

Micah

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As we continue on our tour of the minor prophets, the next book in order we come to is the book of Obadiah. However, Obadiah is only one chapter long, and it is concerned entirely with prophesying the destruction of the now-extinct nation of Edom. I didn't feel much like writing a sermon on that or subjecting you to the result, so instead, we're going to shift our attention to the next minor prophet, the much more relevant book of Micah.

The first verse of the book tells us that Micah was from Moresheth, a town in Judah. He preached during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Chronologically, that puts him about 30 years later than the group of prophets from Israel we've been looking at, men like Hosea, Amos, and Jonah. They prophesied the destruction of the northern kingdom, but Micah was around to see it. Likewise, it makes him a contemporary of the major prophet Isaiah. Just as Isaiah did, Micah apparently moved in the upper echelons of Jewish society. He spends much of the book condemning the sins not of the common people of Judah, but of its leadership. In fact, Jeremiah reports in Jeremiah 26 that Micah's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem were a major factor in persuading Hezekiah to repent.

All of this is no doubt interesting to people who love reading the historical blurbs in their reference Bibles, but it doesn't really go very far explaining how Micah applies to us. In truth, though, it's easy to find relevance in the book. The same problems that Micah highlighted are very much with us today. Just like the Jewish state was riddled with corruption, we see all kinds of corruption in our modern-day government. Our former governor is on trial right now for precisely the same kind of abuse of his office that Micah condemns. When we feel powerless and exploited by those over us, it's reassuring that God sees and will judge the corrupt. Likewise, we find our hope in the same place Micah did, in a perfect kingdom of heaven governed by a perfect messiah. Let's give thought to these things in the book of Micah.

Judah's Problems

As is quite typical with the minor prophets, Micah approaches his subject by cataloguing Judah's problems. The first of these is a **CORRUPT GOVERNMENT**. Micah describes it quite graphically in Micah 7:2-4. On the one hand, Micah presents the prince who can be swayed by lavish gifts and the judge who can be bribed. On the other hand, he points to the wealthy man who wants to do something evil. Corruption brings the two together. The government official gets a little bit richer, and the great man gets to accomplish his evil plan with the acquiescence of the authorities. Nor is this an isolated problem. Micah instead illustrates a political world in which the righteous are hard to find, in which the average official is as crooked as a thornbush. However, as Micah says, the watchman is coming for the wicked. The poor may not have anyone on earth who will plead their case, but God knows what is happening, and He will judge justly.

I have to tell you, friends, when I read this passage, I felt like I was reading the morning paper. If Micah had uttered his prophecies about modern-day Illinois, I don't imagine he'd have said much different. At times, this can fill us with despair. What's the use in voting for governor, we ask, when no matter what party we vote for, the man's likely to end up in federal prison? In such moments, it's reassuring to remember that the corrupt will be punished as they deserve.

Likewise, the Judah of Micah's day had to contend with **CORRUPT PROPHETS**. Consider Micah 3:5-7. Here, Micah is referring to the professional prophet class we've encountered already in the story of Amos. Their message is quite simple. They say, "Give me something to eat, and I'll say that God loves you, but if you don't feed me, then I'll say that you need to be wiped off the face of the earth." Their concern was their own prosperity, not the righteousness of the people. As we would expect from such a philosophy, they only succeeded in leading the people astray.

This may be the dominant motivation for the preachers of our day. They dress what they preach up in fancy clothes. They talk about being tolerant and ecumenical and inclusive. In reality, though, there's the same sort of contract going on. These preachers say, "As long as you drop your check in the collection plate, I'll tickle your ears and rub your belly too. I'll send you home feeling fine." Sadly, that feel-good doctrine is only going to lead people to destruction.

However, it wasn't just the officials and the prophets who failed. The entire people of Judah suffered from a **REFUSAL TO HEAR**. Micah examines their attitude in Micah 2:6, 11. The people were content with all kinds of sin, but there was one thing they couldn't stand. They couldn't stand plain talk about evil and its consequences. They didn't want to hear that they were storing up disgrace for themselves. Their religion was a religion where nobody ever did anything wrong, and they'd sooner listen to a drunken buffoon than to a man who convicted them of sin.

Once again, the parallels are almost eerie. This same love for anything but the unpleasant truth is so evident in the people around us today. Like the people of Micah's day, they preach a gospel of tolerance, under which the only real sin is to be intolerant. The last thing the people of our country want to do is to change their lives to please God.

It's easy for us to nod our heads at this, but it can be hard to do differently ourselves. Do we want to hear the painful truths, or would we rather hear preaching that doesn't require change? Do we listen when God's word tells us to

quit watching filthy TV shows, or do we remain devoted to “Grey’s Anatomy” and “CSI: Miami” and “True Blood”? Do we change our wardrobe to conform to Scriptural principles of modesty, or do we continue wearing the same indecent things? Before we get too critical of the overly tolerant world, we need to make sure that we aren’t right there with it.

Ultimately, all of these problems could be traced back to a **FAILURE TO LEAD**. Look at Micah 3:9-12. According to this text, the leaders of Judah failed in two main ways. First, they were responsible for upholding the law of God, but they used their position to enrich themselves instead. Second, even as they were doing this, they continued to trust in the God whose commandments they were trampling. As a result, Judah was going to be destroyed.

Similarly, it’s fair to say that we are devising our own doom because of the failures of our leaders. We can’t do much about the political scene. We can’t stop the mouths of all of the feel-good false teachers out there. However, we can make sure that the leadership in our church and in our families is righteous. This burden falls upon the men. If we serve in the church as an elder or a deacon, we must be devoted to the Lord personally and devoted to leading others to Him. As heads of households, we have to make the determination that our families are going to do what’s right. We have to man up and commit to bringing our wives and children to every service that is offered and to every opportunity for spiritual growth that the church presents. If we don’t, those close to us may well suffer the same fate as Judah.

God’s Salvation.

Thankfully, despite their flaws, the people of Judah were still going to see God’s salvation. Somewhat atypically, Micah focuses on a number of blessings that will be revealed hundreds of years in the future. The first of these is **THE CHURCH**. Micah raises the subject in Micah 4:1-2. This prophecy is actually quite similar to one that appears in Isaiah 2, but in both cases, we have no trouble understanding the topic under discussion. This clearly refers to the time when Christ would found His church, both as a means of spreading the teaching of the Lord and as a beacon of salvation. This church wouldn’t be for the Jews alone. Instead, all the nations could come to the mountain of the Lord.

This should help us recognize how precious the church we have is. The world around us will never be godly. Corruption was a problem 2700 years ago, and it’s a problem today. However, inside the community of God’s chosen people, we have the opportunity to carry out His will. In some ways, the darker the world around us becomes, the more precious the church grows. A couple of weeks ago, I spoke with Sunday Ayundare, a preacher from Nigeria. His nation is lawless. He showed me the wound in his own body where he had been shot by a gang of thugs in his own home. However, even in Nigeria, God’s kingdom is just as righteous, and its gospel just as holy and pure. We live in a world that’s a long way from heaven, but we can take consolation from our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

Second, Micah looks forward to the perfect leadership of **JESUS**. Let’s consider together Micah 5:2-5. First, notice just how specific this prophecy is. From a distance of 750 years out, it correctly predicts that Jesus is going to be born in Bethlehem. This isn’t like guessing that Jesus was going to be born in New York City. Both in the time of Micah and in the time of Christ, Bethlehem was a little podunk town that probably wouldn’t have qualified for a traffic light. There were hundreds if not thousands of towns like that in Palestine. Only an inspired writer could have predicted that.

Also, this passage could not present a clearer contrast to all of the corrupt leaders whom Micah has described. Instead of exploiting the flock, Jesus is going to feed it. Instead of being easily swayed, Jesus is going to be eternal in both His origins and His purpose. Today, we can take just as much comfort from this description of the Author of our salvation. There are all kinds of human leaders we can put our trust in, but sooner or later, just about all of them are going to disappoint us. Jesus, however, will never disappoint. We can rightfully place our faith in Him.

If we want to belong to this better kingdom and serve this perfect Leader, though, it demands from us a commitment to personal **RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Micah’s great summary of what God wants to see from us appears in Micah 6:6-8. The Jews had gone down the path of trying to buy God off with all sorts of external sacrifices, but what God really wanted to see was an internal change of heart. Even today, God wants just the same things from us. He wants us to do justly, to fulfill all of the duties and obligations we owe to Him and to other men. He wants us to love mercy, to rejoice in blessing others even when they haven’t earned it and don’t deserve it. Finally, He wants us to walk humbly with Him, to spend our lives faithfully following His statutes. In Matthew 23, Jesus describes this same triad of justice and mercy and faithfulness as “the weightier matters of the law.” If we attend to them, we’ll do what pleases God.

However, no matter how much we devote ourselves to justice and mercy and faithfulness, we will always fall short of God’s standards. That’s why **GOD’S NATURE** is so important to our relationship with Him. Micah describes the unique character of God in Micah 7:18-20. Many of the gods of the nations around Israel were vengeful. Their worshipers believed that those gods didn’t rest until they had destroyed those who displeased them. Thankfully, the true God isn’t like that. He doesn’t delight in waiting for a chance to obliterate us. He delights in mercy instead. He doesn’t nail our sins to our foreheads. Instead, when we repent, He casts them into the depth of the sea. The omniscient God actually forgets the evil we have done. We could work all of our lives and not accumulate enough riches to buy forgiveness for one single sin, but God pardons us freely. How wonderful it is to have a God like that!