

MICAH PART 1

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THIS BIBLE STUDY IS PART 1 OF A THREE-PART BIBLE STUDY IN THIS AND THE NEXT TWO EDITIONS OF MET CONNEXION.

INTRODUCTION: MICAH'S MISSION-FIELD

Approaching the prophetic words of Micah, we may be aware of the tiny portion that we often read at Christmas: Micah 5:2, 'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel ...' Or, the often quoted Micah 6:8, 'And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' There is far more relevance in Micah than these brief glimpses and, indeed, these also are better understood in the context of the whole work.

Do you have favourite words from Micah? When did you first hear them? Why have they remained with you?

In the second part of the 8th century BC, there was a comfort and ease to the lives of the people of the cities of Israel and Judah. God's people enjoyed a time of wealth. They had become selfish and greedy. Their faith had become less concerned with the priorities of God's Law or the words of prophets who had gone before. Instead, God's people

had taken to persecuting the poor and creating poverty in place of providing for those in need. Those who were rich were becoming indolent in their complacency and affluence.

Ponder on your own cultural situation. Has it brought about a laziness towards, or a greater dependence and reliance on keeping faithful to God?

Micah follows Isaiah who had been God's mouthpiece in the days of King Uzziah (767 BC). He would precede Zephaniah and Jeremiah who would go on to speak into the reign of King Josiah. As a counterpoint to the godlessness and wickedness of the kings, the prophets were the mouthpieces of God to speak to kings and society. Micah, a preacher-prophet came to Jerusalem from Moresheth-gath (1:1-2) to speak God's truth and judgment into a situation of moral and spiritual depravity.

Even the context for Micah resonates with much that is going on among God's people, especially in our current era, which is shaped by international crisis, pandemic, social media's authority and a liberal-humanist agenda.

In what ways do you see these influences making an impact on your own views of Scripture, and the outworking of your faith? How might you develop a resilience in your faith? Who and what might help you here?

A Challenge to Listen and Act: Micah 1:1-2

'The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah - the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the Sovereign Lord may bear witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.'

We know from this that these words of prophecy from Micah are not going to be comfortable. They are going to rankle with the easy life of the people who pay lip service to God. The people of God are under oppression from the Assyrians. The nation of Israel and Judah is divided and yet there is a single, sovereign judgment; the rule of God is not limited by humanly ascribed boundaries.

We might sometimes feel that we are exempt from the judgment that God is bringing. Yet, as we look at the people of God in Micah's time, we see that even the faithful are suffering along with the faithless. The effects of sin are far reaching and no one is excluded from their impact.

How do you respond to the suggestion that we are all implicated in the 'sins of our nation'? What might be done?

Verse 2 Is the call to Hear and Listen to the holy utterance from God. This is not

confined to the local peoples, but to the created peoples of all times and regions in the earth. We are reminded that God's authority and sovereignty is not to be thwarted by earthly satisfaction and wealth. No matter how sophisticated the peoples of the earth may be, God is greater and is not to be gone against. It is here that we begin to note the framing of this prophetic word as a court of law. Those who do go against God will be brought to account, judged and punished. The scope of God's reign and rule is important as the people had created a religion to suit the comfort of their own era and circumstance. Micah's view is larger than the Northern and Southern kingdoms and yet very much is all about them.

Think about how 'Justice' is often a 'buzz word' used in Methodist/Christian circles. What are your reactions to the various ways 'Justice' is used in churches? How does Micah apply 'Justice' to a people who aren't committed to faith rooted in God and his rule?

Verses 3-5 Describe the nature and character of the Lord Almighty whose sovereignty and strength has been ignored along with his Law and the word of the patriarchs and prophets. God remains true to his own character, even though the perceptions of him are culturally diminished or even, bluntly, erroneous as they were in Micah's time. The terrible reminder of the vastness of his power and the genuinely awesome nature of his strength makes the human viewpoint tiny and the human arrogance of assertion against God as nothing. His answer to godlessness and the terrible ways that religion behaves as a result, is to break them into nothingness.

Verses 6-8 show the ease with which they will be brought low Samaria, strong and proud as the capital city, will be 'rubble'. The 'Promised Land' into which God had delivered his Covenant people was to be brought down as the people denied the sovereign rule of God in favour of their own desires for wealth and ease. The indictment of the wages belonging to prostitutes being returned to prostitutes, reminds us of the faithlessness of the people of Israel in keeping their side of the Covenant relationship. Much like Hosea's relationship with his faithless

wife, Gomer, this is adultery, turning from their Covenant relationship to espouse gods and idols, and is abhorrent to God. The awfulness is in that although the idols and artefacts purchased by the wages of cultic prostitution have been destroyed, they will be traded for a different set of favours which do not honour Yahweh. Given over to greed, lust and idolatry, there is to be a reckoning which will be harsh and terrible. Micah, as the Lord's mouthpiece, will grieve over it and yet it will have to run its course. Micah's torment is prophetic and shows the Lord's pain over this outrage in the Promised Land.

How might these verses speak into the spiritual landscape of your local fellowship?

Verse 9 begins the evaluation of the issue. Sin permeates culture and corrupts entire peoples. Where the leadership is flawed and faulty, there will be a passing-on to the general population. Where the spiritual covering of the kings and priests is corrupted and idolatrous, unholy and not honouring of God, it follows that the whole nation will fall victim to the sinfulness. From Samaria to Jerusalem, they may be divided as nations, but they are united by idolatry and greed and godlessness.

THE PROBLEM OF SIN FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Verses 10-16 Micah lists the places that have fallen. Once pleasant, safe and beautiful, they are tortured, and Micah describes them in their fallenness. The prophetic devices here are puns and word-play. They are worth looking up and investigating to see how Micah uses them to describe a terrible time of destruction where even names will be subverted. It will be a time for mourning and a time for shame. There are reminders in the text of defeats and retreats; Adullam in verse 15, for example, is the place King David escaped to as he retreated from Saul's attack in 1 Samuel 22:1. What is coming will be such desperate times as this. Verse 16 confirms that exile away from the Land of Promises is coming.

Maybe you feel that we are living in a time such as Micah is describing, or are on the verge of it. Perhaps this is

a time for repentance and for a deep commitment to God, that you might weather the storm. Are there others with whom you can pray regularly for the spiritual recovery of our nation?

The following chapters in Micah will build on these opening indictments. Micah speaks of woes to come in response to the godless behaviour of the people. Destruction will follow at the hands of the Assyrians. King Hezekiah will fend them off for a while, but to do this will ally with Egypt rather than trusting in the God of Promise. The fact that Hezekiah does not trust God is another blow for the kingly line of Judah.

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