

Sermon for June 25, 2023 (Micah)

1. Introduction:

Micah lived about the time of Hosea and Amos, who we have heard about the past two Sundays. But unlike them his message was primarily to the southern Kingdom of Judah, not the northern Kingdom Israel. During his time, as he prophesied, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians. The Kingdom of Judah was spared, but it too was guilty and deserving of punishment.

Micah 1:

R: The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it, that the LORD GOD may bear witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple. For Samaria’s plague is incurable; it has spread to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself. Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all. In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust. Pass by naked and in shame, you who live in Shaphir. Those who live in Zaanan will not come out. Beth Ezel is in mourning; it no longer protects you. Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem. You who live in Lachish, harness fast horses to the chariot. You are where the sin of Daughter Zion began, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you. Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Akzib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel. I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. The nobles of Israel will flee to Adullam.

“Moresheth” was in the southern kingdom. When Micah talks about “Samaria” he is referring the northern kingdom’s capital and therefore to the country as a whole. Samaria’s idolatry has “infected” Judah. “Moreseth” means “betrothed.” Like Hosea Micah uses the image of adultery to describe the idolatry of Israel. Though they are “betrothed” to God, they instead chose to make idols their concert.

Micah mentions specific places to emphasize his points. “Gath” was in the land of the Philistines, It grieved Micah to know that they would rejoice over the pain of God’s people. The rest of the places he speaks of are used as plays on words. This is not just being clever. In that culture names were not just a way of identifying. They define what you were. “Beth Ophrah” sounds like “house of dust,” which is what places would become when the invaders brought God’s judgment on them. “Shaphar” sound like “beautiful,” but that beauty would be exposed and shamed. “Zaanan” sounds like “exit,” but there would be no exit when the siege walls were built around them “Beth Ezel” means “nearby house” but it won’t help anyone other place to have them nearby. “Moronth” means “bitterness. “Lachish” sounds like “go to the horses.” They should “go to the horses” to fight, but instead will “go to the horses” to flee. The gruesome siege of Lachish is well recorded by their Assyrian destroyers. “Zion” is the hill on

which Jerusalem is built. The “Daughter of Zion” is the southern kingdom. “Akzib” sounds like “disappointing.” Their quick fall will be a demoralize Israel. “Adullam” was a place David sought refuge from King Saul. The mighty of Israel would try to flee there.

Hymn: “Preach You the Word” #586 vs. 1-2

2. Leaders and prophets condemned:

Micah 2:

R: Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning’s light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud people of their homes, they rob them of their inheritance.

God spent a lot of effort trying to set up His people Israel from getting into poverty. Most people farmed. The key to farming was having land to farm. God ensured this by distributing the promised land into parcels for each tribe of Israel. Half of the book of Joshua is the list of this. He also set up ways to prevent people from seizing other peoples’ land. Land was to be kept in the family to keep families out of poverty. We know from our country that family farmers do a better job of the stewardship of the land than big corporations. The land belongs to the family and cared by them instead of just being a source of profit.

People could lose their land if hardship like drought, hail, or disease hit them. But God’s laws set things up so that after a period of 50 years debts were forgiven and land was returned to families. He also set up laws so that widows were provided for by male relatives and people were allowed to “glean” (pick up the leftovers) from harvested fields. Abiding by God’s laws kept people out of debt, slavery, and poverty.

But the leaders of the people forgot that. If someone had a failed crop and his family faced starvation, you gave them food, but only if he gave you his land. In times of desperation people could be cheated out of what the land was really worth. It got to the point that a few were very rich, and the rest served them, barely eking out a living.

We do know that in our country the divide between rich and poor gets greater and greater each year. We buy things because they are inexpensive, not because the people who make them do not make enough. Much of our politics is controlled by those who use it to help keep their wealth. But as we have mentioned before, the prophets are speaking out against God’s people, which today is not a country, but the Church. Do we “plan iniquity and plot evil on our beds”?

Hymn: “God of the Prophets, Bless the Prophet’s Son” #682 vs.1-2

3. God’s Case:

Micah 6:

*R: Listen to what the LORD says:
“Stand up, plead My case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.*

“Hear, you mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against His people; He is lodging a charge against Israel.

“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer Me.

I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”

What does God want? With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

With the political mess in our country we have been hearing the words “indictment,” and “grand jury” a lot. Just because someone is arrested for a crime, does not mean that person goes to court. First the government has to bring a formal charge, an “indictment” through the work of a “grand jury.” Here in Micah God holds a “grand jury” and brings His “indictment” against His people.

Here is God’s case. God rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. He led them through Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. That is an undeniable fact. He reminds them how we stopped the efforts of King Balak of Moab to curse the people through the seer Balaam, whose donkey talked to him and turned him from cursing into blessing the people. Shittim to Gilgal describes the forty year journey in the wilderness when God supplied the people with manna and quail. In response God only received outward acts to sacrifices, not the true hearts of the people. It got to the point that like the pagans the people were sacrificing their own children to try to gain favor from God. But God didn’t want that kind of outward show. Instead He said, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Prayer:

P: And what does the LORD require of us?

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: But Lord God, we are so tempted to do what makes life easy and simple for us. We forget.

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: We pass on responsibility to other. “Let the government do it.” “Leave it for younger people to do.” “What difference can I make?” Yet You still call us:

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: Forgive us for our failure to live that way. We ask this for the sake of our Savior, Christ who in our place followed Your command—

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: Forgive us so that we are freed from sin—

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: Help us to not look the other way when we see people hurt. Lead us—

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

P: Bless us as a congregation so that we keep before us—

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

(other concerns)

P: All this we pray as we trust that You will be with us—

C: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

4. A Siege, but a Promised Ruler:

Micah 5:

R: Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

The siege described by Micah did come true with the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians. What we know about the Assyrians is that when they destroyed a city, they destroyed it. Not only were buildings torn down and burnt, many people were hung up on poles to die. Great mounds were made of the skulls of the dead. Those who survived were deported to another part of their empire.

Micah is also talking about the southern kingdom. It too would be invaded later by Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed.

Yet in that doom we hear a message of hope. From the village of Bethlehem, not the capital of Jerusalem, would come someone to rule over and restore Israel. Our next hymn reminds us of who is:

Hymn: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" #361 vs. 1,4

5. The New Exodus

Micah 7:

R: Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago. As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them My wonders." Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you. Who is a God like You, who pardons sin and forgives the

transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as You pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.

Micah promises a “New Exodus” like the one when God called His people out of slavery in Egypt. “Bashan” and “Gilead” are the parts of Israel that the people of Israel first conquered under Moses before he died and Joshua led them across the Jordan River into the promised land. They became one of the first areas lost to Israel.

One great problem for people when they hear about God’s judgment and that some people will be with Him as His people and others who will not is that it can make God seem so arbitrary and cruel. Israel escaped from slavery, but the Egyptians lost their firstborn and their army was drowned. But note how Micah describes those who reject God. When Jesus comes again, they won’t turn and say, “Give me another chance! Have mercy on me!” No, they will run away. They didn’t want Him, and they won’t get Him. Then why we and not them? The Bible gives no answer, but what it tells us is that God wants all to be saved and He has saved us in Jesus. It is not what we deserve, but what God promised long ago to Abraham and even before that to Adam and Eve. But He won’t let evil get in at the end. It would not be loving for Him to allow evil to dwell among us in eternity.

Hymn: “*Sing Praise to the God of Israel*” #936, vs. 1,2

6. Israel Restored:

Micah 3:

R: Therefore, the LORD says: “I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. “I will surely gather all of you, Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. The One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their King will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.”

God had a plan that went back before the beginning of time. He foresaw the sins of Israel—and our sins as well. So He planned to send His Son into the world to save us. Israel went from a prosperous nation into a divided nation after the death of King Solomon. Then He allows the northern kingdom to be wiped. Soon the southern kingdom will go into exile in Babylon. But from them will be a “remnant.” From that “remnant” will come a single person, the “True Israel” Jesus Christ. From Him would come a “New Israel,” the Church, which will be built not on its own obedience to God, but the perfect obedience of Jesus.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who guides into the pen. He is the One who goes ahead of us, leading us into the abundant pastures of eternal life.

Prayer:

P: Lord, grant we tune out the many voices around us, and strive to tune in to yours first. Help us choose to see others as more important than ourselves. Make us long to help serve those who have suffered so greatly and to be a voice for those who have been oppressed or silenced. Help us to choose to love mercy, to show kindness, to a world that would seek to build walls and barriers instead of bridges and unity. Guide us to choose to walk in humility with you, instead of looking out for ourselves first or setting our own lives up as more important than others’.

C: Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer:**7. The New Jerusalem****Micah 4:**

R: In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple 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 peoples 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. Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

In the language of the Bible you always “go up” to Jerusalem. This is not only physical, because it lies on a hill, but because you were spiritually going up to the house of the LORD. Micah’s promise is that Jerusalem will be the center not just of the physical people of Israel, but for all people.

Micah gives this wonderful promise of no more war and the prosperity that comes from sitting under one’s own vineyard and fig tree. That might not sound like much to us who have air conditioning and grocery stores and refrigerators, but in a hot, dry land like modern Israel, having shade was a great blessing as was having enough property and water.

In the Broadway musical “Hamilton” George Washington sings this promise. This reflects on the hope of a peaceful, prosperous life the founding fathers of the United States looked for. But you can’t have that in a world corrupted by sin. No, this can only come from the forgiveness and new life we have in Christ Jesus and which we will fully live in eternity with Him when they will “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”