

The Book of Micah

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“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways” writes the author of Hebrews in the opening line of his letter, according to The NIV Study Bible. And that is just what a prophet does: he or she speaks directly to a specific person or group of people and shares God’s message with them. Micah of Moresheth is one of these prophets. He lived in Judah in a time when the majority of God’s chosen people were steeped in sin, were being led astray by power-abusing rulers, judges, and false prophets, and were threatened by a powerful Assyrian empire. Micah repeatedly warned the people of the impending doom that awaited them if they would not turn from their disobedience toward God, but also assured them of the ever-present hope of peace for God’s people in the future.

Prophecy is one mode of communication by God to his people. The generally accepted idea of prophecy involves predicting the future. Telling a nation what the future holds for them if they do not change their ways, a nation that claims to worship Yahweh but unashamedly disobeys His commands, can show the fruits of prophecy through the repentance of those to whom it is directed. King Hezekiah, the king of Jerusalem from 715-686 B.C. is a clear example of this (Jeremiah 26.19). Upon hearing Micah speak of Jerusalem’s coming destruction, he turned to the Lord, and according to the New Bible Commentary, it turned out that only Jerusalem survived in all of Judah during the Assyrian invasions between 721 and 701 B.C.

With a logical study of the Old Testament, as pointed out by LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush in their book, Old Testament Survey, one can see how prophecy is primarily intended for the people of the nation at the time of the prophet through whom God is speaking, and that predicting the future is just one way of getting through to people. It isn’t just a condemnation of a group of people or a crystal ball to the future, it is a revealing of a clearer picture of God’s plan and purpose, “a window that God has opened for his people” so that they can better

recognize God’s will, and in turn more effectively live for him (LaSor 230). A healthier understanding of prophecy itself can be attained when it is seen as “God’s message to the present in the light of the ongoing redemptive mission” (LaSor 229). Applying this perspective when reading or hearing prophecy can expose God’s love for his people.

I’m pretty sure that not a single one of the prophets with written accounts in the Bible had it on their minds that someone in the 21st century A.D. would be reading their prophecies and trying to understand them. Therefore, it is our job to try and better understand what *was* on their minds by gaining a general knowledge of the historical setting and people during a particular prophet’s time. Micah was a man from Moresheth Gath, a village in Judah approximately twenty-two miles southwest of Jerusalem and known today as Tell el-Judeidah (New Bible 822). It is believed that he prophesied between 750 and 686 B.C. during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. During this time, the Assyrian Empire was invading and annexing Israel. The Assyrians were cruel and tyrannical, and according to David J. Zucker in his book Israel’s Prophets, “Fear of their inhuman torture of those who opposed them was a conscious part of Assyria’s foreign and military policy”.

Micah wrote mostly relating to the impending doom of Israel, but attached to that is the hope that lies in God’s forgiveness. He also attempts to shed light on the dark lives of power-hungry rulers, judges, and false prophets. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. The two prophets both share a similar passage in each of their books in the Old Testament concerning peace that is to come (cf. Isa 2.2-4, Mic 4.1-3). Micah is also mentioned in the book of Jeremiah, and even though they never met, as Jeremiah lived a century or so after Micah, a certain sense of unity is apparent amongst the true prophets (Jer 26.18). In addition to Jeremiah in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ in the first century A.D. quotes a passage from Micah and revealed to his twelve disciples it’s meaning (Matt 10.35-40).

Micah begins his book by outright stating that “the word of the Lord” came to him and that he had a vision from God, a common statement among prophets (Mic 1.1, Isa 1.1). To further show his

authenticity, purpose, and confidence in his position as a prophet he later claims he is “filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin” (Mic 3.8-9). A bold statement that backs up his bold prophesies. He goes on to warn Israel of the Lord’s coming due to their transgressions and sins against Him (1.3-5). Micah, forewarning towns in the area of his hometown of potential ruin, uses the meanings of their names against them in a clever play on words. “In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust” he cautions the town whose name in Hebrew means house of dust (1.10).

Chapter two begins Micah’s intentions to expose those who abuse the power that is given to them. Raised in a small village himself, Micah speaks out for the poor and lower class citizens who are affected by greedy landowners and the like (2.1-2). False prophets are first explained and rebuked in verses 6-11. A vivid picture of the wretchedness of unjust rulers is painted in chapter three, and again the corruption of false prophets is apparent and their motives laid bare: “if one feeds them, they proclaim ‘peace’; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him” (3.5). Micah immediately contrasts these false prophets with himself, who is filled “with the Spirit of the Lord” (3.8).

The boldness and evidence of the Spirit comes through in Micah’s fearlessness of going against the grain in claiming that Israel’s rulers “distort all that is right” and that “her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money” (3.9-11). Blind to their own hypocrisy, they ignore their disobedience to God’s commandments and claim the excuse that God is among them and that no tragedy will come to them. After more warnings, God delivers a message of hope and a forecast of a time of peace, the last days, when “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (4.3). Thus begins his prophecies concerning the end times and the Messiah.

Chapter six is a beautiful portrayal of a courtroom scene depicting the Lord charging Israel with unjustly wronging Him. As the Lord cries “What have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me”, Israel proposes to give burnt offerings and other traditional sacrifices that can be

given without true repentance, but Micah lets them know that “He has showed you [Israel], what is good...to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6.1-8).

Chapter 7 ends the book of Micah in three distinct parts. Micah first describes the hopelessness and betrayal that ultimately comes from trusting in man, and then he shares his view: “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me” (7.7). The second section warns Israel’s enemies not to delight in Israel’s temporary slump because it is just that, temporary. The final conclusion is an encouraging reminder of the depths of God’s mercy and compassion. It is a closing remark aimed at pushing Israel to rely on their faith in the God that has promised them deliverance.

It was a pleasure to read the Book of Micah. Though I don’t pretend to understand all of his prophecies, I appreciate the beauty of the way they were written and the constant reminder to God’s people to keep hold of their trust in Yahweh and to value that above all else.

Works Cited

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“The principal purpose of the OT rites and ceremonies was to enable men to ‘draw near’ to God. They cleansed the body and thus removed the ceremonial defilement which prevented access, but they did not cleanse the heart or take away sins. They were therefore symbols of the cleansing which God himself immediately effected apart from this ritual; but more than symbols, they were also the means God used to encourage the humble and give

confidence to the repentant to approach him, by indicating the gracious will to forgive and receive such... God's intention was that both ritual and repentance should be united, the former giving vital

expression to the latter, and the latter giving meaning to the former" [J.D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, pp. 16-17].