

# The Prophets

## Lesson #21

### Introduction To Micah

#### I. **Structure Of Micah**

- A. Micah is a short book of only seven chapters, but it stands as a classic example of the work to which the Old Testament prophets were called. Over and over again, Micah sounds the theme of God's judgment against his homeland, Judah, as well as her sister nation, Israel, because of their moral decline. Micah watched as the Assyrians grew in strength and marched their armies throughout the ancient world. It was clear to him that this pagan nation would serve as the instrument of God's judgment unless Judah and Israel turned back to God.
- B. Micah also is known as the champion of the oppressed. Because of this, he is referred to as the "prophet of the poor." J. P. Smith says, "Micah had Amos' passion for justice and Hosea's heart of love." He condemns wealthy landowners for taking the land of the poor (2:2). He also attacks dishonest merchants for using false weights, bribing judges and charging excessive interest rates. Even the priests and prophets seemed to be caught up in this tidal wave of greed and dishonesty that swept his country. To a people more concerned about observing rituals than living a life of righteousness, Micah thundered, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (6:8). This is one of the greatest passages in the Old Testament. It expresses the timeless truth that authentic worship consists of following God's will and dealing justly with other people.
- C. In addition to the theme of judgment, Micah also emphasizes the reality of God's love. Practically every passage about God's wrath is balanced with a promise of God's blessing. The greatest promise in the book is a prophecy of the birth of the Messiah: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ..." (5:2). This Messianic verse is stunning in its accuracy because it names the specific town where the Messiah was born -- the village of Bethlehem in the territory of the tribe of Judah. This prophecy was fulfilled about 700 years after Micah's time with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
- D. The final two chapters of Micah's book are presented in the form of a debate between God and His people. God invites the nations of Israel and Judah to reason with Him on the subject of their conduct. He con-

vinces them that their sin is deep and grievous, but He assures them of His presence in spite of their unworthiness.

## II. ***Authorship And Date***

- A. This book was written by the prophet Micah, a native of the village of Moresheth (1:1) in southern Judah near the Philistine city of Gath. The name Micah means, "Who is like Jehovah?" Since Micah championed the rights of the poor, he was probably a humble farmer or herdsman himself, although he shows a remarkable knowledge of Jerusalem and Samaria the capital cities of the nations of Judah and Israel. Micah must have been a very striking personality that possessed strong convictions and corresponding courage. As any great preacher, he fearlessly uncovered sin and pointed to Christ.
- B. Micah also tells us that he prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1). Micah began prophesying before the destruction of Samaria (1:5) and continued into the reign of Hezekiah (Jeremiah 26:18-19). This would place his prophecy from about 735 B.C. to 700 B.C., which would make him a younger contemporary of Isaiah.

## III. ***Historical Setting***

- A. The book of Micah belongs to that turbulent period during which the Assyrians launched their drive for supremacy throughout the ancient world. Micah probably saw his prophecy of judgment against Israel fulfilled, since the Assyrians defeated this nation in 722 B.C. The fall of Israel to the north must have stunned the citizens of Judah. Would they be the next to fall before the conquering armies of this pagan nation? Still, religious leaders retreated into a false confidence that no evil would befall them because the temple was situated in their capital city of Jerusalem (3:11). Micah warned there was no magical saving power in their temple or their rituals (3:12). They needed to turn back to God as their source of strength and power.
- B. Though for the most part a good king, Jotham did not remove the idolatrous high places from his kingdom. Ahaz, a wicked king (2 Kings 16:2-4), adopted a pro-Assyrian foreign policy, and during his reign the captivity of the northern tribes took place. Hezekiah, one of Judah's best kings, was anti-Assyrian and withstood the siege of Jerusalem which Sennacherib led in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 18:13-19:36). For peasants and villagers, these were days of harassment from enemy armies, of hardship because of exploitation by the wealthy (2:1-13) and of oppression by the rules (3:1-4) and false prophets (3:5-8). Micah, as Amos, cried for social justice.

#### IV. ***Scriptural Contribution***

- A. The mixture of judgment and promise in the book of Micah is a striking characteristic of the Old Testament prophets. These contrasting passages give real insight into the character of God. In His wrath He remembers mercy; He cannot maintain His anger forever. Judgment with love is the ironic, but essential, work of the Lord. In the darkest days of impending judgment on Israel and Judah, there always was the possibility that a remnant would be spared. God was determined to maintain His holiness, and so He acted in judgment on those who had broken His covenant. However, He was just as determined to fulfill the promise He had made to Abraham centuries earlier. This compelled Him to point to the fulfillment of the covenant in the kingdom to come.
- B. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the book of Micah is its clear prediction of a coming Savior. The future Messiah is referred to indirectly in some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but He is mentioned directly in the book of Micah. Micah sees the mountain of God's house as above all other powers and kingdoms. This would only be accomplished through a ruler born in Bethlehem who would be coeternal with God.
- C. This prophecy of the Messiah's birth is remarkable when we think of the circumstances that were necessary to bring it to fulfillment. Although they were residents of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph happened to be in Bethlehem at the right time when the Messiah was born about 700 years after Micah's prediction. This is a valuable lesson on the providence of God. He always manages to work His will through a unique combination of forces and events.

#### V. ***Special Considerations***

- A. Micah begins his words of judgment with calls for the people to come to court. God is portrayed as the prosecuting attorney, the witness for the prosecution and the sentencing judge. God is a witness against His people (1:2); He demands justice (3:1); He even calls upon the elements of creation to be His witnesses, since He has a legal dispute against His people (6:1-2). This type of language is also found in Isaiah 1:2. It is likely that Isaiah and Micah drew this terminology from Deuteronomy 31:28. The clear implication is that God has the right to hold His people accountable for their behavior.
- B. God insists that His people keep their part of the covenant agreement. Yet even while making His demands, He holds out the possibility of grace and forgiveness. This leads the Israelites to declare, "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou

wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (7:19-20).