

The Minor Prophets
Lesson 22: Judgment Is Coming
(Micah 1-2)

Introduction to Micah:

- **Key People:** The people of Samaria and Jerusalem.
- **Date Written:** Possibly during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (742-687 BC).
- **Purpose:** To warn God's people that judgment is coming and to offer pardon to all who repent.
- **Author:** Micah, a native of Moresheth, near Gath, about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem.
- **To whom written:** The people of Israel (the northern kingdom) and of Judah (the southern kingdom).
- **Setting:** The political situation is described in 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-30. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea.
- **The Christ of Micah:** Micah 5:2 is one of the clearest and most important of all Old Testament prophecies: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting." This prophecy about the birthplace and eternity of the Messiah was made seven hundred years before His birth.
- **The Key Verses:** "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?" (Micah 6:8).
- **Theme:** God judges sin and calls for justice.

Introduction: King David had a great many talented men in his army, but the most valuable were perhaps the men of Issachar, who had "understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chron. 12:32). Because they understood the times, the men of Issachar abandoned the ill-fated house of Saul and joined forces with David, God's chosen king. They saw which way God's hand was moving, and they obediently moved in that direction.

Micah of Moresheth was a man who had the same kind of discernment because God gave him insight into the changes taking place on the national and international scene. Micah received three messages from the Lord to deliver to the people in hopes they would abandon their idolatry and return to sincere faith in the Lord.

The first message (Mic. 1:1-2:13) was a warning that divine judgment was coming on both Judah and Israel (Samaria). This message was fulfilled in 722 BC when Assyria defeated Israel, and 606-586 when the Babylonians invaded Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and took thousands of people captive to Babylon. When God's servant speaks, it pays to listen!

In this brief book, Micah the prophet delivered three messages from the Lord.

I. A Warning Message: Judgment is Coming (Micah 1:1—2:13)
A. Declaration: God's Wrath Is Coming (1:1-5)

When the prophet Amos was about to indict Israel and Judah, he started by condemning the Gentile nations around them (Amos 1—2); but the prophet Micah didn't take that approach. Without any formal introduction, he moved right into his message and sounded the alarm.

1. **The court is convened (v. 2).** The image in verses 2-5 is that of a court of law, with God as the Judge and Judah and Samaria as the defendants. Micah addresses all the people of the earth because God is the Lord of the whole earth (Mic. 4:2-3) and all the nations are accountable to Him. God is both Judge and Witness from His holy temple, where His law was kept in the ark of the covenant. A holy God must act in righteousness and judge sin.
2. **The Judge arrives (vv. 3-4).** Today, when a judge enters a courtroom from his or her chambers, everybody in the courtroom rises—a symbol of the respect we have for the judge and the law that he or she represents. But no judge ever came to the court in the manner described by Micah.

A judge comes to court to see to it that justice is done, and he or she isn't allowed to take sides. But when God comes to judge the nations, he has all the evidence necessary and doesn't have to call any witnesses. God is angry at His people because of their sins. That's why His coming makes the earth split and the mountains melt so that the rock flows like melted wax or a waterfall.

3. **The Judge names the defendants (v. 5).** God points an accusing finger at His own people—Israel and Judah—as represented by their capital cities, Samaria, and Jerusalem, respectively. After seeing what Assyria did to Israel in 722 BC, the leaders of Judah should have repented and turned to the Lord, but they didn't. In fact, during the reign of Hezekiah, the Assyrians plundered Judah and would have taken Jerusalem had not the Lord miraculously intervened (Isa. 36-37).

Both Judah and Israel were guilty of idolatry, which is really rebellion against the Lord. When the nation was divided after Solomon's death, the northern kingdom established its own religious system in competition with the Mosaic worship in the temple at Jerusalem. But the people of Judah had secretly begun to worship the false gods of Canaan; and their hearts were not true to Jehovah, even when they stood in the temple courts and offered their sacrifices (Isa. 1). To God, the temple had become more like the "high places" in the hills around Jerusalem, where the Jews secretly worshipped idols and offered their sacrifices.

- B. **Lamentation: The Cities Shall Be Ruined (1:6-16).** The prophet responded to God's message by acting like a grieving man at a funeral (v. 8; 2 Sam. 15:30). He was genuinely burdened because of what would happen to his people if they didn't heed God's Word and turn from their sin.

1. **The ruin of Samaria (vv. 6-9).** The capital city of the northern kingdom was situated on a hill that overlooked a fertile valley. The prophet Isaiah called the city "the crown of pride" with "glorious beauty" (Isa. 28:1) and predicted that God's judgment would destroy the city (vv. 2-4).

- The Assyrians would turn the beautiful city into a heap of rubble, and her idols wouldn't be able to protect the city from its enemies.
- God destroyed the city and nation of Samaria because the people rebelled against His Word, and He destroyed the Samaritan temple because it housed a false religion that was nothing but religious prostitution.
- But God destroyed the temple in Jerusalem because the leaders had turned the true religion into a false worship of Jehovah and the gods of the nations.
- Jehovah is a jealous God, who will not share worship or glory with another (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15).
- The covenant God made with His people at Sinai was like a marriage contract, and their breaking that covenant was like committing adultery or engaging in prostitution.

The destruction of the city of Samaria was begun in 722 BC under Sargon II, ruler of Assyria, who ordered many of the citizens to be taken captive or killed. Then he imported people into the land from various nations he had conquered; as Jews and Gentiles intermarried, the result was a mixed race that the Jews despised. Even in our Lord's day the Jews had no dealing with the Samaritans (John 4:1-9).

2. **The ruin of Judah (vv. 9-16).** The problem with Samaria was that she was toxic; her infection had spread to Judah. The prophet wept over his land the way you would weep over a patient with an incurable disease in the hospital (v. 9). Isaiah used a similar image to describe the plight of Judah (Isa. 1:5-6), and Jeremiah wept because the spiritual leaders in his day didn't deal drastically with the sin sickness of the people (Jer. 6:14; 7:8; 8:11).

- Micah describes the ruin of the southern part of Judah (the Shephelah) by the invading Assyrians in 701 BC.
- They swept through the land and took forty-six cities, but they could not take Jerusalem, because God protected it.
- In Micah 1:9-16, the prophet uses a series of puns based on the names of the cities similar in sound to familiar Hebrew words. For example, "Gath" is similar to the Hebrew word for "tell." Thus, he wrote "Declare (tell) it not in Gath."

The tragedy of this invasion is that it need not have happened. Had the people of Israel and Judah turned to the Lord in repentance and faith, He would have given them victory. Instead, they believed the false prophets, held fast to their idols, and sinned their way right into defeat. Sad to say, even the little children suffered and went into exile (Mic. 1:16), all because of the sins of the parents.

C. **Accusation: The Sins of The People (2:1-11)**

How could the Lord Jehovah permit such suffering and shame to come to His covenant people? Were they not His special heritage? Was not the land His love gift to them? That was why he was punishing them! "you only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your sins" (Amos 3:2 NIV). Privilege brings responsibility, and responsibility brings accountability. The prophet held them accountable for two particular sins: covetousness (Mic. 2:1-5) and listening to false prophets (vv. 6-11).

1. **Covetousness (vv. 1-5).**

- The Mosaic law required that land remain with the families and within the tribes. The land actually belonged to the Lord (Lev. 25:2, 23, 38), and He “leased” it to the people in return for their obedience to His law.
- But wealthy “robber barons” in Micah’s day were bent on acquiring large estates on which they could enslave the poor and thus make huge profits with little investments. They were so intent on their pursuit of wealth that they made their ruthless plans in bed at night and then got up early the next morning to carry them out.
- They practiced the world’s version of the Golden Rule: “*Whoever has the gold makes the rules*”. They forgot that the Lord owned the land, the Lord made the laws, and the Lord has compassion on the poor and oppressed. But even if these thieves had no fear of God, they should have had concern for their fellow human beings and treated them like people made in the image of God.
- The name for this sin is “materialism,” and it’s committed by people who are covetous and obsessed with acquiring more and more wealth and “things.”
- Ultimately, the covetous sinners Micah addressed would reap what they sowed; and the dreadful harvest of their sins would one day appear (Micah 2:3-5). Many would have the land taken from them acquired by the enemies and wasted. Many would go into exile and die away from the land they had coveted and stolen from innocent people.

2. **False prophets (vv. 6-11).**

- Just as the false prophets had attacked Jeremiah (5:31) and Amos (7:10-17) for preaching God’s truth, so the false prophets attacked Micah for faithfully declaring the message of God.
- These men espoused a shallow theology that had no place for either sin or repentance. “We are God’s special people,” they argued, “and He would never permit these judgments to happen in the land.”
- As long as the people participated in religious services, they would not incur the wrath of God, even if their hearts were not in their worship. The Jews were Abraham’s children and God would never break the promises He made to Abraham. Such were their false premises.
- What these counterfeit religious leaders forgot was that God’s covenants involve precepts as well as promises, obligations as well as blessings. Merely going through the motions of religion isn’t the same as worshipping God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23).
- Anybody can join the crowd and be part of some popular religious movement; but it takes devotion, prayer, obedience, and submission to worship God “with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28 NKJV).
- It is God who speaks in Micah 2:7b-13 as He defends His faithful servant. The fact that these religious leaders rejected Micah’s message didn’t mean that message was wrong; it meant that the hearers were wrong.
- The way we respond to God’s Word indicates our relationship to the Lord (see John 8:47 NKJV).
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- These false prophets were deceiving and robbing the people by giving them false assurance that everything was well in the land.

God originally gave the Jewish people the land of Canaan to be their “rest” from the trial of the wilderness wandering (Deut. 12:9-10; Josh. 22:4). After they had conquered the land and claimed their tribal inheritance, they should have enjoyed rest and blessings in the land, but instead they turned to the idols of the surrounding nations and rebelled against God. God punished them in their land by bringing in different nations that robbed and enslaved them (see the book of Judges). But the nation didn’t learn from its history; the people repeated the same sins as their ancestors.

Micah urged the people to get out of the land because no rest would be found there, in spite of what the false prophets promised. These men would preach any message the people wanted to hear, just as long as they were provided with their strong drink! The false prophets were using religion to make money and enjoy pleasure, and they had no concern for the future of the nation.

D. Consolation: Hope for The Future (2:12-13)

The faithful prophet must expose sin and announce judgment, but he must also provide consolation and hope for those who receive his message and turn to God. Consolation without true repentance is only giving false hope; it’s saying “Peace, peace!” when there is no peace. But conviction without hope creates only hopelessness, like performing surgery without providing healing.

- The Lord seems to be speaking here to the entire nation (“all of you O Jacob... Israel” NIV), and His promise seems to reach ahead to the end times when Israel and Judah will be united, and their King Messiah will reign over them. Micah describes a triumphant procession into the land, with King Messiah at the head and the Lord leading the people, just as He had led them out of Egypt (v.13).
- However, until that glorious day, God will deal with the “remnant” of His people. The “remnant” is a very important doctrine in the prophetic books, and there are many references to it. Though the nation of Israel might rebel against God, there would always be a faithful remnant that would trust Him and seek to do His will, and God would work because of the faith of the remnant. (This is also true of the professing church.) The hope of the nation lies with the remnant.
- A weary remnant returned to Judah after the Babylonian captivity, but it never became the great nation that the prophets promised. That will happen when the Lord returns, claim His chosen nation, and establishes His kingdom. The Messiah is described in verse 13 as “One who breaks open the way” (NIV), that is, who opens the doors that confine the Jews in the various nations so that He might bring them to their land. God certainly did this when the exiles left Babylon, but the promise here is for the last days, when the Messiah shall come to overcome His enemies and redeem His chosen people.

Micah's first message aroused the opposition of the false prophets, but it didn't change the hearts of the people. Thus, he gave a second message, announcing that "the Deliverer is coming."

But we today need to deal with our sins of covetousness, selfishness, and willingness to believe "religious lies." We must abandon "soft religion" that pampers our pride and makes it easy for us to sin. Why? Because "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), and "The Lord shall judge His people" (10:30). Remember, judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17).

Questions for Personal Reflections Or Group Discussion

1. What images come to mind when you imagine a courtroom and a criminal trial?
2. If you picture the opening passage of Micah as a courtroom (as does Wiersbe), how is it like and how is it different from a contemporary courtroom?
3. Why was Micah so sad that he said he must "lament and wail"? What does this say about him?
4. If someone lamented and wept over conditions in your country, how would you respond?
5. As Wiersbe asks, how could the Lord Jehovah permit such suffering and shame to come to His covenant people?
6. In what way did covetousness especially show up with the Israelites? What are the definitions of *covetousness* and *materialism*?
7. What was the shallow theology the false prophets of Israel espoused at this time? Where do you see shallow theology today?
8. Why did Micah's message contain both conviction and hope? What would one without the other communicate?
9. Of conviction and hope, which one would you be most prone to leave out when communicating the gospel message? Why?
10. What in your church or your own spiritual life are you concerned may be "soft" religion" that pampers your pride and makes it easy to sin?

Homework: Read **Micah 3-7**. Study title, The Kingdom