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Introduction to Micah

Martin Luther, in his study of the prophets, complained, "they have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at." (Rad & Stalker, 1965, p. 33)

What is it about Martin Luther that enabled him to say exactly what we are thinking?

Many think that the Old Testament prophets have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next. And yet as we have seen, the difficulty of the prophets is due in part to their books are a compilation of a variety of sermons preached in the course of a lifetime addressing different and unique issues. Then at some point, the prophet skillfully arranged the sermons into the books we have in our bibles such that though the sections individually address different settings, issues, and times, nevertheless together they proclaim an important message to the people of God. Bruce Waltke put it this way:

Micah's prophecy contains once-independent announcements of judgment, oracles of salvation, controversy sayings, lawsuit speeches, instructions, laments, prayer, hymn, and a proclamation of the Lord's epiphany. One could think of it almost as a preacher's file of sermons delivered on different occasions in the life of the capital. But unlike a drawer of sermon-files, the careful student will discern that the messages have been skilfully [sic]

fitted together like pieces of a mosaic by means of catchwords and logical particles. (T. Desmond Alexander, 2009, p. 144)

Mosaic is the perfect word; it reminds me of textography. For example, notice the two maps of the city of Chicago; they have been made out of words!



The same thing happens with the prophets. To look at the smaller sections of each book is to examine a sermon or teaching which the prophet gave at some point in his ministry. Yet we must realize that each section has been carefully selected and placed in the book by the prophet such that whether we look at the book in part or in whole, we receive a declaration of the word of God.

This is what we have when we open our Bibles to the prophets! They are the fruit of the ministry of a man of God, skillfully woven together to exhort the people of God throughout the ages! In fact, if one wants to know God's opinion concerning many of the practices, problems, and issues facing the church today, read the prophets! These books were written to a people of God facing many of the same trials, difficulties, and issues that we face today!

We have examined the messages of Amos (who began ministering in 765 BC), Hosea (who began in 750 BC), and Isaiah (who began in 740 BC) all of whom ministered as contemporaries. Yet there was a fourth prophet at the time his name was Micah who was called as a prophet to the southern Kingdom of Judah around 735 BC.

The Prophet, The Date, and The Religious Setting

Micah 1:1, "The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem."

Though this verse is just the introduction of this prophecy, nevertheless it is packed with important background information. First, consider the hometown of Micah, "Moresheth." Though we know next to nothing about the prophet Micah, we do know a little about his hometown. Moresheth was a Judean city near the Philistine territory of Gath (Micah 1:14) in the Shephelah (the farming region of Canaan) 19 miles southwest of Jerusalem. This meant that unlike Isaiah who most likely was born and raised in wealth, Micah was raised in an agrarian setting amongst the middle and lower class peoples of Judah.

Micah was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah (all of whom laid stress on the religious compromises of the day), nevertheless Micah's main focus when it came to the abuses of God's people was their rebellion against the covenant ethic of love, care, and concern for the weak and hurting in the body. Truly, growing up in Moresheth, Micah would have witnessed first-hand the devastating impact that selfishness and neglect had on the weak, hurting, and poor.

As a child growing up in Judah, Micah would have experienced the spoiled fruit which oft-times accompanies opulence. Notice his exhortation:

Micah 2:1-2, 7-8, "Woe to those who scheme iniquity, who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, for it is in the power of their hands. They covet fields and then seize *them*, and houses, and take *them* away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance⁷ Recently My people have arisen as an enemy [because of their evil practice, God had to oppose them. What were they doing?]- you strip the robe off the garment, from unsuspecting passers-by, *from* those returned from war. The women of My people you evict, each *one* from her pleasant house. From her children you take My splendor forever."

Did Micah witness the wicked practices of the upper class which left many a farmer in poverty as their fields were taken and their families dispossessed? It is hard to believe that he didn't, for clearly the sin spoken about here was rampant throughout Judah and Israel! Yet all was not lost, for in Israel God had placed leaders whose job was to protect the weak and hurting from just such abuse, yet they too at the time had become corrupt.

Micah 3:11a; 7:3, "Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price^{7:3} Concerning evil, both hands do it well. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, and a great man speaks the desire of his soul; so they weave it together."

Imagine being kicked out of your house by a clan of people, and then going to the local authorities only to find that they had been bought off?

Did Micah experience this first hand? Obviously we don't know, yet it is not a surprise to me that the book of Micah contains a scathing rebuke of the people of God on account of their sinful practices! In contrast to the many people-pleasers who assumed the office of preacher and so tickled the ears of those listening, Micah proclaimed the word of God.

Micah 4:8-12, "On the other hand I am filled with power- with the Spirit of the Lord- and with justice and courage TO MAKE KNOW TO JACOB HIS REBELLIOUS ACT, even to Israel his sin. Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, 'Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.' Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest."

At a time when all you could hear from the pulpit was "peace and safety" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:3), Micah proclaimed the full counsel of God which contained the shocking message of judgment on account of the nation's covenant infidelity!

Secondly, consider the era in which Micah prophesied: "in the days of Jotham [which spanned from 750 to 731 BC], Ahaz [which spanned from 735 to 715 BC], and Hezekiah [which spanned from 729 to 686 BC], Kings of Judah" Based on our study of the prophets heretofore, you already ought to be familiar with this era of both Israeli and Judean history. Recall in 793 BC and in 792 BC respectively, Jeroboam II and Uzziah began their reigns as kings over Israel and Judah. Both of these leaders ushered their nation into a "golden era" in which trade, commerce, and security reigned. Truly this was a time of opulence and culture where a standing army was replaced with the arts, fashion, and culture of the larger world. Yet the good was accompanied by the bad as the wealth and ease of the time gave way to (1) the compromise of God's worship, (2) the wholesale rejection of God's word, and so (3) the neglect of the covenant calling of the people of God to care for the weak, hurting, and poor amongst them. Bruce Waltke describing the situation in Judah put it this way:

From Amos a generation earlier we have first-hand knowledge of the moral rot at work inside Samaria (cf. Amos 2:667; 4:669; 5:10612; 8:466). According to Hosea a generation later the same sorry situation obtained, and from inside information given us later by Isaiah and Micah we learn that it came to prevail in Samaria's prostitute sister

Jerusalem as well. A shocking contrast between extreme wealth and poverty was exacerbated by egregious injustices on the part of the elite rich and ruling class against the stalwart landowners, who were driven off their land and into a dependent economic status (2:163, 869; 3:163, 9610). Dishonest practices prevailed everywhere, since the judges were venal and the poor had no redress (6:10611; 7:164a). Moral corruption was so rife that it even debauched the nation's religious leaders. Gifted prophets (2:6, 11; 3:567) and educated priests (3:11) prostituted themselves for their elite pimps. To be sure the nation looked religious as it thronged the temple and offered lavish gifts, but the moral covenant, which mandated a loving spirit towards God and one's neighbour, had been replaced by a covenant between the powerful to spoil the poor (chs. 263). Ahab's false religion leavened the whole nation within a little over a century (6:16). (T. Desmond Alexander, 2009, p. 151)

And yet toward the end of the reigns of both Jeroboam II (d.~753 BC) and Uzziah (d.~739 BC), Assyria was on the rise (for God intended to use them to discipline His people, Isaiah 10:5ff). With the death of these two kings, the security of the first part of the 8th century dissolved into fear and so the frantic quest to protect the nation from any and all foreign threat. The irony is that if God's people had simply called upon the Lord (turned from their sin and so returned to the Lord) they would have been fine (cf. e.g., Isaiah 7:10-16). Instead, the leaders of these nations by and large resorted to manipulation and foreign alliances in the hope of maintaining the nation. Accordingly, God sent forth His servants, the Prophets, who boldly stood in the gap calling God's leaders and people to repentance, faith, covenant fidelity, and so undistracted devotion to the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:35).

Amos was not a professional servant of Christ, but rather a farmer and so a herdsman from the north. Hosea was a man who struggled with a difficult marriage. He most likely was from Judah, but God raised him up to minister to Israel in the north. Isaiah was from the upper class and so was the most educated of all the prophets. Having both royal and priestly blood, Isaiah was at home in the royal court and it was there he served Judah. Micah, like Amos, began in a rural setting. And yet, on account of his call, he entered Jerusalem as a prophet of God and so one who brought the message of the Lord to God's leaders and people. From this we conclude that against the dark and bleak backdrop of the latter part of the 8th century B.C., a spiritual giant walked the land whom God used to stave off the apostasy of Judah for a time – his name was Micah.

Finally, notice the focus of this prophesy: *“which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”* This statement sets Micah apart from the other prophets ministering at the time. Amos and Hosea were called to minister to Israel. Isaiah was called to minister to Judah. In contrast, Micah was called to minister to Judah in light of Samaria's sin! The prophecy of Micah addresses the sin of two sisters: Samaria and Jerusalem (the capital cities of each nation). Samaria/Israel were the chief offenders when it came to compromise in the worship of God; both accepted wholesale the religious practice of Baal (1:5). Yet as the older sister (when it came to sinning), Samaria's wretchedness corrupted Jerusalem/Judah.

Micah 1:9, *“For her wound [her sin] is incurable, for it has come to Judah; it has reached the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.”*

Once again, speaking of Israel:

Micah 1:13b, *“She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion- because in you were found the rebellious acts of Israel.”*

Micah 6:16, *“The statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab are observed [Omri and Ahab were northern kings who brought Baalism to Israel]; and in their devices you walk. Therefore, I will give you up for destruction and your inhabitants for derision, and you will bear the reproach of My people.”*

And it is this that sets the tenor of the entire prophesy. As Micah and Judah witnessed the downfall and destruction of Israel (recall the nation was taken into exile in 722 BC), so the message of this prophecy is one of warning: *“Your older sister sinned and looked what happened to her!! Now, you are doing the same thing as Israel; you are following her example!... Do you think you will avoid her ruin? In light of Israel's doom, repent! If you do not, you too will surely perish!”*

With that, consider a very important emphasis which Micah never wanted us to forget as we read this prophecy

An Amazing God

Micah 1:1a, “The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Moresheth”

While we do not know anything about Micah or his family, we do conclude just from his name that he most likely had a godly heritage. The name “Micah” means “Who is like Yahweh.” Now it could very well be that like our names, not much was intended on the part of his parents when they named him “Micah.” However, Micah himself is not going to let us leave this prophecy without considering the significance of his name on our lives today! It begins by noting that though this is a short prophecy (only 7 chapters) nevertheless it was and is a scathing rebuke of the people of God! As such, it contains a difficult message at a time when almost every other preacher was proclaiming messages of love, joy, and peace. Listen to a sampling of the message of Micah:

Micah 1:2-7, “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 [Micah here is invoking the language of the court and so here presents a divine lawsuit]. For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place [if you were a Judean listening to this message for the first time you would have assumed that Micah was addressing this message to the Assyrians who were on the rise; yet notice the intended people with whom God had a problem]. All this is for the rebellion of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? [talk about a shocker!!!] For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, planting places for a vineyard. I will pour her stones down into the valley, and will lay bare her foundations. All of her idols will be smashed, all of her earnings will be burned with fire, and all of her images I will make desolate, for she collected *them* from a harlot’s earnings, and to the earnings of a harlot they will return.”

That’s judgment! How offended this must have made God’s people! In fact, when the other preachers of his day heard this message, they rebuked Micah!

Micah 2:6a, “Do not speak out, so they speak out”

The preachers of Micah’s day were making a killing off the feel-good messages they preached. As that had become the focus, they quickly abandoned any message which did not attract a crowd.

Micah 3:11, “Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, ‘Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.’”

Yet Micah was no dummy! No matter how much we might believe it, a promise of peace no matter how beautifully spoken will not stave off the disciplining hand of God! And so Micah responded this way:

Micah 2:6b, “*But if* they do not speak out concerning these things, reproaches will not be turned back.”

Truly, whether the preachers/prophets of his day cared to accept it or not, the reality is that judgment was coming. And no feel-good message could delay it! Though the false-prophets tried:

Micah 2:7, “Is it being said, O house of Jacob: ‘Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to the one walking uprightly?’”

In essence the message of these false prophets was, “*You have nothing to worry about! God loves you and would never let anything happen to you! Now... take up another offering!*”

Micah 3:5, “Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; when they have *something* to

bite with their teeth, they cry, -Peace,ø[IOW, when Godø people gave them a good offering, these blind guides gave a favorable sermon] But against him who puts nothing in their mouths, they declare holy war.ö

In contrast, listen to the word of God. Micah after mocking the spineless message of the false prophets said this:

Micah 3:8, öOn 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.ö

In this context you can see how messages like Micah 1:2-7 would have stung many ears! In contrast to the voice of the false-prophets, the book of Micah stands as a shocking and sober rebuke that all is not well when Godø people endure sin! Now as that was an essential and crucial message at the time (and still is today), it wasn't the final word which Micah wanted his hearers to take from this book. Notice the incredible ending of this prophecy. After referencing the time of the Exodus when God proved to be a redeeming Lord to an enslaved people (7:15)- with the implication that it is on account of the love of Christ that Godø people are disciplined- Micah closed his prophesy with these

words-: **מִיכָה**

Micah 7:18-19, öWho is a God like Thee [Why is Micah so amazed at God? Because in spite of all their sin, nevertheless the Lordí], 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. 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.ö

Family of God, what happened to the Egyptian army as it pursued the people of God seeking to re-enslave them? God öcast them into the depths of the sea!ö Now the people of God had fallen into egregious sin such that judgment surely was coming (cf. Micah 1:16; 3:12). This is a major theme of this book! Now again, against the backdrop of preachers who sought to tickle the ears of the nation (because it resulted in a bigger offering), Micah no doubt sounded and looked heavy-handed. Yet so be it, if it served the cause of Christ! However, Godø people must know that though their sin was going to be judged, Godø judgment was not the final word! And so, don't leave Micah thinking only of doom and gloom. Micah deigned to have the final word.

Micah 7:18-19, öIn spite of your sin which has enslaved youí in spite of your sin by which you have cast off God and worshipped the Baals and the Asherimí in spite of your sin which has dishonored the Lord and made His name a laughing stock and a source of jokes amongst the nationsí nevertheless the Lord is going to cast your sin into the heart of the sea!ö

Talk about amazing! What God is like this... enduring long with such a sinful people? If you are going to take anything from Micah, it is this message the prophet wants you to appropriate: Yes Christian, you sin! BUT who is a God like our Godí who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?

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About the Preacher

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