

Route 66

Micah: Outward, Inward, Upward

Part 33 – March 28, 2010

In Micah's oracles, he summons the people of Israel and Judah into "court" (so to speak) to hear testimony against Samaria (the capitol of the *northern* kingdom) and Jerusalem (the capitol of the *southern* kingdom).



Beit Guvrin, near ancient Moresheth

The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of **Jotham**, **Ahaz** and **Hezekiah**, kings of Judah – the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign Lord may witness against you ... – *Micah 1:1-2a NIV*

This is Micah's "backyard" (just south of Jerusalem). He lived about 17 miles from Amos (the sarcastic farmer-prophet). His ministry overlaps Amos and Hosea (the guy who married Gomer, the harlot), and perfectly parallel's Isaiah's.



These are the 19 kings of Judah (southern kingdom) and their reigns; the blue names are those who "did right in the eyes of the Lord". The gray dots reflect Isaiah's ministry. And with the exception of the first gray dot, Micah served during the same kings' reigns. Two blue/good kings and a white – two out of three ain't bad!

Amos and Hosea were traveling and preaching up in Israel while Isaiah and Micah spoke out in Judah. Isaiah preached to the royal court in the city while Micah covered the country. But, Isaiah and Micah seem to have been in close collaboration: Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are almost *identical* passages.

Micah presents three alternating messages of doom and hope as if he were in a courtroom. And God is coming quickly to witness against them.

Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. – *Micah 1:3-4 NIV*

That's when your attorney would lean over and whisper, "This don't look so good ... maybe we should *arbitrate*. Or, just plead guilty and ask for mercy." He predicts that Samaria (capitol of Israel) will be reduced to a pile of rubble (1:6), and that Judah will not escape unscathed:

... disaster has come from the Lord, even to the gate of Jerusalem. – *Micah 1:12b NIV*

And this is *exactly* what happened. About a decade later, in 722^{BC}, Micah sees Samaria fall as Israel is conquered by Assyria. And over the course of 20 years king, Sennacherib [suh-NAK-uh-rib] cuts a destructive path all the way to the gates of Jerusalem.



We covered this in “2nd Chronicles”. Sennacherib’s army surrounds the city, King Hezekiah and Isaiah pray, and 185,000 Assyrian soldiers mysteriously die that night.¹ Herodotus, a Greek historian, attributed it to rats. This 2,700 year-old prism of Sennacherib describes the destruction of 46 Jewish cities and countless villages. The report stops with the abandoned siege of Jerusalem. Micah had predicted the destruction of these cities, many by name, in the longest consecutive series of puns in the O.T.

Tell it not in Gath ... In Beth Ophrah [OHF-ruh] roll in the dust. ... Those who live in Zaanan [ZAY-uh-nan] will not come out. - *Micah 1:10-11a NIV*

“Gath” sounds like the Hebrew word for “Tell”. “Beth Ophrah” means “house of dust”, hence: “roll in the dust”. And “Zaanan” means “come out”, hence: “will not come out”.

It’d be something like saying: You who live in Bow will bough until you break! You who live in Concrete will be wearing *concrete* shoes! And you who live in La Conner will be seeing *la coroner*!

You who live in Lachish (team), harness the team to the chariot. ... The town of Aczib (deception) will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel. I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah (conqueror). - *Micah 1:13-15a NIV*



Ruins of Lachish

It was a dramatic way to get his people to take notice and to remember his warnings.

Notice the name “Lachish”. That was a critical walled-city of defense that protected Judah’s interior. Now it’s a tourist attraction.



At the base of Lachish’s walls, Archaeologists have recovered Assyrian arrowheads, sling stones, and large rocks the Jews swung to dislodge the enemy’s ladders.



Sennacherib’s palace reliefs; British Museum

Sennacherib was so proud of his victory that he decorated his palace (in Nineveh) with these panels depicting the conquest.

A close-up shows Sennacherib on a throne.

¹ 2 Kings 19:35 and 2 Chronicles 32:20-21

An inscription reads: "Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria sat on a throne and the booty of Lachish passed before him".

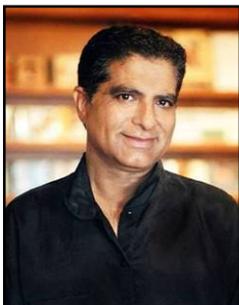
Micah may have had more impact than we know (from his book). 114 years later, when Jeremiah (the weeping prophet) was about to be killed for his harsh warnings, someone spoke up in his favor:

Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'" Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the Lord and seek his favor? And did not the Lord relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? - *Jeremiah 26:18-19a NIV*

Micah was the first prophet to specifically threaten Judah with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. (3:12) He compares her leaders to cannibals, "... who tear the skin from my people ... and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot." (3:2b;3b) He says, "Her rulers judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money." (3:11)

The wealthy covet the land of the poor. (2:1-2) Business men use dishonest scales and false weights. (6:11) And the rich get richer through extortion and violence. (6:12) And through it all, the very people being exploited are turning to false idols and sacred stones instead of the living God. (5:13) And Micah rebukes them for entertaining false prophets:

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! - *Micah 2:11 NIV*



What would be "just the prophet" for *our* people - *our* culture? Two who immediately come to my mind are Deepak Chopra and Oprah. I'm sure they're nice people, but they preach:

- A. Spirituality without the Holy Spirit
- B. Righteousness without repentance
- C. Inner peace without a Savior

The people of Israel and Judah worshipped God; but, they treated Him like all their other idols. They couldn't be "burdened" with a relationship of fidelity and faithfulness to just *one* God. And so, Micah says that God is "suing" them.

Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. - *Micah 6:1-2 NIV*

The “mountains” will act as “judge” because they were present when God entered into a covenant with these people. (“I hope I don’t get Judge Vesuvius ... that guy is volcanic!”) And then the questioning begins:

“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery ...” -
Micah 6:3-4a NIV

The case God brought against them was ingratitude. All their acts of disobedience and cruelty toward one another were simply the visible sign of a lack of *gratitude* toward God. And they knew it. Their guilt was obvious. So Micah goes over the possible damages that could be awarded to the Lord:

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression ... - *Micah 6:7a NIV*

He’s trying to show them the futility of trying to *buy off* God. God isn’t interested in external formalities (no matter how religious or sacrificial) if they’re divorced from a heartfelt desire to know Him intimately and follow Him passionately. Otherwise I’ll get the perverse idea that I’m giving something up for God; when all He asks is that I stop doing the things that destroy, and start doing the things that bring joy.

Micah makes it clear what God expects from His people:

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. - *Micah 6:8 NIV*

He desires a heart that goes outward, inward, and upward. To “act justly” is an *outward* expression of empathy toward others. To “love mercy” is an *inward* experience that embraces and extends God’s grace, compassion, and love. We can offer it *only* to the degree that we’ve received (and internalized) it for ourselves. And To “walk humbly” is an *upward* attitude of childlike dependence that gives God first place instead of usurping it for ourselves. Faith that’s alive and authentic will naturally grow in empathy toward others, gratefulness toward God, and humility toward self.

Three times Micah follows an oracle of doom with a message of hope as God promises to watch over His faithful remnant. Micah tells those in Judah that they *will* be exiled in Babylon (this is 100 years *before* Babylon rose to power!) But, he also assures them that they’ll be rescued and redeemed (*4:10*) He even looks forward to the birth of the promised of a Messiah:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah [EF-ruh-thuh], 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. - *Micah 5:2 NIV*

And as Micah closes this book, he proclaims to his people that we serve a God like no other; a God who pardons sin, forgives transgressions, and delights to show mercy.