

Profit from

# The Minor Prophets

## 6: Micah

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

Micah 1:1

Moresheth — an agricultural village near the Philistine border — was about twenty-five miles south-west of Jerusalem. At the Lord's command Micah, a peasant or small land-holder from the country and most likely previously unknown in Jerusalem, took on the nation's leadership — government, judiciary, civic establishment and religious hierarchy all of which was rotten to the core — and exposed their corruption, injustice and blatant godlessness.

### When Did Micah Prophesy?

Micah was a contemporary of both Isaiah and Hosea. His ministry began a little later, after King Uzziah had died, and extended over the last third of the eighth century BC, spanning the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Significant events of the period are recorded in 2 Kings 15 – 20 and 2 Chronicles 27 – 32.

The Book of Micah centres on the threat of Assyrian invasion that hung over the land throughout that period. Following the peace and prosperity of the time of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah — the days when Jonah and Amos bought their messages from the Lord — the effects of Assyria's ambition to expand began to be felt in the region. It began around 730BC when Israel was attacked and culminated in 701BC with a move against Judah. In 732 Damascus was captured and Israel, Judah and Philistia were made vassals. In 724 Hoshea, the last king of Israel, withheld tribute from Assyria, Samaria was put under siege and captured in 722, and Israel as a nation ceased to exist. Judah retained its kings but lost most of its freedoms and never fully recovered politically.

### Outline

Martin Luther wrote of the prophets:

"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!"

He probably had Micah in mind. Micah moves suddenly from one subject (and even literary form) to another. This could be because his prophecies were not all given at the same time. It would be reasonable to conclude that his book reflects a number of different encounters during which 'the word of the Lord' came to him.

### The first cycle of oracles 1:1–2:13

The first set of oracles of judgment 1:1 – 2:11

The first promise of blessing: the Lord will restore His remnant 2:12 – 13

### The second cycle of oracles 3:1–5:15

The second set of oracles of judgment 3:1 – 12

The second set of promises of blessing 4:1 – 5:15

### The third cycle of oracles 6:1–7:20

The third set of oracles of judgment 6:1 – 7:7

The third set of promises of blessing 7:8 – 20

## **Micah's Message**

Micah touches on all the great themes preached by the Old Testament prophets: the sovereignty of God, His judgement against sin, His amazing love, the need to get right with God and the coming of Messiah.

With skilfully written wordplays on the names of Judah's cities, Micah opens with prophecies of the coming destruction of Judah (1:3–16). He turns around the meaning of a number of town names as a way of describing the world being turned upside down. Shaphir, meaning "Beautiful," would be shamed (1:11); and Jerusalem, its name suggesting "Peace," would be disrupted (1:12). Lachish, a name sounding like the Hebrew word for swift steeds, would flee on its horses. All this agitation will be caused by God's judgment on Judah for worshiping other gods on the high places. In fact, idolatry was so rampant that Micah describes Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of Judah and Israel, as high places themselves (1:5).

The interplay of texts of wrath and mercy mirrors the character of God, for even in His wrath He remembers mercy. In the darkest days of impending judgment on the nations of Israel and Judah, there was always the possibility of a remnant being spared. Although the Lord was determined to maintain His holiness, He was equally intent on fulfilling His loving promises to Abraham. Just as the Lord balances His judgment with mercy, Micah balances his oracles of judgment with oracles of promise. In doing so, Micah points back to the covenant and forward to the coming One.

The book uses the language of a court. Micah calls the peoples of earth to come to hear the Lord's case against Israel, for the nation had broken the covenant (3:1; 6:1–3). The language recalls the language of the covenant or contract the Lord established with His people. The Lord was judging His people according to the terms of the covenant. But in the middle of the oracles of judgment, Micah reveals the Lord's wonderful promises of a glorious future. There would be a time when the coming King would gather His people together (2:12, 13), when He would establish peace (4:3), and when He would bring justice to the earth (4:2, 3). Remarkably, Micah prophesies that this coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (5:2).

Although Micah's preaching warned Judah about an impending national disaster, the religious leaders of Jerusalem were falsely confident that no evil would come to them because of the inviolable presence of the holy temple in their midst. Micah sternly confronted their arrogance and their mistaken notions of God: not even the temple on Mount Zion would be spared the onslaught of God's wrath (3:12).

The lengthy delay in the fulfilment of Micah's prophecies against Jerusalem may be put down to God's mercy. Nevertheless, although the judgment of Jerusalem was postponed, it was finally realised in the destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586BC.

## **Questions For Discussion**

- What are the main messages of the book of Micah?
- How can we apply the teaching of Micah practically to our own lives?

## **For Further Study**

Viewing them in their context, what can you learn from these verses?

- Micah 4:2 – 5
- Micah 5:2
- Micah 6:8
- Micah 7:18 – 19