

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

The Prophecies of Micah

Readings: *Micah 3:1-5:15*

Reflections:

- Micah's second discourse continues to expand on his themes. The first point of challenge is to Israel's leaders who have rejected God's mercy and justice for their own self-indulgent abuse of the people. The false prophets are warned again that the day is coming when they will be silenced, disgraced, and put to shame. Micah though clearly knows the power of God on his life, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin." This empowerment of the Spirit in the time of Israel was for a specific person who was given by God a specific task. When the Spirit comes after the resurrection of Jesus, this same experience of empowerment is for all people and the primary fruit of that empowerment is love. In this context, the greatest expression of love was calling the people back to true justice for the poor and needy within Israel and complete rejection of abusive pagan worship.
- The leaders of Israel are motivated by money. "Her leaders judge for a price, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money." This is a strong warning for all those in spiritual leadership who seek to get rich off of selling God's truth. It is too easy to fall into the trap of materialism and the desire for more and better possessions.
- Micah 4:1-12 is a direct parallel passage to Isaiah 2:1-5. Micah expands a bit on Isaiah's prophecy but basically it is word for word. This underscores the importance and centrality of these words. "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and people will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.' The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many people and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." In other words, in the last days God is going to reach the nations of the world and they will come seeking Him. They will learn of God's ways, justice, mercy and truth, and God's

new people gathered from all nations will be a people of peace. This we seek clearly expressed in Jesus and in his first Christ-followers.

- The next verse adds an important vision for the future. “Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree and no one will make them afraid.” This takes the reader back to the Garden of Eden as well as the hope for the Promised Land where each person can live safely and securely in harmony with their world and those around them. The impact of the fall of Adam and Eve was captured in the simple phrase, “I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid.” Here we see the reversal of that. No longer hiding but safe and secure. The image of having your own tree and vine is that of having all of your needs met.
- The next section on the remnant who God will bless begins with this phrase, “I will gather the lame.” Throughout this passage God refers to the “daughter of Zion.” This is a phrase as well as “daughters of Jerusalem” used in prophetic literature to signify a people whom God will bless and save. The daughters of Jerusalem were most likely the poor people who lived in villages outside Jerusalem. They were not wealthy enough to live within the walls of the city and were vulnerable to any attack by invading forces. It is to these daughters that Jesus states when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey that they should not weep for him but for themselves. In this context it makes sense in that the remnant that God will choose and work through are the weak, poor and vulnerable. As we read in Micah, “I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation.”
- The next passage returns again to address the nations, this time those that are wealthy and proud. It can get confusing because sometimes Micah talks about the nations of the world receiving God’s grace in the last days. This should not be confused with God’s judgment of the nations in the present. Here we return to the present situation and Micah declares that the nations gathered to attack the poor of Israel, the daughters will be judged (threshed) by the poor and that these nations’ wealth will be ultimately submitted to the Lord. What a message of hope for the poor! As you can see, the prophetic messaging tends to have a free flowing nature that requires the reader to slow down and carefully listen.
- We now return to the promised Messiah, the coming ruler. Here we learn that he will come from the small town of Bethlehem, a sign of his humility. Notice that it has the cryptic phrase, “Whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This could also mean “Whose goings out are from old...” or “whose ways are from old, from ancient times.” The coming Messiah is set within the context of an overarching image of Israel being in labor to give birth: pain, struggle and yet hope for the future.
- Consider the words said of the Messiah: “He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.” Notice the image of shepherd that Jesus will later use for himself. Also notice

the emphasis of reaching the nations of the world. In Acts 1:7,8 Jesus parting command calls his followers to be witnesses “to the ends of the earth.” Finally, we see the emphasis on bringing peace. This is an important theme that we see will be a hallmark of the Messiah.

- Micah turns his attention back to the immediate and the future invasion of Israel by the Assyrians. He declares that there will be seven shepherds, eight leaders that will rule Assyria and deliver the remnant out of that nation. The remnant within Assyria is portrayed as dew that quickly disappears. In other words, this remnant will quickly escape the control of the Assyria. It is also like a lion among the beasts. In other words they will be able to destroy with ease. These are images of triumph and deliverance. The final section of this reading outlines how God will not only destroy the power of the proud nation but will also destroy its religion – spells, carved images, and asherah poles. This judgment is reserved for the nations that “have not obeyed me.” In the last days, the days of the Messiah, the nations will experience grace. In the present days, the proud nations attacking Israel will be judged.
- In the ongoing and unfolding story of “what doesn’t work,” it is interesting to see the comparison between the present situation of Israel, the future captivity and ongoing battle with the nations around them, and then the coming Messiah who apparently reverses everything and the nations now receive grace. As Micah flip flops back and forth, it has to make the reader struggle with the apparent change of approaches. In an isolated situation, it appears to be contradicting. Yet, in the overall storyline, it makes sense. God is continuing in the present situation to reveal to Israel that what you think should work to make for a better life (the right rules, a secure land, punishing your enemies, good leaders), none of these work to bring about lasting change. The only thing that works is the human heart being changed from the inside out. When that happens, rules are replaced with love, land is replaced with freedom from fear and true faith in God, punishment of enemies is replaced with enemy love, human leaders are replaced with intimacy with God. These inner workings of God are what God wants to offer all people as the foundation for life, a new life of peace and grace.