

Bible Study Class
Clayton Presbyterian Church
Lesson 1 Micah

Opening prayer: Lord, help us to hear your words for us through the prophet Micah. We know that while these words still apply to us today. Help us to learn from these examples. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Today we begin with an introduction of Micah and chapter 1. Next Sunday we will study chapters 2 and 3. Micah has three sections as shown on the chart.

Introduction

Micah as we said last Sunday is one of the minor prophets, which means that his book is shorter than those of the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. The primary role of the prophets in the Bible was to speak with the people about the words and will of God in their specific situations. The prophets served as God's megaphones, declaring whatever God commanded them to say.

Read Deuteronomy 18:18-19

Micah is called the Morasthite. This word means that he was an inhabitant of Moresheth Gath, a small village about 22 miles south-west from Jerusalem. He was a prophet when Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah were kings of Judah. They were kings from 756 to 697 BC. Micah's name means who is like Yahweh? Of course, the answer is no one. He was a contemporary of Isaiah though he is younger.

In the year 975 BC, King Solomon's nation, Israel, became divided. Even though the nation had not obeyed God or his laws, He didn't destroy the nation because He had given them a covenant. He had promised to send someone from Abraham's family, through his descendant David who would save Israel. Jesus the Messiah came into the world to save the world from sin. Notice that this is a very different plan than the political saving that almost everyone expected. There was a war between Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and a servant of Solomon called Jeroboam. Rehoboam ruled only the southern part of the nation, called Judah and had only two tribes. Jeroboam ruled the northern part and 10 families called themselves Israel. The modern word 'Jew' comes from that name. Judah remained loyal to the covenant. Kings from David's family continued to rule in Jerusalem, Judah's capital. Israel's kings had different cities as capitals. The last capital was Samaria. The powerful kings of Israel controlled the people by means of changes to their religion. They changed the ways in which people prayed, chose new priests and built

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two new temples. One was at Dan on the northern border of Israel. The other was at Bethel on Israel's border with Judah.

Micah especially mentions three kings of Judah who ruled in Jerusalem. Micah or prophets such as Isaiah and Hosea would not have respected the northern nation. The reason was that, in the northern nation, the people themselves had appointed their kings rather than have God-chosen kings. While that is how the prophets might have seen the situation. Micah uses the name Israel for both nations. God sent many prophets to Judah and Israel. Some prophets were priests, some were farmers, some were rich and they advised the kings. Other prophets lived much more simply. Some prophets wrote down their prophecies, others didn't. But all the prophets taught the people about right judgements in the courts, about how people should be fair to other people and that people need to trust God for help. Many prophets warned that the people would suffer defeat and their enemies would take them away to different places abroad if they did not start to obey God again. Some prophets understood God's plans for their nation and looked forward to the time when a new king would come to rule the nation. The Messiah who would lead God's people into a wonderful new age without end. Other prophets saw that he would also be a servant and He would suffer many things to cause his people to come back to God. But all the prophets saw that this Messiah would be the man that God had chosen.

During Micah's life, Israel's and Judah's enemies would destroy those two nations. God had warned Israel's people about things that might happen in the future. But they had not listened to him. In 722 or 721 BC, an Assyrian army came and defeated Samaria, the capital city. They took the people from their homes to various places all over the country called Assyria. The Assyrians then brought foreigners to live in Israel. Israel's priests taught these people. Since the priests taught them, many foreigners tried to obey the covenant. These people were called the Samaritans. This is why the people of Jesus' day still looked down on Samaritans. Then the Assyrians tried to control Judah. They defeated the people in much of that country. But God saved Jerusalem. Judah continued to exist for over 100 years after the defeat of Israel. But in the end the army from Babylon defeated Judah's people and led them away from Judah and they became foreigners in another country.

Micah pronounced judgment on the cities of Israel and on Jerusalem in Judah. These centers influenced the people of each nation. Micah's condemnation of urban

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problems sounds very much like our present-day problems: violence, corruption, robbery, covetousness, gross materialism, and spiritual bankruptcy. While he came from a small town or village, he could be called the prophet of the city. McGee tells us that Micah is the favorite minor prophet for many people. He would have been a good war correspondent. He combines God's infinite tenderness with His judgments. Through the gloom of impending judgement, Micah saw clearly the coming glory of the redemption of Israel.

Max Lado says the key themes of this book are:

- God will punish those who oppress the poor.
- Micah claims Bethlehem to be the place of the Messiah's birth.
- Religion should be practical and within the context of community and society.

PART	CHAPTERS	TITLE	AUDIENCE
Section 1	chapters 1-2	Punishment and Rescue	All people
Section 2	chapters 3-5	Ultimate Blessing	Leaders of Israel
Section 3	chapters 6-7	God will forgive the remnant of his people	A personal plea for Israel to repent and return to God.

Micah will remind you that even when God seems distant and uninvolved, God still cares and offers hope to those who choose to remain faithful to him. Reading this book will remind you that God is still active in this world, and he will not allow sin to hinder his purposes.

Chapter 1 Prophet's first message, directed against Samaria, reaches to Jerusalem.

Read Micah 1:1-4

V 1. This verse makes it clear that this message isn't Micah's message but from God. The message came with great power because the Holy Spirit came and used him. Micah heard God's voice and he understood God's message. He saw God's plans in a vision or dream. Samaria is the capital of the Northern Kingdom. One of the golden calves is there. Micah prophesies to both kingdoms, but primarily to the Northern Kingdom. Samaria is 30 miles north from Jerusalem.

Read 1 Kings 16:23-24

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It is on a hill that has steep sides and a long flat top, which was difficult to reach. The hill was called the hill of Samaria.

V 2 Micah gives an order to all the people in Samaria and Jerusalem. It is a call to all the world to hear how God is going to judge Samaria. The people in Israel had a special relationship with God because they had made a covenant with him. But they had not followed the rules in the covenant. God calls both Israel and the other nations to a court of law. He asks them to defend themselves. Yes, God would punish Samaria and Jerusalem. But the whole world must hear this message. The Lord will come to be a witness against Israel and against the whole world. Everyone and everything in the whole world must listen to these words.

V 3 'High places' and 'valleys' describes all places everywhere. It may mean strong, important institutions. People in other nations met together on the high places. To pray to their gods there. God had ordered King Hezekiah to destroy such places. The Assyrians are God's instrument of judgment.

Read 2 Kings 18:1-6.

People feel safe as long as God stays in heaven. But he will come to the Earth to give judgement and to punish sin. Nations and institutions will melt when they meet God's fire. They will realize that they must meet the holy God.

Read Micah 1:5-9

V 5 Micah accuses 'Jacob' or Israel about sin. The people have not obeyed the covenant that God made with Israel. Those in Samaria' the northern capital here means the bad leaders of the northern nation. 'Jerusalem' the southern capital refers to the bad leaders of the southern nation. In the northern kingdom they had adopted calf worship and Baal worship as well as other Canaanite, Syrian, and Assyrian idols and idolatrous practices. God had sent Elijah, Elisha, and Amos to turn them back from idols. But in vain. Sin here means that the people purposely decided to oppose God. God gave to them a purpose that they should live for and they have failed to achieve that purpose. They have decided that they will not obey God's covenant, therefore Jerusalem with its temple and services, has become just another high place of heathen worship. The condemnation of Jerusalem, however, seems to apply more to the time of Ahaz, whose specific sins, according to the book of Kings, included the installation of an additional altar in the temple precinct. This was just one of several changes "in deference to the king of Assyria"

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Read 2 Kings 17:3-18

Samaria's people prayed to images showing that they did not understand God or his laws. Their evil religion caused them to do bad things and the effect is evil. They said that they were wise. But they became fools. They exchanged the greatness of the God who can never die for images. One of their sins was using sex in the wrong way. God was like a husband to the people in Israel. They were like prostitutes, who leave their husbands to go with other men. The people in Samaria had become wealthy because of this wicked religion. They had learned this behavior from the other nations. The people in Samaria would become slaves to other nations. And the army from Assyria would take away their wealth. Micah's denunciation of Samaria uses several vivid images, with the force that the thriving urban capital will be transformed into an agricultural plot, its formidable buildings nothing more than stones to be cleared for the crops. Evidence of the prosperity of Samaria is found in the excavations revealing, e.g., the extensive fortifications that defined the acropolis beginning in the days of Omri. Of additional interest, archaeologists recovered the Samaria a potshard with writing. It was a series of receipts for goods delivered from the surrounding area. While earlier summaries of the excavations at Samaria spoke of the Assyrian destruction of Samaria around 722 BC, recent archaeologists are no longer certain if the Assyrians razed the city or whether they merely replaced its political structure and many of its inhabitants while leaving its architecture substantially intact. Some of this imagery may, while retaining the concept of destruction, also hint at ritual defilement. Isaiah speaks of the cultic "smooth stones of the ravine "and a fifth-century BC Phoenician inscription uses the uncovering of foundations as evidence that something has been cursed. The language here might be focused on the cursing of Samaria rather than on the disposition of its architecture.

V 6-7 The remainder of the chapter describes prophetically the destruction of Samaria by Assyria. Micah lived to see his words come true

Judgment on Judah

V 8-9 The following verses are a lamentation of Micah. The meaning of names reveals a play on words. Micah weeps as he speaks God's judgement. He knows that the situation is hopeless. Micah has seen that a wicked enemy will overcome Samaria. God's judgement is certain. The nature of sin is that it spreads. The sin is like an unstoppable disease that has spread to Judah. It has spread right into the

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center of Jerusalem. In the first couplet, Micah weeps and wails, using verbs that are almost always used in the context of mourning for the dead in this case in anticipation of the devastation of Judah. Further, Micah strips off his clothing and shoes. While the tearing of garments is often a sign of mourning, the nakedness of the prophet seems more closely linked to the anticipation of exile. The final metaphor can be related to mourning or to exile. Some propose that the jackal and the "owl" are mentioned here for their distinctive howl or piercing cry, perhaps paralleled with the cry of the mourner. The more likely connection, however, is to the jackal and the "ostrich," two animals found on the fringes of the inhabited places, signaling that Judah is to be a desolate wilderness, left to these animals. Ostrich remains have been found in excavations on the border of the wilderness. Verse 9 refers to the gate of Jerusalem. Some have argued that this is the Divine Warrior of the first few verses who has finally arrived at his destination of judgment. Others focus on the commercial function of the gate. The commercial injustice, which Micah will later discuss, has now even infected the very marketplaces of Jerusalem.

Read Micah 1:10-16

Show the map.

V 10 Gath means weep town. Micah is thinking about the army from Assyria that would soon come to Jerusalem. Micah mentions towns near his home town, Moresheth Gath. Without those towns, Jerusalem would not be a capital any longer. The Hebrew word for each town becomes a message about the future. Gath sounds like the Hebrew word for 'tell'. In the Hebrew language, 'in Acco' sounds like 'weep'. Beth Aphrah means 'House of Dust'. The message might be, 'Do not tell it in Tell town. Do not weep in Weep town. Roll yourself in the House of Dust.' The army from Assyria will defeat the people in those towns. Then Jerusalem's rulers will 'roll themselves in the dust'. This was a custom that showed complete despair. In 701 BC, King Sennacherib advanced towards Jerusalem. He attacked 46 towns and cities, and he took control of them. These included the ones that Micah mentions here. We can understand why Micah felt so much pain. Israel is like God's light to the nations. When the light becomes dark, the nations have no light and no hope. V 11 Shaphir was a beautiful city. But its people will soon be prisoners. The Assyrians will take its people away to another country. They will make its people walk naked through the streets. Then those people will be greatly ashamed because

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everyone will see their naked bodies. Their enemies will not care about them. But God sympathizes. Zaanan means 'go forward' or march town. But the people in the town called Zaanan will not go forward to help their neighbors in the battle. Instead, they will hide behind their walls. Bethazel means 'house where they take away'. Its people will 'take away' their help and will not protect Judah any longer. V 12 Maroth is a town where the people are bitter. Bitter people need to hope for something better. The people in Maroth hope for help and peace. But there is no help from Jerusalem's people. Jerusalem is the city whose name means 'peace'. God will use the Assyrians to carry out his judgement. The Assyrians will march right up to the great gate of Jerusalem. By means of them, he will punish the people in Judah. Severe punishment has come from the Lord.

V 13 Lachish was an important town about 4 miles from Micah's home. It was the strongest place in the region and the site of an army installation that included fast horses and chariots. The army's job was to defend the western hills. The two words 'horses' and 'Lachish' sound similar in the Hebrew language. Lachish might mean a team of horses. The people in Lachish would have trusted in their strong army and chariots. The people thought that they were in no danger from the Assyrians. But they were wrong. In Micah's message, God is telling the people to leave this strong town as quickly as possible. This command probably made the people very afraid. The Assyrians would soon defeat the people in Lachish. Lachish's people had caused Jerusalem's people to stop trusting in God. They had pride in their horses and chariots instead of God. Pride causes us to think that God's rules for our life do not matter. We believe that we can do as we choose and we don't need God. We think that we can live very well without him. The people in Lachish had the same sin as the people in Israel had. The 'Daughter of Zion' is another name for Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. In our modern world, we too can be guilty of pride. Now we might trust machinery, computers and modern science. We might trust all those things when we should be trusting God.

V 14 In this message, the Assyrians have defeated the people in Lachish. The king must now pay money as gifts to the Assyrians. Achzib is now under the Assyrians' control. Therefore, Judah's rulers cannot receive taxes from the people in Achzib. Achzib means 'cheat' or lie. It was a wealthy town with many places where people worked. They will have nothing. That is the result of God's judgement on the nation.

V 15 'People in Mareshah'. The Hebrew words here sound like 'someone who takes possession' like the person that wins a battle. The result will be that only a few

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people will live. It was like that earlier at the cave of Adullam. This statement about Adullam refers to David when he ran away from Saul and hid in the cave of Adullam.

Read 1 Samuel 22:1-2

However, all those references to the cave of Adullam mean the same thing. David's companions were unhappy men in trouble and in debt. Those who ran from Mareshah were important people. But those two situations were alike, because there was little hope for improvement. In both events, it seemed that the end had come. There is a promise about a better future for Judah and Israel. But it comes later in this book in chapter 2.

V16 God gives more orders for the people in Jerusalem. All good parents love their children and desire good things for them. The children, like their parents, are important people. The parents will be sad when the Assyrians will take the children away to a foreign country. God tells them to cut off their hair to make themselves bald. The people had a custom. When they were ashamed and sad, they would shave all the hair from their heads. Then everyone would see how sad they were. Then they will look like a large bird that has no feathers on its head. Soon, Judah's people and Jerusalem's people would suffer terribly. Unfortunately, many people do not love God and they do not obey his orders. In the previous verses, we see that God is the judge of towns, cities and nations. Because of his holy nature, he must be angry against sin. 'Trouble has come down from the Lord in verse 12. 'I will bring a person that will act against you 'in verse 15. The punishment comes from God. The events in these verses are the result of God's direct action. These are serious matters for us today. We need to be aware of our own sin and confess our sin to God. He cares about us and does not want us to suffer his punishment. And he will forgive us if we humbly invite him into our lives. God did not want to punish the people in Samaria and Judah. He wanted them to serve him again and he wanted them to obey his laws. But they refused to obey him. And in the end, they suffered the punishment that Micah described. The destruction of Samaria by Assyria is a miniature of the great destructive last days.

Closing prayer: Help us to apply what we have heard to follow you more closely. Amen.

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Micah 1:1-4	1 Kings 16:23-24	Deuteronomy 18:18-19
Micah 1:5-9	2 Kings 18:1-6	1 Samuel 22:1-2
Micah 1:10-16	2 Kings 17:3-18	

