

SESSION #35

MICAH

1. Setting

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, as you see on the timeline chart. They certainly knew each other and the respective ministries God had entrusted to them. Isaiah directed his message primarily to the leadership level, the aristocracy of Judah's society whereas Micah aimed his message at all societal levels – the judges, the prophets, the rulers, and the common people.

Micah has a set of prophecies which involve both Samaria, the capital of Israel, and Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. Only Micah among all the writing prophets had a dual ministry to both Israel and Judah, Samaria and Jerusalem.

Like Amos, Micah was not an urban person. His home was in a rural area of Judah, 30 km southwest of Jerusalem, but he was called by God to address urban problems. As a result, he has become known as the 'prophet of the city'. And much of what Micah had to say to people in urban settings of his day is very relevant to people living in urban societies of our own day.

He was somewhat successful because his terrible words of judgment influenced King Hezekiah and the leaders of the nation, bringing about a temporary revival described in 2 Chronicles 30.

His name – Micah or Micaiah, the longer form – means "*Who is a God like Jehovah?*" Under God's direction, he takes his own name and uses it as the theme for the message which God delivers to His people through Micah. "*Who is like Jehovah?*" – nobody is like Jehovah, is Micah's answer.

2. Structure

If you find the book of Isaiah to be rather daunting because it's so long, 66 chapters, you might find Micah a little easier because he has the same set of themes, leading some commentators to call his book "*Isaiah in shorthand*". Like Isaiah, Micah deals with judgment and with comfort.

Let's begin with the judgment section, chapters 1 and 2. God's judgment against His people is imminent, it's bound to happen very soon. Micah, though he is a rural person like Amos, doesn't use the figure of a lion, but rather the more urban image of a judge. He pictures God as being like a cosmic Judge. He steps down from His courtroom in heaven, down to the clouds, down to the mountains, then the hills, all of which melt under His feet as the Judge moves into His courtroom on earth and takes up the bench. He calls His people into the dock to hear the charges He has against them. This book, then, is a record of the trial and verdict.

In describing the judgment which God the Judge will pronounce against His people, Micah uses the image of moving from darkness to light, an analogy of the Jewish day which begins at 6:00 pm with dusk, then heading into night and the dark hours, then sunrise, daylight and concluding once again at 6:00 pm the next day. Micah uses this analogy to build the dark theme of judgment followed by the light of God's goodness and blessing.

So, from imminent judgment in chapters 1 & 2, he moves to ultimate blessing in chapters 3 – 5. Micah talks about God's promise to bless His people, and describes in chapter 4 the coming kingdom, a future kingdom set up by God Himself.

If there's going to be a kingdom there has to be, of course, a King. Micah then is the one who famously predicted the birthplace of this King in 5:2. Jesus the Messiah, the King, will be born in Bethlehem as part of that ultimate blessing.

Then, because judgment is coming, and because ultimate blessing will be determined by God, the third aspect of his message is: therefore, repent! He pleads with God's people to repent now, chapters 6 & 7.

In the midst of that overall movement from darkness to light, there are three sub-movements from darkness to light as Micah structures his book. Each of these three sections begins with a dark theme of doom, identified by the word “hear”. “*Hear, all you people*” (1:2) “*Hear, O heads of Jacob*” (3:1) “*Hear, O you mountains*” (6:2)

Then each section ends with a message of hope. Through the entire book, then, there are alternating messages of judgment and promise, of doom and hope.

An easy title for the book of Micah could be “*Present Judgment* (yes, that’s the dark theme), *but Future Blessing*” – the bright side of God’s purposes for His people.

A key verse would be 6:8, one of the more famous verses in Micah – “*What does the LORD require of you*” ...one of the complaints of God’s people in Micah’s day was that God asks too many hard things. They were saying, “*If He didn’t require so many difficult things, then we could obey Him.*” God comes to them through Micah and says, “*No, I’m not asking you to do a lot of hard things. What do I require? It’s just three things: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God*”. Those are God’s basic requirements of His people.

Dan Schmidt suggests that to “*do justly*” means “*to use the available power, influence & resources in such a way that those for whom we have responsibility benefit.*”

To “*love mercy*” means to respond to human weakness with compassion that shows we really care.

And to “*walk humbly*” means to renounce all arrogance and submit to God. Peter Marshall, a former US Senate chaplain, once prayed: “*Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change. And when we are right, make us easy to live with.*”

In the NT, in Matthew 23:23, Jesus talked about the same things concerning the Pharisees in His day who were neglecting what Jesus said were the more important matters of the Law. And He named the same three things: justice, mercy and faithfulness. That’s still what God requires. It’s the essence of true religion. A God-ward perspective with man-ward implications.

3. Key passage

Chapters 6 & 7 of Micah is a key passage in the writings of all the Minor Prophets because these two chapters compress a summary of the themes of all of these 12 prophets. The vital issues about God's concerns regarding mankind are all put into these two chapters, ending with Micah's pronouncement once again in 7:18, "*Who is a God like Jehovah (Micah) – pardoning iniquity, passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.*"

In the next verse we see that as God looks at our sin He channels all His might and power to subdue it: "*you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*" Wow! That's the kind of God Micah is talking about.

And He is our God! Who is like Him? Who can compare with Him? No one!

Our next session takes us to the shortest book of all the prophets, Obadiah.
