

In our text tonight,

Micah speaks of the coming judgment upon Samaria and Jerusalem.
But rather than content himself with vague generalities,
Micah takes to meddling –
 he can be uncomfortably specific –
 and so I will try to do the same!
but like any good Christ-centered preacher,
 he concludes by proclaiming the gospel – the good news!

Martin Luther once commented that the prophets “have a queer way of talking,
like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner,
ramble off from one thing to the next,
so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at.”
(quoted in Waltke, 13)

Micah is such a prophet!

As with most of the prophets,
the book of Micah is probably a collection of Micah’s sermons –
 perhaps material delivered at different times throughout his life –
but then edited together into a coherent whole.

Introduction: The Word of the LORD which Micah Saw (1:1)

The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Verse 1 is an assertion that what follows is “the word of the LORD,”
followed by two relative clause.

The first explains
 to whom the word came (Micah of Moresheth – from SW Judah)
 and when the word came (in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah –
 between 740-690 BC, around the same time as Isaiah)
while the second explains what it’s all about: “concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.”

There is another Micaiah – the son of Imlah, in the time of Ahab (ca. 874-852 BC) –
but that was around 200 years before the time of Hezekiah.

Our Micah seems to know of the earlier Micaiah, and often plays off of Micaiah’s story.

In the days of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah allied himself to Ahab by marriage.
The house of Ahab was blended with the house of David –
 which was the “beginning of the end” for the house of David!
When Jehoshaphat joined Ahab to go to battle,
Micaiah contradicted the 400 prophets of Ahab,
 and prophesied against Ahab that he would die (1 Kings 22).
“I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.”

Now, 150 years later, a prophet named Micah will rebuke the house of David for becoming too much like the house of Ahab!
He will zero in on the false prophets of *his* day,
and he will emphasize the *shepherd* theme throughout his prophecy.

The parallels between Micaiah and Micah suggest that Micah remembered his namesake, and so crafted his prophecy in order to emphasize some of the same themes.

Jeremiah 26 also refers to Micah by name.

When the priests and the prophets wanted to put Jeremiah to death because he prophesied against Jerusalem and against the temple, certain elders replied that Micah of Moresheth had prophesied similar things (quoting from Micah 3:12)
but because Hezekiah heeded the warning and repented, the LORD relented of disaster.

So, apparently Micah was remembered for over a century in Jerusalem as the prophet who had convinced Hezekiah to repent.

(We usually think of Isaiah as the chief prophet in the days of Hezekiah – but that’s just because he wrote more!

It would appear that Micah may have been the more famous of the two in their own day)

We are going to see two repeated themes in Micah’s vision:

- 1) Internal corruption within Judah
(which Micah will say is simply Judah imitating Israel – the house of David following the house of Ahab);
- 2) the external threat of Assyria

Isaiah had compared the coming of the Assyrians to a mighty flood that would wash Israel away. Micah, his contemporary, uses a similar image.
The Assyrians are the agent of God’s wrath that will bring his judgment.

The last thing to note about this first verse is that this is a word which Micah *saw*.

Last time, when we looked at Obadiah,
we heard about the *vision of Obadiah* –
and saw that prophets are often called *seers*.

We normally think of “hearing words” and “seeing visions.”
But this is the *word* which Micah *saw*.

This reminds us that when God speaks, things happen.

God’s words are not mere sounds that flit through the air.

After all, “in the beginning was the Word.”

The “Word” is at the heart of who God is – not just what he says.

God’s words take shape –

as they did when the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us!

1. The Coming Judgment (1:2-16)

a. Judgment on Samaria Is a Warning to Judah (1:2-7)

² *Hear, you peoples, all of you;^[a]
pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it,*

Verse 2 opens by calling the peoples to “hear” –
the same imperative will occur at the beginning of chapters 3 and 6,
signaling the three divisions of Micah’s “Word.”

Micah calls the peoples pay attention as the LORD comes in judgment Samaria:

*and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you,
the Lord from his holy temple.*

³ *For behold, the LORD is coming out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth.*

⁴ *And the mountains will melt under him,
and the valleys will split open,*

*like wax before the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.*

The LORD is coming from *his place* – his holy temple –
and is coming down from the heavens to tread (or perhaps “trample”)
upon the high places of the earth.

The high places were where the nations (and Israel) worshiped their gods.
But when the LORD comes in judgment on the high places,
then the earth will split apart.

Waltke summarizes this nicely:

“When this majestic God suddenly erupts with justice,
puny man’s proud walls and fortifications crumble and fall into the ravines.
Humans feel secure as long as the long-suffering God remains in heaven,
but when he marches forth in judgment,
they are gripped by the stark reality and gravity
that they must meet the holy God in person.” (57)

The natural man sees only the armies of the Assyrians
and tries to figure out some new alliance to protect Jerusalem from the Assyrian menace.

But the eyes of faith recognize that this is God’s judgment.

Why does disaster strike?

To warn you that judgment Day is coming!

And why?

⁵ *All this is for the transgression of Jacob
and for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob?*

*Is it not Samaria?
And what is the high place of Judah?
Is it not Jerusalem?
6 Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country,
a place for planting vineyards,
and I will pour down her stones into the valley
and uncover her foundations.
7 All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces,
all her wages shall be burned with fire,
and all her idols I will lay waste,
for from the fee of a prostitute she gathered them,
and to the fee of a prostitute they shall return.*

God is saying that Israel has broken covenant with him.
And because they have played the prostitute with other gods,
therefore he will hand them over to destruction.

Micah says that Samaria is “the transgression of Jacob.”
Samaria was the capital city of the House of Omri.
In the book of Kings, Omri is portrayed as a wicked parody of David.
Everything we know about Omri is “like” David.
He was a general for the previous king (like David was for Saul).
After the death of the previous king there was a division
(like between David and Saul’s son Ishbosheth).
Omri ruled for 6 years before founding his new capital, Samaria
(like David ruled for 7 years before founding Jerusalem).
Omri’s son, Ahab, built a temple for Baal in Samaria
(like David’s son, Solomon, built a temple for Yahweh in Jerusalem).
In other words, Omri and Ahab are the anti-David and the anti-Solomon
(they are “anti-Christ”!).

Micaiah had prophesied the death of Ahab.
Now Micah prophesies the destruction of Ahab’s city.

And, as we saw this morning,
God’s judgments on Israel are a picture of what he will do to all nations.
God had called Israel to be a light to the nations –
but they have broken the covenant and rejected his law.

Notice that Micah starts with worship.
Israel has refused to worship the living and true God – therefore judgment is coming.
Instead Israel’s worship is all about sex.

Therefore God will bring judgment against Samaria –
and, by implication, judgment on Judah will follow!

b. Judgment on Judah Will Follow (1:8-16)

⁸ *For this I will lament and wail;
I will go stripped and naked;
I will make lamentation like the jackals,
and mourning like the ostriches.*

And therefore, in verses 8-9 Micah weeps over the judgment that has fallen on Jerusalem. The description of this judgment in verses 10-19 connects well with the Assyrian invasion in the 730s. Tiglath-Pileser III (who reigned from 744-727) demanded tribute from the rulers of the region. He records that “Azriyau of Yaudi” (sounds a lot like Azariah of Judah – whose other name was Uzziah) rebelled. And so when the Assyrians destroyed Samaria, they also took many people from Judah captive as well.

That’s why Micah says,
⁹ *For her wound is incurable,
and it has come to Judah;
it has reached to the gate of my people,
to Jerusalem.*

We know from Isaiah and Kings that, in fact, the Assyrians *did* come “to the gate” of Jerusalem. All the land was plunged into darkness, with only the city of Jerusalem surviving the devastation.

And so Micah runs off a series of puns in verses 10-15. The place names in verses 10-15 are cities in Judah.

¹⁰ *Tell it not in Gath;
weep not at all;*

“Tell it not in Gath” – was precisely what David had said when Saul died. In other words, do not tell our enemies about our losses.

in Beth-le-aphrah (which means “House of Dust”)
roll yourselves in the dust.

Echoing God’s words to Adam –
“dust you are, and to dust you shall return!”

¹¹ *Pass on your way,
inhabitants of Shaphir, [which means “beauty” or “shining”]
in nakedness and shame;
the inhabitants of Zaanan [which means, “going forth”]
do not come out;*

*the lamentation of Beth-ezel [house of taking away]
shall take away from you its standing place.*

¹² *For the inhabitants of Maroth
wait anxiously for good,*

Maroth means bitter –

as Naomi had said, “Call me Mara” – for the LORD has dealt bitterly with me.
The inhabitants of Bitterness wait anxiously for good...

*because disaster has come down from the LORD
to the gate of Jerusalem.*

Verse 13 is the center of this parade of puns –
and for this honorable position, Micah chooses Lachish:

¹³ *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.*

Lachish was the most technologically advanced city in Judah.

The latest military technology could be found in Lachish.

Since they were lower in elevation than Jerusalem

perhaps they hoped that chariots could help them.

But Micah says that this was “the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion.”

Because they were trusting technology – rather than trusting the LORD.

¹⁴ *Therefore you shall give parting gifts^[b]
to Moresheth-gath;
the houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing
to the kings of Israel.*

¹⁵ *I will again bring a conqueror to you,
inhabitants of Mareshah;
the glory of Israel
shall come to Adullam.*

Some of the puns are fairly obscure, so I won't try to cover all of them.

But Micah's point is that what you sow, that you will also reap.

If you are a town that is characterized by deceit –

“Achzib” means “deceit” –

then you will reap deceit.

And so Micah concludes his first oracle by saying:

¹⁶ *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.*

This suggests that a portion of the people of Judah were also deported in 722,
together with the people of Samaria.

I want you to think about the themes here in chapter 1.
Instead of worshiping God,
Judah is worshiping technology, money, sex, and power.

Micah's warning to the church in his day speaks also to us!
But maybe you are getting frustrated at Micah.
Micah – this is all so general!
What in particular is the problem here?

Well, I'm glad you asked that question, because in chapter 2
Micah starts to meddle!

2. Getting Particular (Micah Starts to Meddle!) (2:1-11)

a. Woe to Those Who Covet Houses (2:1-5)

*Woe to those who devise wickedness
and work evil on their beds!*

*When the morning dawns, they perform it,
because it is in the power of their hand.*

² *They covet fields and seize them,
and houses, and take them away;
they oppress a man and his house,
a man and his inheritance.*

³ *Therefore thus says the LORD:
behold, against this family I am devising disaster,^[a]
from which you cannot remove your necks,
and you shall not walk haughtily,
for it will be a time of disaster.*

⁴ *In that day they shall take up a taunt song against you
and moan bitterly,
and say, "We are utterly ruined;
he changes the portion of my people;
how he removes it from me!
To an apostate he allots our fields."*

⁵ *Therefore you will have none to cast the line by lot
in the assembly of the LORD.*

Verses 1-5 issue God's *woe* upon those who intentionally plunder the poor.

Some have called Micah the “prophet of the poor,”
but Waltke points out that “the poor” rarely own houses, fields, and vineyards,
and so suggests that Micah is more properly called “the prophet of the middle class.” (3)

But this misunderstands the biblical concept of “the poor.”
“The poor” – the “oppressed” – are not defined in terms of their “stuff,”
but in terms of their access to power –
their ability to find an advocate who will protect them.

If you are helpless before the powerful,
then you are (by definition) poor,
because whatever you may “own” is at risk.
You are defenseless.

When you look at the sins that Micah condemns:
seizing fields – confiscating the inheritance of others –
these are the acts of the “rich” against the “middling sort” –
not particularly against “the poor.”

But, the result is that the “middling sort” are reduced to poverty
because of their lack of access to *power*.
Because no one would defend their cause, they have lost everything.

That is what it means to oppress the poor.

After all, when you lack power – when you are helpless –
the next thing is that you will lack resources!

After all, in an agrarian culture, your land is your livelihood.
Moses had forbidden moving a boundary stone,
because moving a boundary stone is, in effect, murder.
Not theft, but murder.

If you steal his crops, they can be replaced.
If you steal his donkey, it can be replaced.
But if you steal his land, you are striking at his ability to eat.

But the LORD says that as they have done to others, so shall it be done to them.
Because they have wrested the land from their neighbors by force
therefore God will send a violent enemy to wrest the land from them by force!

The wages of sin is death.

I want you to think about modern society in this light.
I once worked for a man who would scout out his competition.
And that’s fine.

But his goal was to undermine his competition.
His goal was to drive his competition out of business.

And so I quit.

If you are coveting another man's field –
in other words, if you are thinking about how to deprive him of his livelihood,
then you are devising evil against your neighbor,
and God will destroy you!

Loving your neighbor as yourself
means that you never take an economic action
that would harm your neighbor.
You must be as concerned for his prosperity and well-being as your own.

This doesn't mean that your business can't grow.
What it means is that if the only way for your business to grow
is to push someone else out of business,
then you are worshiping money, and not the living God.

But not every prophet would join Micah in this judgment:

b. And the Prophets Who Encourage Them (2:6-11)

⁶ *“Do not preach”—thus they preach—
“one should not preach of such things;
disgrace will not overtake us.”*

⁷ *Should this be said, O house of Jacob?
Has the LORD grown impatient?^[b]
Are these his deeds?*

*Do not my words do good
to him who walks uprightly?*

The prophets of Judah condemn Micah.
And there are plenty of preachers today who will echo this chorus!
If you ever hear a pastor say that God is a God of love –
and so God would never bring anything bad into your life –
run away!!
He does not speak the Word of the LORD!

God says that his words do good to the one who walks uprightly!

Some pastors never warn against greed and covetousness.
Oh, they say, “don't be greedy,”
but they never get particular.
They can't imagine that there are any serious economic sins!
After all, it's a free market – businesses come and go.

And so the prophets declare that God has no objection to modern business practices!
But notice how Micah speaks of their practices in verses 8-9

⁸ *But lately my people have risen up as an enemy;
you strip the rich robe from those who pass by trustingly
with no thought of war.*^[c]

⁹ *The women of my people you drive out
from their delightful houses;
from their young children you take away
my splendor forever.*

Again, these are not “the poorest of the poor.”
They are “stripping rich robes” from those who pass by –
the women are driven out into the streets,
the splendor of God (the inheritance that God gave Israel)
is taken away from their children.

The middle class is dispossessed –
reducing them to poverty.
The result is that the rich grow invariably richer,
and the poor grow invariably poorer!

You know how the system works.
This CEO makes X, and so that CEO should make more than X,
because his company did better.
And this athlete should make more than that athlete,
because he hit more home runs.

And so 40% of the wealth of America winds up in the hands of the top 1%.
Micah does not provide a magic bullet to solve the problem.
Rather, he points to the fundamental root of the problem:
the people refuse to listen to God;
and the preachers refuse to preach the word of God.

If you love God and neighbor,
then you will not accept an exorbitant salary –
you will not accept a salary that impoverishes another.

But what is exorbitant?
Listen to what Micah says in verse 10

¹⁰ *Arise and go,
for this is no place to rest,
because of uncleanness that destroys
with a grievous destruction.*

The language of “resting place” in verse 10 is the language used by Naomi,
when she spoke of seeking a resting place for Ruth.
If you are quibbling over what is exorbitant
then there is no resting place for you in the land!
The greed and covetousness found in Israel
renders the land unclean – and destruction will follow.

In the OT the land could be defiled – rendered unclean –
by the sin of the people.
We may not have much wealth (by the standards of our culture) –
but the question for us is *how are we using our wealth*
to further Christ’s kingdom?

I’m not really talking about “giving money” –
you have consistently practiced that very well!
Most of your wealth (for most of you) is tied up in your house.
How are you using your house to love God and neighbor?
Your car?
Your investments?
When someone needs a place to stay for a night – or for a month –
do you welcome them into your home?
When someone needs a ride – do you offer to drive them?

Investments are a little different –
because there you need to think about how you are using your wealth
to encourage and reward companies that practice righteousness
in their corporate culture.

That takes more work – and perhaps will result in lower returns.

After all, Micah adds:

¹¹ *If a man should go about and utter wind and lies,
saying, “I will preach to you of wine and strong drink,”
he would be the preacher for this people!*

The prophets of Micah’s day didn’t speak against the prevailing trends –
they encouraged them.

Think of Micaiah, when he encountered Ahab’s prophets –
they urged him to speak like one of them –
tell the king what he wants to hear!
There are plenty of pastors today who will tell you what you want to hear!
Think of those who preach only that “God is love” –
but never mention that God will judge sinners!

Micah preaches *justice* – therefore he preaches judgment upon sin,
as well as grace for the penitent!

3. The LORD Will Preserve a Remnant (Micah Preaches Christ) (2:12-13)

¹² *I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob;
I will gather the remnant of Israel;
I will set them together
like sheep in a fold,
like a flock in its pasture,
a noisy multitude of men.*
¹³ *He who opens the breach goes up before them;
they break through and pass the gate,
going out by it.
Their king passes on before them,
the LORD at their head.*

Micaiah had said to Ahab,

“I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.” (1 K 22:17)
At the end of each of *Micah’s* oracles,
he will use the shepherd image to provide hope.

Admittedly, verses 12-13 are fairly slim on hope.

All God says is that he will gather the remnant of Israel,
and set them like sheep in a fold –
he could be saying,
I will gather them together *for judgment!*
After all, Jesus talks about separating the sheep from the goats –
which is the task of the *shepherd!*

But at the final day, the king will go before them –
the LORD will be at their head –
because our Lord Jesus is both true God and true man;
he is the Son of David who rules as God’s vicegerent,
but he is also God himself – who rules as God!

And Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats – as the good shepherd,
and Jesus says that he will render judgment according to how we treated *him* –
how we treated “the least of these, my brethren.”

Have your loved Jesus?

Have you fed the hungry?
clothed the naked?
visited the sick and the imprisoned?
In short, have you loved your neighbor as yourself?