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An Inconvenient Truth

Micah 1:10-16, "Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all; in Beth-le-aphrah roll yourselves in the dust. Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame; the inhabitants of Zaanan do not come out; the lamentation of Beth-ezel shall take away from you its standing place. For the inhabitants of Maroth wait anxiously for good, because disaster has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem. Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish; it was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel. I will again bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. Make yourselves bald and cut off your hair, for the children of your delight; make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile. "

In May of 2006, director Davis Guggenheim released a documentary featuring a slide presentation by former Vice President Al Gore about global warming entitled "An Inconvenient Truth." Now ironically,

about the only accurate statement in the title of the documentary was the little word, “An” for at the time it was reported that Al Gore was living quite wastefully using up a lot of electricity and other valuable earthly resources in his mansion; so the knowledge of global warming obviously wasn’t that “inconvenient.” And whether or not there is such a thing as global warning, scientists clearly do not agree. This brings into question whether or not global warming can be considered a “truth.”

However as we look at Micah we see what can genuinely be called “An Inconvenient Truth!” Though the book of Micah contains a smattering of sermons which Micah preached over the course of a fifty year ministry, nevertheless he assembled these messages into the prophecy before us. Thus it is hard to break this prophecy down into snippets for each section/theme truly is but a stanza in a much larger song. So, as we examine each stanza we must keep in mind its place in the overall song.

The first stanza proclaims the glorious Kingdom for which we have been saved and that toward which everything on this earth is moving! Following the Last Judgment, God is going to re-create this world into a paradise at which time we will co-reign with Him over it for eternity. It is in light of this Kingdom that we understand the promises in Scripture regarding the Christian’s health, wealth, success, and prosperity. God is bringing us to the ultimate objective behind His work in this world.

Micah 1:12, “For the inhabitant of Maroth becomes weak waiting for good...”

Micah 1:10-16 contains a prophecy of what awaited the people of God in Judah when Sennacherib marched on Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Note that this prophecy does NOT detail the path which Sennacherib would take in his advance on the capital city. Rather, it addresses Sennacherib’s destructive invasion literarily. First note that the cities mentioned form a 14 km (8.25 miles) circle around Micah’s hometown of Moresheth. In other words, these were the little farming villages that dotted the Shephelah with which Micah was quite familiar.

Secondly note that each of the twelve cities named receive a promise of a judgment which coincided with their name. For example, notice Micah 1:0 speaks of Gath. In Hebrew the word “gath” was used of the trough in wine making in which the juice from the squeezed grapes dripped like tears! What was the fate that awaited the inhabitants of this city? They soon would be “weeping on account of their grief.”

In Micah 1:10b, Beth-le-aphrah, “the last part, “aphrah” comes from the Hebrew word for “dust.” The city name literally reads, “house of dust.” What was the fate of the inhabitants of this city? On account of mourning they soon would be “rolling in dust.” Allen commenting on the puns contained in this prophecy wrote this:

Names are treated as omens which, once observed, haunt the localities until they are fulfilled. They are revealed as clues to the curse that is to come upon the country. (Allen, 1994, p. 278)

This entire section continues with these word-plays bouncing from city to city in a circle around Micah’s hometown giving this prophecy a dynamic and dramatic effect. The passage was written so that the reader could feel the excitement long before Sennacherib’s onslaught began!

With that, notice the words which Micah wrote in Micah 1:12a of Maroth: “the inhabitant of Maroth becomes weak waiting for good.” The Hebrew “Maroth” (bitterness) speaks of a bitterness which

weakens the body (Proverbs 17:22). This is the fate of the inhabitants of this city, they would become weak waiting for and so longing for a good which evidently had been promised to them! What was this good?

In response to Micah's message of judgment concerning, among other things, Sennacherib's march on Jerusalem, the false prophets sang another song:

Micah 2:7, "Is it being said, O house of Jacob: 'Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? Are these His doings?' [in response to the message of Micah? Notice the false prophet's response...] Do not My words do good to the one walking uprightly?"

Why did the inhabitants of Maroth have an infatigable hope that good lay in their future? Because that was the message of the false prophets in Micah's day! Speaking of the false-prophets, Micah wrote:

Micah 2:11, "If a man walking after wind and falsehood had told lies *and said*, 'I will speak out to you concerning wine and liquor' [that which flowed in abundance in times of plenty and so prosperity] he would be spokesman to this people."

Truly the main message that could be heard from the many false prophets who dotted the land in Micah's day was that good and plenty awaited all God's people. In fact, so effective was the brainwashing, that everyone was affected (much less than the inhabitants of Maroth), even the upper class and her leaders.

Micah 3:11, "Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the Lord saying, 'Is not the Lord in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us.'"

This represents the message that was being preached in Micah's day from almost every pulpit! The idea for this message came from the promise of God's coming Kingdom and a day when the curse will be removed from this world. Truly in that day, all sin and sorrow will be gone and we shall co-reign with God over creation for eternity which is why "glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God!"

Now to be sure, life in this state of sin and misery is not all doom and gloom. God does bless His people with many things: Joy unspeakable and a peace which surpasses all comprehension. Yet it is theologically irresponsible for us to conclude from Kingdom promises intended primarily for the next age that in Christ we are assured of prosperity and good today. Yet that seems to be the broad evangelical mantra throughout every age. A little than a hundred years after Micah, Jeremiah would criticize the pulpits of his day saying this:

Jeremiah 6:14, "And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace."

We want this message, we need this message, and so it is this message which is the favorite of false preachers! We see it in Ezekiel which was written fifty years after Jeremiah. The false preachers of his day would be rejected by God.

Ezekiel 13:10a, "...because they have misled My people by saying, 'Peace!' when there is no peace."

And according to Paul, it would be this message that would characterize the last days (which is that time period from Christ's resurrection to His second coming), "Peace and safety!" (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

And so we hear the refrain of the popular chorus of the 1970's:

I I just feel like something good is about to happen
I just feel like something good is on it's way
He has promised that He'd open all of Heaven
And, brother, it could happen any day
When God's people humble themselves to call on Jesus
And they look to Heaven expecting as they pray
I just feel like something good is about to happen
And, brother, it could be this very day.

In fact, not too long ago, it was stewardship Sunday at a church and the preacher was trying to fleece; I mean raise a lot of money for the upcoming budget. After totally obliterating a chapter in Proverbs he exhorted the congregation to give sacrificially, he closed the service with these words; "I don't know what it is, but I believe that God has in store for us this year great blessing. 2013 is going to be a year of untold blessing for God's people!"

And yet, let us not only look outside, at others, for we all believe to a certain degree that because of our salvation, good lay in our immediate future. Don't we? That is why we can get so upset with God with things don't go our way. And this was the mindset of many in Judah in the days of Micah. They truly believed that "something good was about to happen." Yet sadly, in the words of Micah 1:12, they would grow weak in their longing for this good. After rebuking those who took advantage of the weak and the poor of Judah, Micah said this:

Micah 2:3, "Therefore, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am planning against this family a calamity from which you cannot remove your necks; and you will not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time.'"

Try preaching that on Stewardship Sunday and see how much money you raise! Yet throughout the course of redemptive and church history such has been the will of God at times when it comes to His people. Remember Christ's prediction concerning the age in which we currently are living:

Matthew 10:21-23, "And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you shall not finish *going through* the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."

Clearly this text tells us that the age in which we live is an age of treachery and difficulty. It was this message which Micah endeavored to proclaim to God's people. Micah quoting the very words which the rich used to dispossess the poor from their homes, relays God's message to His people speaking of Judah:

Micah 2:10, "Arise and go, for this is no place of rest..."

If you read the text further you will note that it wasn't simply because of this state of sin and misery, but because of something God's people had done that difficulty awaited them. We'll talk about this in a moment, but get the point: sometimes the message of "peace and safety" does NOT represent what God has planned for His people. There are eras when God's people enter into an "evil time"! And so they would in Micah's day.

Micah 5:10-11, "'And it will be in that day,' declares the Lord, 'That I will cut off your horses from among you and destroy your chariots. I will also cut off the cities of your land and tear down all your fortifications.'"

Now you place this message, which is that which frequented the lips of the genuine prophet of God, next to the message of the false prophet (who promised peace, prosperity, success, and ease of day), and you know why the world persecuted these men! Stephen speaking to the Sanhedrin asked this:

Acts 7:52a, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"

Yet at the risk of offending anyone, we must understand that there are times when the message from God is not one of "peace and safety!" Do you understand that? There are times when you might do everything right and still you struggle.

Philippians 1:29-30, "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..."

1 Peter 2:19-21a, "For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose..."

It is because of these promises and declaration that we as God's people must heed the words of William Cowper:

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan his work in vain; God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain. (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 128)

Personally this has and continues to be a place of struggle for me and many others. As a Christian, as much as I don't want to be, I am a product of my environment. The message of "peace and safety" has had its impact on my life such that at times I find myself cursing the God who loves me.

- Why don't you make it easier?
- Why don't you give me that job?
- Why do you bless the one who does not love You?

At times I have found myself voicing with Asaph:

Psalm 73:1-3, "Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling; my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant, *as* I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

It is possible to do everything right and still encounter difficulty and hardship in life. Since when is blessing a right or something earned from the Lord? If you've got it today, enjoy it; but do not come to expect it or depend upon it. God's goodness has never guaranteed ease of living in this age, just in the age to come! Until then we do not look with fear upon the future, for it is in the hands of God. Rather we look to the future with sobriety. If He should deign blessings to come, we pray for humility "lest we be full and deny the One we love" (Proverbs 30:9).

If He should deign bitterness or "the evil day" (Micah 2:3), we pray for the grace to accept it as coming from the hand of a good and loving God whose ultimate plan stretches well into eternity! Yet a little understanding will help us cope, which no doubt is why Micah in this prophecy declared the sobering cause of the difficulty that was coming to God's people. There is no clearer statement as to the cause of the suffering that God ordained for His people than this passage,

Micah 1:2-5a, "Hear, O peoples, all of you; listen, O earth and all it contains, and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple. For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place. All this is for the rebellion of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel."

This is a shocking statement, but it was true. The trial and difficulty which soon would confront the people of God was because of the covenant infidelity of their nation! It wasn't on account of their personal/individual sin, but the national sin that went unchecked by her leaders! In contrast to the false prophets of his day, Micah said this:

Micah 3:8, "On the other hand I am filled with power- with the Spirit of the Lord- and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin."

Notice that the focus was on the nation for its national compromise. It couldn't get clearer than Micah's speaking of the leaders of Judah, her judges, priests, and prophets:

Micah 3:12, "Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest."

There are many more passages at which we could look in this book,¹ yet it should be clear that the present trial that was coming on Israel and Judah in Micah's day was NOT because of the individual sins of the people of God nor of the sinful nations that surrounded them, BUT because of the rebellion and spiritual-compromise of the nation! Micah drew a direct correlation between the sin of the nation and the suffering of the nation, and once again this begs for an explanation. In the outworking of God's redemptive plan, recall that God did the following two things: first He organized His people into a nation whose existence would be predicated upon their covenant fidelity (cf. Leviticus 26:14-17). This is how Scripture describes a Christian nation. Secondly, He deigned to rule over His people through an earthly

leader/king. And so if the nation and king proved faithful to the covenant, they would enjoy blessing. But if the nation or king rebelled, they would know “evil days” (Micah 2:3). And though Israel divided in 931 BC, both kingdoms remained a theocratic nation whose strength and vitality was intractably linked to their fidelity to God.

Micah was written at a time when the sun was setting on both these nations on account of their rebellion. And as such, the prophet had no qualms of laying the blame where it belonged: the covenant infidelity of the people of God!

Today the people who remain corporately in covenant with God is the church. But does this mean that we no longer with Micah can lay the blame for the ill before us on the nation and the national leaders?

When the “evil day” comes to the earth, if we are going to place blame (as so many preachers love to do after a tragedy), where ought we to look? If one must blame a people, one must look to the remaining people in-covenant with God on this earth today, the church! Now I don’t expect you to accept this if you believe that the church and the nation of Israel are distinct entities in Scripture. But the Kingdom of Israel was but a type of the Kingdom which Christ came to establish in His first advent. The church now is the “Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16) and so described by Peter:

1 Peter 2:9, “...a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God’s* own possession...”

One cannot escape the correlation between the nation of God in Micah’s day being the cause for the ill in their day AND the church of God is the cause for the ill in our day. Deuteronomy 28 details the blessing and the curses that would come upon the nation if they rebelled against God, and these curses go way beyond the people of God to include the land in which they lived and the surrounding nations whom they were to bless:

1. If Israel was faithful, the land, people, and nation would know blessing (Deuteronomy 28:11-13).
2. But if Israel proved unfaithful, they would be a scourge in the land (Deuteronomy 24:24, 38, 59; 29:23).

After describing the extent of the apostasy that existed in Micah’s day, the prophet wrote this:

Micah 7:4, 5-6, “The best of them is like a briar, the most upright like a thorn hedge. The day when you post a watchman, your punishment will come. [And what in this text is that punishment?] Then their confusion will occur. [Don’t miss it: it is “the confusion” that is the punishment of God. What was that confusion? Notice...] Do not trust in a neighbor; do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom guard your lips. For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own household.”

Do you see it? The “confusion” in the land of Judah whereby a son, daughter, husband, or wife acted treacherously toward each other did NOT simply warrant judgment from God, it was the judgment which is exactly what Deuteronomy 28:54, 56 predicted!

When I look around the United States and see its moral decay; divorce, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, pornography, abortion, and much, much more, and when I consider the natural disasters

which recently have and continue to rock this land; I do not look to the non-Christian or the decisions of the government of United States for the cause. I look at the last remaining people in-covenant with God, the church. And when I do this, I am not surprised. The church has become a harbinger for Baalism, compromise, neglect, false-worship, spiritual decay. Truly, we are living in the days of Micah! Ought we not to expect a similar judgment from God?

Now if you are burdened as am I, what ought we to do? As a church we must give up our love-affair with the world, turn from pop-Christianity which has been designed to please you the consumer, accept God on His terms, and so give ourselves afresh and anew to Him and His word. At the dedication of the Solomonic temple, the Lord gave this promise regarding His covenant people:

2 Chronicles 7:13-14, "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

If the church doesn't repent, then we can with certainty predict that it is only going to get harder as truly we are living in an evil day. Yet our consolation and hope is NOT a better job or a richer bank account, BUT the glorious Kingdom for which God has saved us and which awaits us all in Christ!

Consider the first two points of the sermon which Micah would have us all heed. God has planned a glorious future for us in a New Heavens and a New Earth! This ought to be our longing, hope, and joy in life! For indeed, there are times when God ordains a bitter providence, "evil days" when sadly the righteous will suffer alongside and on account of the wicked. What must be our consolation and hope during these times? Micah's first point.

End Note(s)

¹ cf. Micah 3:4; 5:15; 6:9-16 (13-15); 7:9a, 18.

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About the Preacher

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