

Micah

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be ruler in Israel
Whose goings forth have been from of old, From Everlasting” (Micah 5:2)

Without argument leaders have an enormous influence on their people for good or bad. Israel had enjoyed both good and bad leaders. However, as things progressed there were more poor ones than righteous. When God is finally forced to take action against the wickedness of His nation Israel, both people and leaders come under judgment for their sins. The prophecy of Micah addresses this dynamic in a most direct manner. The people had failed because the leaders had failed but God would ultimately send “One to be ruler in Israel” who would be able to do what no king or leadership complex had ever been able to accomplish—lead Israel into the kind of obedience that was required in order to experience the fullness of their promised blessing. However, in the meantime they must bear their punishment. Micah shows them how.

Authorship

Little is known about the author besides his name and hometown. Micah means “Who is like Yahweh?,” a question that is explored in the book (cf. 7:18). Moresheth (Gath), in western Judah, guarded a key route into Jerusalem. Sennacherib attacked it in 701 B.C. Though Micah carried on his prophetic ministry from Jerusalem, he would have felt keenly this Assyrian assault on his hometown.

Date

The prophecy is dated during the reigns of the Judahite kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, which covers the period from 750 to 686 B.C. Internal considerations,

such as co-regencies and historical events like Assyrian incursions, narrow Micah's ministry to a time between 735 and 700 B.C.¹

Historical Setting

This is a complex period in the history of the divided monarchy. Not only was there the ongoing spiritual crisis so present in the prophets but there was international upheaval and intrigue as well. Syria and Israel entered into an alliance and attacked Judah ca. 734-732 B.C. Assyria moved to bring Syria under control (732 B.C.) and then destroyed Samaria in 722 B.C., thus bringing to an end the northern kingdom of Israel. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib, in an effort to bring the whole area under firm Assyrian control, brought destruction as far as the gates of Jerusalem. Moresheth was destroyed during this incursion.

Original Readers / Occasion

Micah's message is addressed to both Samaria and Jerusalem, the respective capitals of Israel and Judah. The former was already under the threat of judgment from which there would be no return. Judah had not yet progressed to this point and could still turn back to Yahweh if they would just learn from Samaria's judgment (cf. Jer 3:6-8). Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, whose ministry was mostly to the royal house of David. Micah's ministry centered more on the spiritual condition of the common people.²

¹ Charles Dyer and Gene Merrill, *The Old Testament Explorer* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 779-80.

² *Ibid.*, 781-82,

Message

Though Israel and Judah will be judged for the sins of leader and people alike, Yahweh will establish the eternal kingdom through His ideal Ruler, who will restore the remnant in righteousness and lead the people into truth.

Outline

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| I. | Title: The word of Yahweh for Samaria and Jerusalem. | 1:1 |
| | A. The Prophet: “Who is like Yahweh?” | 1:1a |
| | B. The Period: The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. | 1:1b |
| II. | Message to the People: Samaria’s destruction is Jerusalem’s warning. | 1:2—2:13 |
| | A. Judgment is promised for transgression because God is just. | 1:2–16 |
| | 1. It is stated before witnesses as a divine object lesson. | 1:2–5 |
| | 2. It is directed to Samaria who will experience total destruction for its incurable would of idolatry. | 1:6–7 |
| | 3. It is directed to Jerusalem who will experience partial destruction. | 1:8–16 |
| | B. Judgment is justified because God is holy. | 2:1–11 |
| | 1. The people will be judged for their covetous oppression. | 2:1–5 |
| | 2. The people will be judged for their preference to the words of those with a false spirit. | 2:6–11 |
| | C. Restoration is promised because God is gracious. | 2:12–13 |
| | 1. A remnant will be assembled. | 2:12 |
| | 2. Yahweh their king will lead them. | 2:13 |
| III. | Message to the Leaders: Righteous leadership will result in kingdom blessing. | 3:1—5:15 |
| | A. Their present kingdom will be destroyed due to bad leadership. | 3:1–12 |
| | 1. Their rulers hate justice and love evil—so the people will perish. | 3:1–4 |
| | 2. Their prophets pronounce false peace—so they will abide in darkness. | 3:5–7 |
| | 3. The Spirit of Yahweh pronounces judgment as a result of Israel and Judah’s bad leadership. | 3:8–12 |
| | B. Their promised kingdom will be established through the ideal leader—Messiah. | 4:1—5:15 |
| | 1. Israel’s eternal kingdom will be established through their tribulation. | 4:1—5:1 |
| | a. Ultimately Israel’s promised kingdom will be established in righteousness and peace. | 4:1–8 |
| | b. In the meantime Israel will go into captivity but will be redeemed. | 4:9–10 |
| | c. Eventually Israel’s enemies will be defeated. | 4:11–13 |
| | 2. Israel’s ideal King will arise to accomplish their restoration. | 5:1–15 |
| | a. A future king will be humbled. | 5:1 |

- b. The ultimate King will prevail. 5:2–15
 - 1) His birth will be in obscurity. 5:2
 - 2) His rejection will bring Israel difficulty. 5:3
 - 3) His return will bring Israel into security. 5:4–15
 - a) He will stand in the strength of Yahweh and give peace. 5:4–5a
 - b) He will lead Israel in victory over their enemies. 5:5b–15
- IV. Message of the Covenant Lawsuit: Judgment is assured but repentance is still appropriate. 6:1—7:20
 - A. Yahweh sues Israel for breach of covenant. 6:1–16
 - 1. He calls creation as witnesses. 6:1–2
 - 2. He recounts His goodness to His people. 6:3–5
 - 3. He specifies the charges against His people: they have given him hollow sacrifices rather than the offerings of justice, mercy and humility. 6:6–12
 - 4. He pronounces the punishment: they will be desolated despite their best efforts because they walked according to the statutes of Omri. 6:13–16
 - B. Micah shows Israel what their response should be. 7:1–20
 - 1. He accepts the indictment as accurate. 7:1–6
 - a. There is no righteous person. 7:1–2
 - b. The leaders are altogether wicked. 7:3–4
 - c. There is no one who can be trusted. 7:5–6
 - 2. He expresses the correct response to the indictment. 7:7–20
 - a. He vows to trust in Yahweh for his deliverance. 7:7
 - b. He purposes to endure the darkness of judgment until Yahweh pleads his case. 7:8–13
 - c. He petitions Yahweh to shepherd His people in forgiveness and loyal love. 7:14–20

Argument

Micah prophesied during the years when Assyria destroyed Samaria and then advanced to the very gates of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 15—19; Isa 36—37). For Samaria he has only a word of judgment. However, for Judah there is warning as well as judgment. For both there is the ultimate hope of the ruler to come out of Bethlehem. There are three distinct messages marked off by an introductory “Hear. . .” (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). This places the eschatological Leader who will succeed in juxtaposition with Israel’s current leaders who have failed, resulting in the central teaching of Micah.

I. Title: The word of Yahweh for Samaria and Jerusalem (1:1).

Micah has been sent to declare judgment against Israel and Judah. His name “Who is like Yahweh?” highlights the message of the book, namely that one who would come and lead the nation into kingdom blessing would not be like their present leaders but would be like Yahweh himself (cf. 5:2 with 7:18–20).

II. Message to the People: Samaria’s destruction is Jerusalem’s warning (1:2—2:13).

Micah announces that Yahweh is coming to judge Samaria (Israel) and Judah (1:2–5). Samaria’s judgment will be complete and final (1:6–7) while Judah’s will be partial (1:8–16). Both will happen at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 and 701 B.C. respectively. The reason why these destructions are justified is that the people were characterized by covetous oppression of one another (2:1–5) and because they preferred the words of false prophets to those of God (2:6–11). There is hope for a future remnant, led by a king, who will be or be with Yahweh himself (2:12–13).

III. Message to the Leaders: Righteous leadership will result in kingdom blessing (3:1—5:15).

Next, the leaders come under condemnation. Heads, rulers, priests and prophets are all held accountable for their pursuit of evil and failure to lead the people into justice as a way of living despite their confidence that Yahweh’s presence will protect them (3:1–12). Zion will be plowed like a field and Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins (3:12). However, in the latter days Israel’s eternal kingdom will be established according to promise (4:1–8); it will be, in contrast to Micah’s day, a kingdom of righteousness and peace. Though that would be something to look forward to, for now they would be without king and living in captivity (4:9–10). Eventually their enemies would be de-

feated and the plunder given to the Lord (4:11–13). Ultimately Israel’s restoration would depend on the Ruler “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (5:2). When he stands and feeds His flock Israel will come into the secure blessing of their eternal kingdom (5:3–15).

IV. Message of the Covenant Lawsuit: Judgment is assured but repentance is still appropriate (6:1—7:20).

As other prophets would do, Micah brings Israel to Yahweh’s bar of justice in order to answer for their breach of covenant. With creation as His witness the Lord recounts His goodness in blessing them (6:1–5) and then specifies the charges against them (6:6–12). They had tried to appease Him with meaningless sacrifices when what He really wanted was a people who embodied His characteristics of justice, loyal love, and humility. Their punishment will be to reap the consequences of their sin (6:13–16).

Micah responds personally to the charges, as though accepting the indictment on behalf of Israel (7:1–6). Knowing that he will feel the consequences of his nation’s sin he vows to look to Yahweh and wait for His deliverance (7:7). When the darkness comes he will wait for Yahweh’s vindication (7:8–13). Knowledge of the coming judgment and hope in the coming kingdom prompts Micah to petition the Lord to shepherd His people since there is no such God who will forgive Israel’s sin and delight in fulfilling their covenant promises (7:14–20).

Conclusion

Micah represents hope in the face of disaster. Judgment was coming soon on Israel and eventually to Judah. However, God had not given up on His people. In order to restore a remnant and fulfill His promises Yahweh would bring forth a ruler from

Bethlehem who would save and shepherd His people. With that perspective and that kind of a God, the darkness could be faced with the confidence that forgiveness and compassion would follow.

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