

Introduction to Micah

מיכה

Micah 1:1-7:20

Key Verse: 6:8

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

The book of Micah teaches us what it means to be a holy nation people. The prophet warned about the God's judgment on Israel as well as Judah for the sins of their rulers, prophets and priests. Their lives did not reflect the teachings of the Holy God. Micah also encouraged those who lived by faith in God by prophesying that a ruler would be born in Bethlehem to establish an everlasting kingdom.

Who was Micah?

The prophet Micah (whose name means 'Who is like the Lord?') was from a country town called Moresheth (1:1), located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, near the border between Judah and the Philistine territory. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1), around 8th century, B.C. His contemporary prophets were Isaiah and Hosea. Micah steadfastly depended on God in his life of mission. The national leaders as well as the ordinary people of his country were steeped in sin, but Micah said, "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me" (7:7).

The Times of Micah

Micah described his times as times of moral and spiritual corruption, greed and injustice. God's judgment was imminent on the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria) for her rampant idolatry. It was about to fall to the Assyrians. Now even Judah was on the verge of catching the spiritual disease from Samaria. Micah said, "You were the beginning of sin to the Daughters of Zion, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you" (1:13).

Micah said that the word of God came to him during the reigns of the three kings of Judah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1). Jotham was one of the few good kings of Judah. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done (2Ki 15:34). However, he did not remove the high places and his people continued to offer sacrifices to the idols.

Ahaz, son of Jotham, was 25 years old when he became king of Judah and he ruled in Jerusalem for 16 years. He did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire (2Ki 16:3). During his reign, the northern kingdom of Israel made an alliance with Syria and invaded Judah. When Rezin king of Aram (Syria) and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to Jerusalem and besieged the city, King Ahaz was scared and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. Through his servant Isaiah, God told him to keep calm and stand firm in his faith. God told Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign." Ahaz said in his arrogance, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test." Still, God had mercy on his people and promised to give a sign. "The

virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). What did Ahaz do? He turned to Assyria for help. He sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria to say, “I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.” And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria (2Ki 16:7-8). The king of Assyria was only happy to comply because he had the ambition of conquering Syria on the way of invading Israel and even Judah itself.

Ahaz did not stop with his political alliance with the pagan king. In fact, his spiritual idolatry had much more devastating impact on his people than his political blunder. When he went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria, he saw a pagan altar there and told his priest to make a detailed sketch of it for construction. He had an altar built in Jerusalem, and offered up his offerings on it (2Ki 16:13). This idolatry by the king brought a corruption of the chosen people of God that only the furnace of the Babylonian exile would begin to cure.

Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles (2Ki 18:4). He trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. He faithfully kept God’s commands. And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook (2Ki 18:7). Hezekiah also decided not to serve Assyria as his father Ahaz had done. Instead, he built up his defense forces. Then in the sixth year of Hezekiah’s rule in Judah, Assyria invaded the Northern Israel and deported the people to Assyria to settle them there. This happened because they had not obeyed the Lord their God, but had violated his covenant (2Ki 18:12). In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. He had to give some gold and silver to the Assyrian king to keep him at bay. However, he refused to give in to the pagan king. Instead, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, God of Israel, ... Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God... Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O Lord, are God" (2Ki 19:14-19). God heard his prayer and delivered the city of Jerusalem from the army of Sennacherib (2Ki 19:35-36).

The Message of Micah

Micah preached during one of the most tumultuous times of Israel’s history. He served the Lord under a godless king Ahaz as well as the two good kings. He saw how his country’s political future was like a candlelight flickering in the wind gust called the Assyrian Empire. But the biggest problem he saw for his people was not the external forces, but the internal corruption of the leaders of his nation--priests, judges, prophets, and rulers. In 3:1-3, Micah said, “Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people’s flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?” Micah also said in 2:11, “If a liar and deceiver comes and says, ‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,’ he would be just the prophet for this people!” He lamented the fact that his people exchanged the truth of God with the lies of the false prophets. This corruption of the nations permeated the hearts of all people in his nation, from leaders to ordinary people. The symptoms of their corruption included lies, hypocrisy,

greed, bribery, robbery, fear and unrest. In Micah's eyes, the real cause of the social evils and injustice was their neglect of God's word and their spiritual idolatry.

What did Micah preach to his people in such situation? Like his fellow prophets Isaiah, Amos and others, he had to deliver the message of God's judgment upon his people. Something drastic had to be done to purge the corruption of his people and nation. God would send his people into the hands of their enemy. Micah prophesied the fall of Samaria (1:6), which took place in 722–721 B.C. He also prophesied Judah's exile to Babylon (4:10). These hardships would serve as a wake-up call for his people. But ultimately God himself would establish truth for his people. Like Isaiah, Micah looked forward to the day when God would establish the mountain of the Lord's temple as chief among the mountains. In 4:2, he said: Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

In proclaiming the impending judgment of God on his people for their sins, Micah did not try to make his message soft by using politically-correct language. Instead, he used blunt words. He said in 6:11-13, "Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins." Micah used the language of poetry to describe vividly the sins of Samaria and Judah and God's warnings against their corruption. But he was also quick to remind them of God's mercy and unfailing love towards his people. Each of his rebuke and warning is followed by words of encouragement and hope in God. The ultimate hope he prophesied was the redemptive plan of God that would solve the fundamental problem of man's sin--the coming of the Savior, Jesus Christ. He said in 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (cf. Mt 2:4-6)

Many of the symptoms of sin Micah pointed out for his people are present in our society as well. Micah's message is still relevant to us. Many of our political, business and even religious leaders observe the statues of Omri and practice Ahab's traditions (6:16). We are guilty of spiritual idolatry. Many people worship someone or something other than God. They exchange God's truth for lies. In the name of political correctness, they take Christ out of Christmas. They advocate abortion when the Bible teaches us clearly that life comes from God and therefore belongs to God. Not many of them would say boldly that homosexual behavior is sin before God. These ways of thinking and false teachings have devastating impact on ordinary people, especially young people of our society. What would the prophet Micah say about our society today?

Micah gave a spiritual direction to his people which is relevant to us as well. In 6:8, he said, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." His words remind us of Jesus' summary of God's commandments in Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." According to Micah, the answer to our social ills,

including economic injustice and moral degradation, is not some clever policy, but a return to God and his words of truth. If we, leaders as well as ordinary people, love God with all hearts and love our neighbor as ourselves, God will surely bless us to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Outline of Micah

1. God Will Punish Idolatry (1:1-16)
2. Warnings Against Political and Spiritual Leaders (2:1-3:12)
3. A Ruler Will Come From Bethlehem (4:1-5:15)
4. God's Judgment and Mercy (6:1-7:20)

Chronology of Micah

Chronological Table

Years BC	Kings of Israel (Northern Kingdom)	Kings of Judah (Southern Kingdom)	Prophets	Historical Events
790	Jeroboam II (790)	Azariah/Uzziah (792)	Amos	
785				
780				
775				
770				
765				
760				
755				
750				
	Zechariah (749) Shallum (748) Menahem (748)		Isaiah	
745				
740		Jotham (740)	Micah	Tiglath-Pileser Assyrian king (744-727)
735	Pekahiah (737) Pekah (735)			
	<u>Hoshea</u> (733)	Ahaz (734)		Syro-Ephraimite War (734-732)
730				
725		Hezekiah (728)		
	Fall of Northern Kingdom (721)			Shalmaneser V Assyrian king (726-722)
720				
715				Sargon II Assyrian king (721-705)

Maps of Micah



Map 1. Judah and Israel in Micah's Time



The Assyrian Empire, C. 700 B.C.E.

Map 2. Assyrian Empire in Micah's Time



Map 3. God's Judgment on Israel for Her Sins