

September 29 : Scriptures Micah 1-4

SUMMARY

Hey! Here we are in a new book – Micah! Micah's ministry overlapped Isaiah's, sometime before 722 A.D., lasting through King Hezekiah's reign. My study Bible has some great background to share:

"Both Israel and Judah experienced affluence and material prosperity in the late 8th century B.C. In the South, King Uzziah's military victories brought wealth for some. A wealthy merchant class developed, and many poorer farmers found themselves at the mercy of government-supported businessmen. As business dealings became more corrupt, God's prophets spoke to the nation, confronting the ill-gotten wealth and accompanying godlessness. Amos and Hosea prophesied in the northern Kingdom of Israel, and Isaiah and Micah prophesied in Judah to the South."

We'll see a lot of indictments in Micah regarding how the rich treated the poor and the powerful treated the vulnerable and how the Judahites were turning their backs on God. Micah's prophetic words address both social and spiritual rot.

Micah's opening salvo in chapter 1 vividly describes God's approaching judgment for Israel and Judah's sins, centered in Samaria, Israel's capital, and Jerusalem, Judah's capital (1:5). Because Samaria was the core of idolatry in Israel, the Lord determined to bring the city down. Since she earned her prosperity as a prostitute (selling herself to the idol gods), Yehovah will bring the Assyrians to take her prostitute's pay and use it on their own prostitutes (1:7).

Micah mourns and wails over Israel's "incurable wound," her destruction by Assyria, which also threatens Judah (1:8-9). The prophet calls out towns near Judah to spur them to repentance. The Lord is behind the Assyrian's attack. They will approach Jerusalem's gates but not triumph (1:12). However, those in Lachish (a central military post in northern Israel) will have to harness their horses and flee on their chariots to get away from the advancing army (1:13). Judah will have to surrender the towns of Israel to the Assyrians. The leadership of Israel will have to flee and hide as David did when he fled from Saul and hid in the cave at Adullam. They will shave their heads in grief because their children will be taken into exile. What a painful thing that would be to bear!

Chapter 2 opens with Micah's charge against the wealthy, who plot evil before they get up in the morning. Given the current corruption in our government and business realm today, it sounds like the "investment firms" and banks conspiring to manipulate the

financial system so they can buy up land and homes cheaply and then rent it back to people at a high price, thus taking unfair advantage of the average person. What is Yehovah going to do to those unrighteous scoundrels? He'll bring in the enemy who will ruin them and take what the offenders unrighteously took from their vulnerable fellow citizens.

Ah, but that's not what the guilty want to hear, nor the prophets who preach, "shame will not overtake us" (2:6). But should the House of Judah talk like this? No. The false prophets are lying, saying that shame will not overtake those doing wrong. Of course, it will. Yehovah brings evil to the wicked just as He brings good to those who live morally right (2:7). But that isn't what the people of Judah are doing. They take the garment with the robe (abusing the collateral process) and steal people's homes and family land. Therefore, the Lord tells them they're going to get off the land they stole (2:10). These greed-meisters will get exiled for abusing the people. Micah goes full sarcasm when he implies the false prophets are just full of wind, but if they're prophesying an easy life with loads of wine and beer, they would be just the perfect prophets for the Judahites!

Micah suddenly shifts his words to encourage those who will be of the righteous remnant. God, Himself, will gather them together as sheep in a pen. Once they're gathered together, "someone" will break open the sheepfold door, and the penned-up sheep will burst out into the open field with their Shepherd King leading them. This word is a prophecy of more than just Israel's regathering at the End.

Chapter 3 begins with a rhetorical question, "Hey, Judah's leaders. Aren't you supposed to know the right things to do as the Torah tells you?" The answer is "Yes." *But* they treat the people like they're food – they consume them. Yehovah will turn His back on the leaders for their crimes when they cry out under His judgment.

As for the false prophets who lead Yehovah's people away from Him and prophesy good to those who support them and attack those who refuse to do so, God will no longer speak to them. Any remnant of spiritual insight they may have had will be snuffed out, and their occult divination will fail.

May I take a little bunny trail here? This situation sounds like many so-called prophets (and some pastors/leaders) today in the Charismatic/Pentecostal churches. I'm talking about prophets, pastors, and ministers whose "ministry" may have started as a call from God but has rotted into a money-making venture. They suck up to those who will support them and run down those who don't. Their reason for ministry is to enrich themselves more than comforting, encouraging, and strengthening the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians

4:13). Will there come a time when God does to them what He did to the prophets of Micah's day? Will He blind them and refuse to speak to them? Will they come to be "ashamed" and "disappointed?" Will they "cover their mouths because there will be no answer from God?" (3:7).

Not so with Micah! He knows he's filled with power via the Spirit and will speak out against Israel's and Judah's sins with justice and courage (3:8). The leaders hate "justice and pervert anything that's right." They achieve their goals through bloodshed and injustice. The leaders, priests, and prophets sell themselves for cash, yet they hypocritically assume the Lord is still with them. Oh boy, do they ever have that wrong! Because of them, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount will be wiped out (3:12).

But at the End (what we know by now as the Day of the Lord), Yehovah will do something remarkable. He will establish Himself as the ruler of His people and all the world's nations. People will stream to Israel and Jerusalem to be taught God's ways. King Jesus, David's descendant, will make peace between the nations and people groups. War will cease, prosperity will abound, and Israel will remain faithful to her God. After they've suffered at the hands of a strong nation, all the people of Israel will be regathered, and the Davidic kingdom will rise as before (4:8).

However, as just said, Zion/Judah will have to suffer first. They will be exiled to Babylon, but the Lord will bring them back (4:10). Even though the nations have gathered to "feast on Judah," this is all part of Yehovah's plan (4:12). After He's regathered them Israel will thresh her enemies as a calf stomps on grain. Israel will take plunder from their enemies as a tribute to Yehovah.

INSIGHT

Micah uses a vivid metaphor to describe the Lord gathering His people together and bringing them to a safe place to rest and be prosperous. As evening drew near, a shepherd would gather his flock into a cave or an area protected by rocks and create a temporary fence of branches across the opening to keep his sheep safe. However, this space was usually too tight for the sheep, and they would get restless toward dawn. When the sun rose, a helper would break open the fence, making a doorway for the sheep to pass through, with the shepherd leading them out to pasture.

Micah's prophetic use of this picture is the foundation of Jesus' words in Matthew 11:10-12. "This is the one about whom it is written: See, I am sending my messenger *ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.* "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is

greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, *the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force.*"

God called John the Baptist to prepare the Jewish people to receive their Messiah. John called his fellow Jews to repent and get their lives right with God because the Messiah was coming. Many Jews were excited and impatient because they felt constrained by the religious laws, practices, and rituals that had evolved and grown within the Judaism of their day. John was the "door-breaker." Through his ministry of leading people to repentance, he prepared many Jewish people to recognize and follow Jesus from their religious constraints into the fresh, green pastures of a new way of life with their Messiah. When the door was open, and Jesus appeared, the crowds were ready to run out to meet Him.

September 30 : Scriptures Micah 5-7

SUMMARY

Even though chapter 4 ends with Judah triumphing over her enemies, chapter 5 opens with Judah under attack and her leader abused and humiliated by Judah's attackers. Side note: Bethlehem is about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. Therefore, when Jerusalem was under siege, Bethlehem was affected and could see the siege from a distance. So, as Micah sees Jerusalem under attack in His revelation, he sees something else. Yehovah will bring forth a ruler from the Bethlehem area. This information is significant because Bethlehem is King David's birthplace. Therefore, God reveals that this ruler from Bethlehem will be David's descendant (5:2). The ruler's "origin is from antiquity, from eternity." The literal text reads, "And his comings forth [are] of old, from the days of antiquity" (Young's Literal Translation).

On the surface, this means his origins go back about three centuries to King David and Yehovah's promise that David would always have a descendant on Judah's throne. However, the words for eternity are *yom olam*, "days of forever." Under the Spirit's inspiration, Matthew affirms Jesus' messianic/Davidic credentials by quoting Micah 5:2. Since we know Jesus preexisted with His Father, then using the word "eternity" for *yom olam* (days of forever) means more than just ancient times. Its double meaning refers to Jesus' ancestor David and His eternal existence.

There is much speculation about verse 3, which is tough to figure out. This is the way I see it. Verse 2 talks about the coming One, Jesus. Verse 3 talks about God abandoning Israel until "she" gives birth, and then the "rest of the ruler's brothers will return to the people of Israel." Isaiah might help us because he and Micah were prophets to Judah simultaneously.'

Isaiah says this:

"Rejoice, childless one, who did not give birth; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of the married woman,' says the Lord" (Isaiah 54:1) and "Before Zion was in labor, she gave birth; before she was in pain, she delivered a boy. Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day or a nation be delivered in an instant? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor, she gave birth to her sons" (Isaiah 66:7-8). Isaiah's verses are in restoration/End Time contexts. Israel will have more children at the end than in her former days (54:1), and the one doing the birthing is the nation of Israel.

Therefore, with this information, Micah could be saying that God will “abandon” (stop Israel from being a nation) until the End when she appears again, and her population increases as the world has seen over the last century. At that time, Jesus will stand as Israel’s shepherd and defend His sheep against Assyria. But how will Assyria exist when Jesus returns? Assyria doesn’t exist today. True. However, prophecy scholars see the Antichrist as coming from the area that Assyria once covered. Daniel’s type of Antichrist, Antiochus IV, ruled that area. So, even though Micah is looking at Judah’s situation during his day, his prophetic word can also apply to the end. Mind-blowing, isn’t it?

In those days (Israel’s supremacy at the End), they will tear through the nations like a lion through a flock (5:8) because God (Jesus) is with them. Along with that, God will eliminate anything from Israel they trust other than Him – military might, defenses, anything supernatural God has forbidden, and idolatry. Israel and all the nations will submit to God.

Yehovah brings a “lawsuit” against His people in chapter 6. What do they have against Him that they’ve abandoned Him considering all the righteous things He’s done for them: Deliverance from Egypt, protection from Balaam (Numbers 22-24), and miraculously bringing Israel over the split Jordan River (Joshua 3-4)? Does God want sacrifices and offerings from His people? Is that what really matters to Him? Though commanded, no. Yehovah wants them “to act justly,” according to His standards, “to love faithfulness,” to remain committed to Him, “and to walk humbly with your God,” living as He wants them to live (6:8).

The God with the rod (threatening punishment for sin) calls to the merchants and leaders in the city, “Is there still sin going on? Are you still cheating people? Are you violent with your fellow citizens? Do you keep lying? Yes! That’s why I’m still striking you. What you crave and have accumulated, you will lose. And because of your idolatry, your city will fall” (6:13).

Judah is in a sad state! The illustration of not being able to find fruit after the harvest season describes how the Lord can’t find a righteous person among the people of Judah. They’re really good at sinning, and the best among them are worthless like briars and a thorny hedge (7:1-4). No one can trust anyone else, but Micah knows he can trust Yehovah (7:7).

Next, Micah speaks in place of Zion/Judah, telling their enemies not to gloat over Jerusalem’s downfall. This wasn’t by their hands but Yehovah’s hand because they sinned. However, when the Lord restores Zion, the enemies who said, “Where is your

God?" will be humiliated because they will see Israel's God in action as God's people trampled their enemies in the street. On the Day of the Lord, God will reclaim His people from Egypt to the Euphrates, and the nations will be made desolate.

Micah asks the Lord to shepherd His people once again. This prayer echoes the Lord's promise to collect His people like a flock and lead them to green pastures (2:12-13). God replies that He will again work miracles on behalf of His people and humiliate their oppressors (7:14-17). When the Lord appears to lead His people, the nations will "tremble in the presence of the Lord our God; they will stand in awe of you." Micah finishes his prophecy with words of hope and praise. There is no God like Yehovah who forgives iniquity and passes over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance (7:18). God will forgive His people their sins and once again show His loyalty and covenant love.

INSIGHT

There are a couple of verses that I often quote when I reassure people how complete God's forgiveness is:

"You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19), and "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

I love these verses because the east is as far from the west as possible, showing God's capacity to remove sin is without measure. Once it's gone, it's gone.

When He forgives our sins based on Jesus taking our punishment, He throws them into the deepest part of the sea, so to speak. Oh, and He puts up a sign that says, "No fishing!" If God forgives and forgets our sins, we should, too.