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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Micah 1:1-9

34. THE BOOK OF MICAH

What's in a name ? In the Bible names are often very significant. The book of Genesis contains the story of a man named Methuselah, a famous name because Methuselah is the oldest man in Scripture and probably the oldest men who ever lived. Do you recall that when Methuselah was born, his father Enoch give him a name that proved not only significant but also prophetic, for in Hebrew the name means “ *When he dies it will come.* ” Methuselah lived 969 years and the year in which he died was the year of the great flood of Noah. Now the book of Micah is another example of the significance of names in the Bible. You see, in Hebrew Micah which is a shortened form of Micaiah means “ *Who is like the Lord ?* ” In the last chapter Micah uses a play on his own name saying. “ *Who is a God like you ?* ” (7:18) R. G. Lee says,

The name of the prophet was suited to his character. God was everything to him. He had a high view of the holiness, righteousness and compassion of God. To judge by his writings, he was a man of powerful personality, of calm, sane judgment, tender-hearted yet faithful, and for all this he gave God the credit and the glory. (3:8)

Now no doubt you are familiar with certain sections of the book of Micah. The one that concerns beating swords into plough-shares and spears into pruning hooks and the reign of peace that will come when Christ returns. Then there is passage that you will heard from Micah read at the Carol services, “ *But thou Bethlehem 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.* ” (5:2) That prediction was made some 700 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus. Then there is that classic statement in (6:8) “ *What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God.* ” (6:8) Of course there is that remarkable statement at the end of the book which has been made into a number of hymns, “ *Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity ?* ” (7:18)

All memorable statements but as David Pawson says, “ *they are usually taken out of context and used as pretexts. We need to put the whole book into context, time and place.* ” So let's consider,

THE PLACE:

Micah was a native of the village of Moresheth Gath (1:1, 14) a village about twenty four miles south west of the city of Jerusalem. Keep in mind that Galilee the northern part of Israel was called “ *Galilee of the Nations,* ” because international traffic went through it. The south was more Jewish and it had far fewer international visitors. If you take an east west cross

section in the south we have the Mediterranean Sea at one side and the Dead Sea at the other. The Dead Sea is a lot lower than the Mediterranean. Now Micah came from Moresheth Gath which was situated between the Philistines and the Jews. As such he could look up to the corrupt city of Jerusalem and down to the Gaza Strip.

THE PERIOD:

Micah exercised his ministry during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (750-732 B.C.) Ahaz (735-715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) He probably preached for about seventeen years starting before 732 B.C. and continuing until after 715 B.C. This means that he was a contemporary of Isaiah in Judah (1:1) and Amos and Hosea (1:1) in Israel. By this time, of course Israel was divided following the death of Solomon. The ten tribes of the north had separated, calling themselves Israel, and the two tribes in the south were known as Judah. *Micah was the only prophet who directed his preaching to both the Northern and the Southern kingdoms but the burden of his prophecy was for Judah.* So here is Isaiah and Micah preaching at the same time. Isaiah came from an upper class, wealthy background but Micah was a simple country man with a heart for the ordinary people who were being exploited.

Isaiah preached in the city, Micah preached in the country. Isaiah was God's messenger in the palace, Micah's was God's messenger to the people. Isaiah dealt with political matters, and Micah dealt with personal matters.

THE PURPOSE:

To set forth the theme of “ *Present Judgment but Future Blessing.* ” You see, Micah was a country man living a simple life out in the fields and hills, But he was burdened about what was happening all around him. You see, in the Bible cities are always seen as dangerous places. The concentration of sinners makes sin worse. So vice and crime are normally worse in the city than in the surrounding country. What was happening in Judah was this. The corruption in Jerusalem was beginning to touch the country towns in which Micah labored. (1:9) Property was taken by violence, (2:2) debts were collected by force (2:8) prophets and priests were corrupt (3:11) justice was perverted by the nation's leaders (3:1-3, 9) witchcraft and paganism were rife throughout the land (5:12-14) false weights and deceit were frequently used in trade (6:10-12) and family relationships had broken down with awful consequences. (7:5-6)

Micah saw the coming judgment of God upon Israel under Assyria in 722 B.C. as well as the fall of Jerusalem and Judah under the Babylonians in 586 B. C. He sought to call the Jews back to faithful worship of Jehovah and sincere obedience to His covenant but they refused to listen. He was the prophet of social justice his heart went out to the helpless, but the people would not repent. Now the simplest way to divide this book is by the three fold “ *Hear ye,* ” (1:2, 3:1, 6:1) So these sections begin with the rebuke for sin and the announcement of judgment. Then each section closes with the promise of blessing in

the Messiah. (2:12-13 5:10, 15 7:20) So the central thought of the book is “ ***Present Judgment but Future Blessing.***” Look at,

(1) THE FIRST SERMON 1:1-2:13

Micah wastes no time in getting to his message. The Lord has spoken to him and warned him that the sins of the people are so great that He must send judgment. Do you see that he names the capital cities in (1:1) ? Jerusalem, the capital of Judah in the southern kingdom and Samaria the capital of Israel in the northern kingdom. In fact in this first message Micah names twelve cities and points out their sins. The sins of the cities were polluting the whole nation. Does that not sound up to date ? Judgment was coming. The court was convened, the judge had arrived, and the defendants were named. (1:5) For here there is brought before us,

(a) THE REVELATION OF COMING JUDGMENT:

As God points an accusing finger at His own people, Israel and Judah. Today, when a judge enters a courtroom everyone in the courtroom rises, it is just a symbol of respect for the judge and the law he or she represents but no judge ever came to court in the manner described by Micah. The phrase “ *cometh forth out of his place,*” in (1:3) means “ *to come forth for battle.*” God opens the court and declares war. A judge comes to court to see to it that justice is done and he or she is not allowed to take sides. But when God comes to judge the nations, He has all the evidence necessary, and He does not 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. (1:4) The “ *wound,*” in (1:9) is the stroke of judgment, and it was going to be “ *incurable,*” that is, there would be no recovery from it. And God’s rod to inflict the stroke was Assyria. And after the Assyrians had laid low the Northern Kingdom (Israel) they also invaded the Southern Kingdom (Judah) so that (1:9) is in advance of the event “ *It (the stroke) is come unto Judah it is come unto the gate of my people even to Jerusalem.*” In (1:10-16) the unfamiliar names are names of places in the locality where Micah was reared. He is describing the ruin of the southern part of Judah (Shephelah) by the invading Assyrians in 701 B.C. (1:10-16 2 Kings 18:7) They swept through the land and destroyed these cities but they could not take Jerusalem because God protected it.

Now Micah does a play on words here and he shows how each city will become the very opposite of the meaning of its name. For example “ *Saphir,*” means “ *beautiful,*” but the citizens would endure public disgrace. Look at (1:14) Moresheth-gath was Micah’s own city, it means “ *betrothed,*” and brides were given farewell gifts. In other words the town would no longer belong to Judah but “ *leave home,*” and belong to the invaders. David Pawson says if Micah were preaching in London he would say something like this.

Hammersmith will be hacked to pieces. Battersea will be battered for all to see. Barking will be set on by wild dogs

and sheep will graze over what is left of Shepherd's Bush. Vultures will feed on the corpses at Peckham

My this is how Micah speaks about local places. He takes the name of each town and he twists that name to be a message of judgment. How could God do this ? Were they not His special people ? Was the land not His love gift to them ? My that's why He was punishing them. " *You only have I known of all the families of the earth therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*" (Amos 3:2) Privilege brings responsibility and responsibility brings accountability. I mean can you see,

(b) THE REASONS FOR COMING JUDGMENT:

What were some of the sins that God would judge ? Idolatry. Do you see that (1:5) talks about " *the high places of Judah,*" The people insisted on worshiping " *the works of their own hands.*" (5:13) But people do that today. We may not carve out statues and bow before them, but we certainly live for the things we have manufactured, cars, clothes, houses, money. My what we serve and sacrifice for is the thing that we worship. In (2:1) we see the *sin of covetousness.* People would lie awake at night thinking up new ways to get " *things,*" and then get up early to carry out their plans. Paul says in (Col 3:5) that " *covetousness is idolatry.*" Many people today have an insatiable appetite to get more " *things.*" Do you recall the warning of the Lord Jesus " *Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*"

(Lk 12:15) The people were not only covetous, but they used illegal means to get what they wanted, fraud, threats, and violence (2:2) The rich took advantage of the poor, and the rulers did not obey the Law of God. (Lev 25:2 23, 28) They practiced the world's version of The Golden Rule " *Whosoever has the gold makes the rules.*" Do you know what the name of this sin is ? **Materialism** and it affects us big time today. Parents rob children of time and companionship by working at several jobs so that they can make more money to buy more " *fun.*" Believers rob the Lord of " *tithes and offerings*" that are rightfully His so that they can enjoy the good life. We forget the words of the Lord Jesus in (Matt 6:33) and put everything ahead of the kingdom of God. How did Micah respond to the sins of the people and the judgment of God ? He wept and mourned. (1:8-9) He was like a broken man at a funeral. He saw his fellow country-men rushing down a slippery slope and if they would not weep for themselves he would do so for them.

Do you recall the lamentations of Jeremiah ? " *Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.*" (Jer 9:1) Do you recall Paul's great burden for his fellow Jews ? " *I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.*" (Rom 9:2-3) Have we the same kind of heart broken concern today ? How do we react when we read of an escalating divorce rate ? A Christian leader who has a moral lapse ? Fellow believers who show signs of losing their first love ? Do we climb up to the judge's bench or

fall down at the mourner's bench ? How did the people react to Micah's preaching ? They tried to stop him. In (2:6) they say, " *Stop preaching such terrible things. You know they will not happen to us. We are God's people.*" But Micah says, " *I must preach, the Spirit of God compels me.*" Micah knew that the people did not want honest preaching, they preferred their drunken false prophets who lived as wickedly as the people did.

(2:10-11) (1)

(2) THE FURTHER SERMON 3:1-5:15

Do you see that this section begins with the same charge to hear ? (3:1) Now notice that in these chapters Micah speaks of,

(a) THE COMING RETRIBUTION: Chapter 3

Do you know the story of the Greek philosopher Diogenes ? He went about the countryside carrying a lantern. Even in broad daylight he carried his lantern to arouse curiosity and provoke questions. People would ask why are you carrying a lantern in the daytime and Diogenes would reply, " *I'm looking for an honest man.*" Like Diogenes Micah has been tramping around the Southern Kingdom of Judah searching for godliness but he finds only oppression, corruption, bribery and injustice. Micah exposes the mess in Jerusalem and he says the reason for God's judgment on His people is that those who have authority have forgotten that they are responsible to God. Look at (3:12) I suppose we could call this is the collapse of civilization and why was this ?

Well, look at (Ch 3) and notice that Micah addresses,

CORRUPT POLITICIANS:

In (3:1-4) Men who were not only permitting the wealthy to exploit the poor but were doing it themselves. They fleeced the poor scraping them to the bone stripping away everything they had. Do you see where Micah starts ? At the top. When you clean out a fishpond you start at the tap, because the dead fish always rise to the top. And when a country goes sour it starts at the top and dribbles down to the bottom. Micah told the leaders that the Assyrians were not their enemy. He laid the blame for the decline and destruction at their own feet. You are the cause of this, he said, you are the real enemy of this country. (1 Kings 18:18) My hen God sought to bring about revival under King Hezekiah He started with King Hezekiah. And the revival in Nineveh started when the king repented in sackcloth and ashes.

Now its not my job to get into politics. But during this election year we will have a lot of people running for everything and standing for nothing. Yet Paul says that the political leaders are God's ministers. (Rom 13:4) They are responsible to the Lord. The tragedy in Judah was instead of defending the sheep they were devouring them. Ron Dunn speaking of U.S.A could easily have been speaking of the United Kingdom when he said,

And this seems to be the place we have come to in our country. They have thrown the Bible out of the schools and left it in the motels. They handcuff the policemen

and let the criminals go free. The Supreme Court can't come to a satisfactory decision concerning pornographic literature in the malls but they have no difficulty in ruling on prayer in schools.

My do we not need to pray for our leaders ?
(1 Tim 1:1-2) That our country, might be led in righteousness.

COMPROMISING PREACHERS:

In (3:5-11) What were the preachers doing in Micah's day that brought about the denunciation of God ? The very same thing preachers are doing in our day, preaching what the people want to hear. The establishment wanted to hear "*Peace*," so the prophets said "*Peace*," even though Assyria the superpower to the north was eyeing Judah. You see, these preachers were willing to say anything as long as there was adequate remuneration.

(3:11) But how different was Micah for he says in (3:8) "*But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord and of judgment and of might.*" My do we realize that this is the only thing that can give life changing power to preaching today ? Spurgeon said, "*It were better to speak six words in the power of the Spirit than to preach seventy years of sermons without the Spirit.*"

COMPLACENT PEOPLE:

In (3:11-12) All of this corruption and pollution permeating the country and yet the people leaned upon the Lord and said, "*Is not the Lord among us ? No evil can*

happen to us. Micah, you talk about all this corruption and this immorality, why the Lord is with us. We are trusting in God, we believe in God. Nothing can happen to us." You see, to all outward appearances the religious life of the country was flourishing, but the endless activity in the temple and elsewhere hid widespread sin. Ron Dunn says that several years ago there was in the city Chicago a group of policemen who became bandits. They would go out and rob a store, then return to their hiding places, put on their uniforms, and investigate their own crime. I wonder is that we are doing ? (Jer 7:8) Has the church has become a hideout for multitudes of Christians, who during the week are living Christ-less, godless lives and then think because they come to church on Sunday morning, God is going to overlook it all. My He will not do it. As far as Judah was concerned judgment was coming. (3:12) (a) But (Ch 4) takes up a wonderful new theme, for one day there will be peace on the earth and righteousness will reign, for there is,

(b) THE COMING RESTORATION: Chapter 4

Do you see how the chapter begins ? "*But in the last days*," (4:1) The period known as "*the last days*," began with the ministry of Christ (Heb 1:1-2) and they climax with His return to establish His kingdom on earth. You see, the pendulum is swinging here from predictions of coming judgment to previews of the Messianic age. For this passage describes a scene yet to come. Nations today will never forget how to make war, never beat their swords into ploughshares, never turn their spears into pruning hooks, until the coming of the King. The words of

Micah here are almost identical to the words of (Is 2:4) which speak of a similar time. These words are inscribed on the pedestal of a bronze statue in the United Nations garden. The statue depicts a strong man literally hammering a sword into a farmer's plough, and it was a gift from the Soviet Union presented in 1959 three years after Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev promised the West, “ **we will bury you.**” So much for world peace at least until the Messiah comes. My a kingdom is coming in which there will be multilateral disarmament and this kingdom is going to be established on earth. Did you know that when you are praying the disciples prayer this is what you are praying for ? “ *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* ” (Matt 6:10) You say, how can this happen ? Because of

(c) THE COMING RULER: Chapter 5

Now keep in mind here that Micah is shifting his focus time and again. Sometimes he sees his people in his day, then in he sees his people in “ *the last days.* ” Here in (Ch 5) he is shifting his focus again this time to the coming of the Messiah. Do you see here,

The First Advent of the Lord Jesus:

Look if you will at (5:2) Would you for a second “ *turn your eyes on Jesus and look full in His wonderful face.* ” Do you see **His Eternality:** He is eternal God “ *whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting.* ”

Do you see **His Humanity:** “ *Shall he come forth unto me,* ” (5:2) Christ stepped out of eternity into human history sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Do you see **His Humility:** “ *But thou Bethlehem Ephratah,* ” The name “ *Bethehem,* ” means “ *house of bread,* ” and the name “ *Ephratah,* ” means “ *fruitful.* ” There David had been born there Christ would be born. In this little town the Lord of Glory, the second person of the Godhead would be become man. You see, when God chose to become a man he did not choose to be born in Athens, Alexandria, Babylon, Rome, London, Paris or Washington He chose to be born in Bethlehem, in a humble stable or cave in Bethlehem. But Micah looks ahead not just to His first coming but to,

The Second Advent of Jesus Christ:

For having gone to Calvary as the great shepherd of the sheep, He will retain His shepherd character when He returns. You know in the Old Testament the sheep was always slain for the shepherd, but in the New Testament the Shepherd was slain for the sheep.

**When blood from a victim must flow
This Shepherd, by pity was led
To stand between us and the foe
And willingly died in our stead**

And the Lord Jesus will reign as shepherd. God's ideal Old Testament king was David, the shepherd king. In the Hebrew Scriptures the whole idea of kingship is wrapped

up in the idea of a shepherd, one who pastors, protects and provides. In (Ps 22) we see the Suffering Shepherd, in (Ps 23) we see the Sustaining Shepherd and in (Ps 24) we see the Sovereign Shepherd. Micah could see “ *our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep,*” (Heb 13:20) standing and feeding His flock with no one daring to interfere “ for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” (5:4) Micah concludes (Ch 5) by declaring that Israel’s future enemies would be defeated, (5:5-6) the Jewish remnant would be blessed (5:7-9) and the nation would be purged. (5:10-15) (1) (2)

(3) THE FINAL SERMON 6:1-7:20

Do you see how it begins again ? (6:1) Micah is moving his focus again from the dim and distant future and he is bringing the people back to the present. Do you recall that the opening chapters of the book condemned the sins of the people, now the prophet appeals for their repentance. Micah began his prophecy with a trial scene and now he returns to it. You see, God has a controversy with His people, and Micah wants them to keep some things before them.

(a) GOD’S GOODNESS IN THE PAST:

“ *State your case against Me,*” says the Lord. “ *I have a complaint against you,*” announces the Lord, “ *for I have done all I can do for you, yet you have rejected Me. I brought you out of Egypt, I led you in the wilderness, I protected you from your enemies. What more could I have*

done ?” Isn’t it astonishing that we also neglect the Lord as if He wearies us. As John Phillips says,

He is the most fascinating absorbing person in the universe. Yet we yawn in His face and gave our attention to our puny business matters and pitiful little pleasures as they are more important to the universe. (a)

(b) GOD’S DEMANDS IN THE PRESENT:

What would it take to get right with God ? Look if you will at (6:6-7) Yet these were all external things and Micah swept aside Judah’s reliance on them. God does not want extravagant gifts and sacrifices, He wants our hearts. (Ps 51:16-17) Micah (6:8) has been called “ *the greatest saying of the Old Testament.*” Here Micah is pleading with the Jews to repent on the grounds that they are God’s people. (6:3, 5) And what is God’s demand ?

To be Considerate: To do justly:

Did you know that is how the Bible describes God ? “ *A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*” (Deut 32:4) Of course the people in Micah’s day ignored this, for they stole other people’s property, they perverted the course of justice and engaged in financial chicanery. My are you doing justly ? When you fill in your tax return ? When you pay your employee less than he or she deserves ? When you keep your child from school without good reason ? When you travel on public transport without paying the correct fee ?

To be Compassionate: To love mercy:

A man was having his portrait painted and said to the artist, “ *I hope this will do me justice.* ” The artist said, “ *It’s not justice you need, its mercy.* ” Do you recall that word “ *hesed*,” mercy that we noted in the book of Hosea ? Albert Barnes the 19th American scholar said, “ *Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy.* ”

To be Contrite: To walk humbly with thy God:

Augustine maintained, “ *For those who would learn God’s ways, humility is the first thing, humility is the second and humility is the third.* ” My consider the life of Jesus Christ. Did He not do justly ? Did He not love mercy ? Did He not walk humbly with His Father ? Now here is Micah telling his people that God has a controversy with them, pleading with them to repent. Reminding them of (a) (b) and,

(c) GOD’S PLANS IN THE FUTURE:

Speaking in the latter part of (Ch 6) God says, “ *You had better repent because judgment is coming.* ” But sadly the Israelites refused to obey God, and the tragedy of Israel’s sinfulness overwhelmed Micah’s soul. For he cried, “ *Woe is me.* ” But Micah has faith in God. (7:7-10) And he turned away from the sins of his people to meditate on the faithfulness of God. Sure, God will **punish** sin, but Micah saw a day when God will **pardon** sin. For the

prophet could see end time Israel restored and God making good His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Gen 12:1-3) Israel’s future is bright and Israel’s foes are beaten. Do you remember the meaning of Micah’s name ? “ *Who is like God ?* ” Who indeed ? “ *Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.* ” (7:18-20) As someone has put it, “ *God has cast our sins into the deepest ocean and put up a sign ‘ No fishing.’* ” My who is like God ?

**Great God of wonders all Thy ways
Display Thine attributes divine
But the bright glories of Thy grace
Above Thine other wonders shine
Who is a pardoning God like Thee
Or who has grace so rich and free**