but they won’t be going anywhere, they’ll be holed up behind their walls in fear.

“Maroth” or “bitterness” would writhe in pain waiting for relief, but only disaster would come to them.

Lachish was known for its strength, but the only thing they would be harnessing their horse for would be to flee... Evidently the trickle down of Israel’s influence of idolatry in Judah began in Lachish. **(Closing)**

But on & on he goes, he speaks Achzib (which means lie) being a deceit to Israel. The city would fall so fast it would be a deception rather than any kind of defense.

The point is plain... judgment is coming. The bigger question is how would they respond to the Word of the Lord?

The same is true for you & me. God is faithful to warn us of coming judgment. & He tells us how to be spared His judgment through turning from our sin, trusting in J.C. But it’s imperative that we listen to Him, that we respond appropriately to Him... Hearing the word is one thing, doing it is another, don’t confuse the 2. Let’s be doers of the Word of God.

Prayer Points:

Father I pray that as we look into Micah’s message over the next few weeks that we would hear. That we would listen & that we would give heed to Your word, Your direction & Your correction in our lives.

Judgment is coming, grace is available. Don’t put off till another day what God is calling you to do today. Whether it’s turning to Him, or returning to Him. Let’s give God the whole of our heart today...