

Major Lessons from Minor Prophets God's Special People (Micah)

Lesson #7 for May 18, 2013

Scriptures: Micah 1:1-9; 2:1-11; 5:2; 6:1-8; 7:18-20; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27.

1. In this book: Micah receives visions of God's grief over Judah's and Israel's evil deeds, their coming destruction and later deliverance, the capture of Jerusalem, [Micah was the first prophet to predict the downfall of Jerusalem (Micah 3:12)] and the future arrival of the Son of Man [Micah 5:2]. Micah discusses two key events: the capture of the City of David and the coming[s] of the Son of David. As Micah addresses God's case against Israel—and his compassion for the people—his confidence in God grows.—Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible (Micah)*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
2. Unlike Jonah—whose story is his book and his message is one sentence; and even Joel, Amos, and Hosea who have compelling stories as a part of their books—Micah's book is, basically, a record of his messages to the people of Israel and Judah.
3. Micah (short for *Mikayah*, the name means "Who is like *Yahweh*?") prophesied between 739 and 686 B.C. under Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. (Micah 1:1) Micah had messages for both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. He was a country person from Moresheth Gath, very close to the vicinity of the Philistine city of Gath. Micah is referred to in Jeremiah 26:18,19. Jeremiah was contrasting his experience with Micah's. Micah is very much like Isaiah, and some people call Micah the shorthand version of Isaiah.
4. **The dominant foreign power during the period of Micah was Assyria.** Both Judah and Israel, as well as their neighbors, were heavily influenced by what Assyria did. Most nations at that time had conscripted citizen armies, but Assyria had a large full-time professional army, which none could match. As conquests were made, mercenaries were hired on as soldiers as well. Supported by heavy tributes exacted from subjugated territories, this professional army was free to enforce Assyrian rule and make new conquests. [Assyria worshiped the war god.]

Three significant events took place during the era of Micah that were related to Assyria:
 1. In 734-732 B.C. Tiglath Pileser III led a campaign against parts of Israel and Judah, as well as Syria and the land of the Philistines. Assyria won a resounding victory. All the nations had to pay tribute, but the northern kingdom of Israel suffered the most and lost most of its territory (2 Kings 15:29).
 2. In 722-721 B.C. Shalmaneser V of Assyria besieged the northern kingdom's capital of Samaria (2 Kings 17:5,6). The city eventually fell to Sargon II, and large numbers of its inhabitants were deported.
3. During the reign of Hezekiah in 701 B.C., Judah unwisely joined a revolt against Assyria. King Sennacherib overran much of the country, but Jerusalem was spared in the end. [Isaiah 37:36-38]

Micah's book must be read in the light of these events. The prophet was obviously a keen observer of current events, and God's message to him speaks to his contemporary situation.—*Bible Amplifier Series - Micah*, Jon Dybdahl.
5. Within Israel and Judah during this time, a shocking contrast between the extremely rich and the oppressed poor developed due to the exploitation of Israel's middle class (Micah 2:8,9) by greedy landholders (Micah 2:1-5). The

oppressors were supported by Israel's corrupt political and religious leaders (Micah 3). Because of this failed leadership, the whole nation became morally corrupt and ripe for judgment (Micah 6:9-16; 7:1-7). (*New Geneva Study Bible*)

6. Following the introductory statement in Micah 1:1, the entire rest of the book is written in poetic form. During Micah's ministry, the northern kingdom of Israel was overthrown, and the people were scattered by Assyria. Micah said that the people of Judah were really no better than the people of Israel. Judah's captivity in Babylon did not come until 120 years later. Notice the following words from *The Online Bible* about the corruption going on in Micah's day:
 - A. Among the laity (Micah 2:1-2, 6-10)
 1. They continually plot evil (Micah 2:1).
 2. They practice fraud and violence (Micah 2:2).
 3. They reject the Holy Spirit (Micah 2:6-7).
 4. They are insolent thieves (Micah 2:8).
 5. They mistreat widows and orphans (Micah 2:9-10).
 - B. Among the leaders (Micah 2:11; 3:1-5, 8-11)
 1. They are drunken liars (Micah 2:11).
 2. They hate good and love evil (Micah 3:1).
 3. They devour the sheep (Micah 3:2-5).
 4. They despise justice (Micah 3:8-9).
 5. They shed innocent blood (Micah 3:10).
 6. They accept bribes (Micah 3:11).—Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (Micah 2:1-3:11). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Do these accusations sound vaguely familiar? How could it be that false prophets, dishonest judges, and mercenary priests had become the norm for the land? (Micah 3:5-11)

7. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* focuses on three passages in the book of Micah: Micah 5:2; 6:1-8; and 7:18-20. In this study guide, we will take the liberty of mentioning several other passages as well.
8. What do you think of the description of preaching in Micah 2:11? Can you imagine anyone preferring this type of preaching? How many congregations today are getting that kind of message? Does this sound like the politicians of today?

Micah 2:11: ¹¹ The sort of prophet this people wants is a windbag and a liar, Prophesying a future of "wines and spirits"! (*Phillips*)
9. What would it be like to attend a church where the pastor was preaching that kind of a message? Compare 2 Timothy 4:3,4. How do we respond to pastors or Sabbath school teachers who give us messages that perhaps we do not want to hear? Could we be like the people in Micah's time? Do we listen only to those who speak what we want to hear?
10. Read Micah 4:1-4 and Isaiah 2:2-4. Who do you think borrowed from whom? Or, is it possible that both of them were quoting a common expression used in their day or possibly a song? When God inspires prophets to give us messages, does He have the right to give the same message to more than one prophet? Why are there so many passages in Scripture that are duplicated? See Jude and 2 Peter 2. Almost 90% of Mark is in either Matthew or Luke. Isaiah 37 is essentially verbatim from 2 Kings 19. 2 Samuel 22 is identical to Psalm 18. Do these duplications worry you? What about Ellen White's "borrowings"?
11. Is Joel 3:10 a biblical contradiction of Micah 4:3 and Isaiah 2:4?

12. In ancient times, it was believed that when two nations were at war and one nation conquered the other, it was because the conquering nation's god was more powerful than the god of the defeated nation. So, why would God allow His people to be captured and scattered throughout Assyria and later allow His people from Jerusalem and Judah to be taken into Babylonian captivity? Wouldn't that send the wrong message? Why did God allow His people to spend all that time in slavery in Egypt? Who would want to worship a God of a bunch of slaves?
13. Read Micah 4:11,12. What is implied by the idea that "these nations do not know what is in the Lord's mind"? What did the nations think? God was disciplining His people. Did it do any good?
14. Read Micah 4:13-5:1. Does Micah 4:13 sound like a contradiction to Micah 5:1? Don't you suppose that Micah 4:13 was a key text for the people in the days of Jesus? There are many Christian groups even today who believe that the millennium will be a time when Jesus will come down and reign from Jerusalem, gathering the wealth of the world there!
15. What do you understand is the context of the famous Messianic prophecy in Micah 5:2? Why did God give such a message of promise or warning to people who were acting as the people were acting at that time?

Micah 5:2: The LORD says, "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, but out of you I will bring a ruler for Israel, whose family line goes back to ancient times." (GNB)

5:2: But thou, Beth-lehem 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;
 Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (KJV)

At a time when disaster was being prophesied for Judah similar to what had recently taken place in Israel, it was important for God to point out that He had plans for His people for hundreds of years into the future. At times, it seemed that the Davidic line of kings had disappeared and all the promises that had been given to David would fail. But, then the Messiah was born, just as Micah had predicted in the region of Ephrathah, in the town of Bethlehem, and all that changed. The Eternal King was a descendant of King David and will represent his line forever. So, the prophecy served as a reminder for those who cared enough to read it and believe in Yahweh that He still had plans for the children of His friends Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel. How should we interpret this verse?

As with many Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, Micah 5:2 makes a reference to the **first and the second comings** of Jesus Christ. With His first coming, the prophet says that He will be born in the city of Bethlehem. At His Second Coming He will become Ruler over the people of Israel. We know that the Jews rejected the Messiah at His first coming and did not allow Him to rule over them. However, [true] Israel will recognize the Messiah at His second coming and will allow Him to become their Ruler for eternity. The last part of this verse refers to Jesus' divine nature, **His pre-incarnate existence**, by saying, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Thus, within this one short verse, we have a revelation of the Messiah's identity in eternity past, in His incarnation and in eternity future.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Book of Micah. Study Notes on the Holy Scriptures* (14). Gary Everett.

16. An elderly black pastor in the southern United States described the visit of Jesus to Jerusalem at the age of twelve, saying something like the following. As Jesus was sitting among the scholarly rabbis and asking them questions the likes of which they had never heard before, one of them turned to Him and asked: "Son, how old are you?" According to the elderly pastor, Jesus hesitated for a moment and then answered: "On my mother's side, I am twelve; but on

my Father's side, I am older than time." Surely, this would qualify Him as being One "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

17. Read Micah 6:1-8. Micah 6:8 is the most succinct statement in the entire Bible of God's will for His people. It summarizes all prophetic teachings on true religion: A life displaying justice, mercy, and a close walk with God. *Justice* is something that people do when prompted by God's Spirit. It has to do with fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless who are exploited by others. *Kindness* means to freely and willingly show love, loyalty, and faithfulness to others. "Walking with God" means putting God first and living in conformity with His will.
18. Why is it easier to keep the Sabbath and other ceremonial requirements strictly than it is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God? Doing what is right requires an abandonment of selfishness and an acceptance of love as one's *modus operandi*.

Micah 6:8 is the verse *par excellence* for biblical ethics and describes the true Christian lifestyle. In order to better understand what God is saying through Micah, we need to become acquainted with one crucial feature of biblical Hebrew thinking. When biblical authors want to explain a sequence of different actions, they describe them usually from the effect to the cause. This principle works from the visible to the invisible, from the superficial to the real, from the outside to the inside. We think and speak differently today; we explain things from cause to effect.

In other words, to understand what Micah is really saying, to catch his message, we need to reverse his sequence of thoughts. We need to begin to study this verse, starting from the end. Thus, the proper sequence for us today is:

First, "Walk humbly with the Lord!" This is the cause of all other actions described. [The first four commandments]

Second, "Love mercy!" This is the first result. [The last six commandments]

Finally, "Act justly!" This is the ultimate consequence for those who walk with God. (*Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 86)

19. It is absolutely essential to understand the meaning of Micah 6:8 because we know historically that the ceremonial system can be turned into a terrible curse, just as the Sabbath can be turned into a curse. On the other hand, if the ceremonial system and the Sabbath are properly understood, they can be a tremendous blessing. **What would make the difference between the Sabbath or the law being a blessing or a curse even in our day?**
20. It is almost guaranteed that if you do not fully understand why you are doing something, then before long it will be turned into something very different from what was intended. Virtually every religious practice has been perverted in one way or another. But, if our religion is understood as a joyous opportunity to get to know our Father and God better, it is much less likely that we will lose its meaning. Why was this apparently so hard to understand? Do you see any evidence that the people in Micah's day and Isaiah's day were delighted about their growing relationship with Yahweh? Think of all that Jesus and Paul said about how the Jewish system had been corrupted in their day. How can we prevent that from happening in our day? Has it already begun to happen?
21. Read Micah 7:18-20. Is there a pile of sins at the bottom of the sea? What is meant by that?

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