

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/1/08 Wednesday evening

## Old Testament Survey—Micah

A prophet for hire. That's a person who preaches a message depending on what he can get out of it for himself. He finds out what people want to hear, then preaches it, and gets the paycheck he desires. Does that happen in our day? Sad to say, it does. But it's not a new problem.

Prophets for hire was one of the many problems that confronted God's people seven hundred years before Christ. We read in Micah 3:5, "This is what the LORD says: 'As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim 'peace'; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him.'"

Discuss: What stands out to you about the book of Micah?

### **Who wrote the book?**

--Micah

### What do we know about Micah?

--from Moresheth (1:1), probably Moresheth Gath (1:14) in southern Judah, a country village southwest of Jerusalem, halfway between Jerusalem and the Med. Sea (that's Philistine country). (see map)

--a contemporary of Isaiah (in the south) and Hosea (in the north). Isaiah ministered to the leaders in Jerusalem itself (and addressed the political concerns affecting the nation), whereas Micah ministered primarily to the common people, the common folk in the villages outside of Jerusalem.

### **When was the book written?**

--Second half of 8th century B.C.

--He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (735-700; see 1:1). He probably ministered primarily under Ahaz. The sinful conditions described in Micah reflect the setting under Ahaz.

Note: A connection between Jeremiah and Micah (see Jer 26:18). When Jeremiah was about to be killed for his message, some elders recognized he was saying the same thing Micah had said 100 years before! (Jer 26:18 > Micah 3:12).

It's amazing the difference 100 years will make! When the prophets were living, they were often ignored, mocked, even killed. Much later, they were eulogized by the people! Truth always wins out in the end.

Discuss: What happens if we lose sight of this?

### What was the historical setting of Micah's message?

--The political vacuum of the first half of the 8th century let Judah expand into great prosperity. 2 Chron 26-32 explains that there was so much money, the people had to find ways to spend it! Jerusalem began to view itself as invincible. The people became self-sufficient, though just as religious as always.

A few years ago a book came out with a eye-catching title, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. I don't know the contents of that book, but its title is fitting for our entertainment-crazed society. Micah faced it too, and here's what happened...

--The prosperous times made it difficult for the prophets to speak.

--Abuses developed: (see Hillers, pp. 5-6; Allen, p. 240)

1. Uzziah's aggressive program of armament and fortification and enlargement of borders placed economic burden on the common people (2 Chron 26:9, 11-15).

2. Hezekiah fortified and armed Judah (2 Chr 32). This cost money! It was a burden on the commoners.

3. Ahaz paid tribute to Assyria. This added to the financial burden.

4. Jerusalem expanded around 722 B.C. The Israelites from the north immigrated to Judah. Why? To escape the Assyrian threat. Jerusalem increased to three or four times its previous size at this time. The land was overpopulated.

5. These factors led to social abuse of the people.

Listen to Allen's description, and see if it doesn't sound like a modern scenario (p. 240): "Wealth was invested in land, with the result that the traditional system of agricultural small holdings collapsed with the growth of vast estates, and material and emotional distress ensued. Age-old sanctions associated with the divine covenant were shrugged off, and social concern was at the bottom of the list of priorities of national and local government officials. Even religious leaders--priests and prophets--did little more than echo the spirit of the period, buttressing the society that gave them their livelihood."

## **Why was the book written?**

Micah attacked two main sins:

### *1. Social sins*

Micah did for the south what Amos did for the north.

Q: Notice 2:1. People were not going to bed to sleep, but for what reason? To plan how to use and oppress other people for self-serving gain!

Q: What example of social sin did Micah confront in 2:2? They were robbing people of their inheritance, which was a violation of the Mosaic Law.

In addition, they didn't take care of the helpless (orphans, widows).

Who did God hold most responsible, acc. to 3:1-3? The Leaders

Q: What was the character of the people according to 2:11? They would love a prophet that predicted

plenty of wine and beer! Very self-focused people, chose to live for pleasure, for the temporal thrills of the moment.

See: 6:16--It got so bad that Omri's and Ahab's sins were prevalent. These were wicked kings from the apostate north, but their sins had moved south to Judah. The south is no better than the north, says Micah.

See: 7:6-7--Families couldn't even trust each other.

## 2. *Mere Religious activities*

Micah addresses the theme of true religion.

See: 6:8 "He has showed you, O man..."

Q: Back in 6:2, what analogy does God use to address the sin problem of His people? God takes His people to court, and brings a case against them.

Q: How does He begin the court hearing in verses 3-5? He reminds them of what He had done for them by His grace--His redemption from slavery. He invites them to "remember."

Q: According to 6:6-7, what was going on in Judah all the while that God was displeased? Temple worship services, offerings

Q: Religious activity was increased, but God was displeased. Why? What does God really want from His people, acc. to 6:8? Justice and mercy.

Archer put it this way (330), "The necessary product of saving faith is social reform and practical holiness based upon the righteousness and sovereignty of God."

## **What is the outline of the book?**

Leon Rowland suggests there are three divisions in the book, based on the cry, "Hear!" (in 1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

- I. A Message of Judgment (ch 1-3)
- II. A Message of Comfort and Restoration (ch 4-5)
- III. Practical Matters of How to Live to Please God (ch 6-7)
  - A. In the Present Time
  - B. In the Messianic Era

## What is the message of the book in one sentence?

Micah insists that if we have true faith in God, it will show up in practical deeds of justice and mercy.

## What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?

### 1. *God has high ethical standards for His people.*<sup>[1]</sup>

Discuss: In what way does Micah communicate this truth?

For a sure way to short-circuit your prayer life, see 3:4.

### 2. *True religion is never just a set of beliefs. It's a way of life that revolves around God.*

Discuss: What does that mean in practical terms? What other passages in the Bible address this theme?

### 3. *The difference between a true and false prophet often is not creed, but conduct.*

See: 3:8-12

Q: What were the spiritual leaders claiming in v 11? "The Lord is among us."

Q: What were they doing while they made this claim? V 11 Teach for a price

Discuss: What can we do to keep from falling into the same trap of having conduct that doesn't match creed? Remember, there's more to Christianity than study and intellect.

### 4. *The ultimate purpose of God is going to be realized in spite of the sin of people. The Messiah will see to it.*

See: 5:1-4

Q: What did Micah predict about the Messiah in 5:2? Bethlehem...

Q: What did he say the Messiah would do, in 5:4? Shepherd...

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<sup>[1]</sup> I'm indebted to seminary class notes and material presented by Old Testament Professor Leon Rowland, Grand Rapids Baptist Seminary.