

INTRODUCTION:

The prophets Micah and Oded were contemporaries of Isaiah in Judah and Hosea in Israel, prophesying in the last third of the eight century B.C.

Although Micah’s message related to both Israel and Judah, he focused on the latter. He denounced ethical sins primarily, and the social situation which he addressed is markedly similar to that encountered by Amos in Israel a few years earlier. The rich were oppressing the poor. Merchants cheated their customers. The religious and judicial leaders were corrupt, and the true prophets were told to keep quiet. Many people were so insensitive to the problem that they believed God would still defend them. Micah’s message reminded them of the consequences of national sin. He foretold the fall of both Samaria and Jerusalem and even the Babylonian exile later. Two passages stand out above the rest: Micah 5:2 prophesied the Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem, and this was fulfilled by the birth of Jesus. Micah 6:8 is one of the classical statements of the prophets, and some regard it as the high-water mark of Old Testament religion.

Much less is known about Oded. His prophetic account is limited to 2 Chronicles 28:9-11. He intervened when Israel was attempting to carry their brethren from Judah to Samaria in captivity during the time King Pekah reigned in Israel. Oded’s words produced a great effect. Some of the leading men in Samaria, persuaded by him as to the path of duty, refused to allow the army to bring the prisoners inside the city. They then clothed the naked, fed the hungry, and, mounting the feeble on asses, took them to Jericho and handed them over to their countrymen. A person of the same name is listed in 2 Chronicles 15:1, 8 but in association with the time of King Asa of the southern kingdom of Judah, which would be 120 years before the time when the Israelite King Pekah reigned.

While Micah will accurately predict the Babylonian exile and the birth of the Messiah to be in Bethlehem, Micah’s ultimate message will be a call for humility, mercy and justice as eloquently described in 6:8, and in a similar message, Oded will call for restraint and mercy in that we don’t act beyond God’s command.

BOOK OF MICAH:

This is the sixth of the Minor Prophets. Its author prophesied in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). Its contents also show that it was written after the reigns of

Omri and Ahab (6:16), at the time when Assyria was the power that the Israelites dreaded (5:5-6), and in part at least while Samaria and the Northern Kingdom were still in existence (1:6, 14); but how long before the fall of Samaria the words of Micah 1:5-7 were uttered cannot be determined, for from the time of Uzziah and Jotham the prophets were foretelling the approaching doom of Samaria (Hosea 1:6; 3:4; 5:9; Amos 2:6; 3:12; 5:1-3, 27; 6:1, 7-11, 14; Isaiah 7:8-9; 8:4) and the desolation of Judah (Hosea 5:10; Amos 2:4; Isaiah 6:1, 11-13; 7:17-25). Micah 1:9-16 may contain a reference to the campaign of Sargon (711 B.C.) or that of Sennacherib (701 B.C.). The prophecy of 3:12 was spoken during the reign of Hezekiah (Jeremiah 26:18), though Micah may have discoursed on this theme before.

The prophecies of Micah, although they refer especially to Judah and were spoken to the people of the Southern Kingdom, yet concern all Israel (Micah 1:1, 5-7, 9-16). The abrupt transitions indicate that the book is rather a summary of the prophet's teaching than a series of distinct discourses. The expression, “Hear, you,” repeated 3 times, serves to mark the beginning of 3 divisions, each of which likewise ends with a message of hope.

(1) Prophecies of judgment. The prophet begins (1:2-4) by describing, in impressive imagery, the approaching manifestation of the Lord for judgment. He prophesies judgment upon Samaria for its incurable disposition toward idolatry (1:2-8), and upon Judah as involved in like guilt (1:9-16). Micah prophesies woe upon the oppressors of the people and the ruin and captivity of the nation (2:4-5) as a punishment for the unrighteousness and injustice of its representative men (2:1-11). Yet a remnant shall be restored (2:12-13).

(2) Denunciations passing into prophecies of salvation. In contrast to, “And I said” (3:1), we have (3:5), “Thus says the Lord.” As opposed to the false prophets, Micah appears as a true prophet of God (3:8). Here we have rebuke of the civil and religious authorities for heartless indifference to truth and right and for the mercenary character of their doctrine and government (3:1-11), and the consequent abandonment of Zion by the Lord to the power of its foes (3:12). This prophecy of 3:12 made such an impression that it was still remembered more than a hundred years later (Jeremiah 26:18).

There follows the ultimate exaltation of the Lord’s Kingdom in moral influence among men and in peace, prosperity, and power (4:1-8). But at present the prophet sees dismay, helplessness, captivity (4:9-10), followed by the overthrow of its enemies for their sinful opposition to the Lord (4:11-13). Now there is discomfiture for Zion (5:1), until He who is to be ruler in Israel shall come forth to God, “whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (5:2-4). This foreordination of God regarding the Messiah assures and secures the deliverance of Zion from the Assyrians (Micah 5:5-6; Isaiah 7:4-16), and is the pledge and potency that guarantees the survival of God’s people throughout the ages and their ultimate triumph over all foes and attainment of conformity to God’s ideal (Micah 5:7-15).

(3) The Lord’s controversy with the people as a whole, not with the wealthy and the official classes only (6:1-5), explaining the requirements of true religion (Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-17), lamenting its absence and the presence of its very opposite (Micah 6:9 to 7:6), and closing with the prophet’s own confidence in a glorious future due to the forgiving grace of the Lord and His faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham (6:7-20).

The book may also be divided according to form and general arrangement of material as follows: chapters 1 to 3, threats; chapters 4:1 to 5:9, promise; chapters 5:10 to 7:6, threats; chapters 7:7-20, promise.

Chapter 4:1-3 is almost identical with Isaiah 2:2-4, but is more closely connected than in the corresponding passage in Isaiah with the verses that immediately follow. It appears that both Isaiah and Micah are quoting an anonymous prophecy that was well known in their time. The liturgical refrains (Isaiah 2:5; Micah 4:5) suggest that both prophets quoted from a liturgical collection of hymns, or, in view of the difference in the refrains, from two different collections. At any rate God’s people of old had authoritative prophecy upon which they relied, and favorite passages which they quoted.

Micah is the prophet of the humble and the poor. His concept of the Messiah may be compared with that of Isaiah (9:2-7; 11:1-5). According to Micah, the Messiah will not come from the capital, but from the small town (5:2). The passage, 5:2-4, is especially dear to the Christian on account of the interpretation we have in Matthew 2:5-6, who sees here a reference to Christ. We find in Micah a protest against formalism and a demand for an ethical religion (Micah 6:6-8); simple practical religion, which has not been surpassed.

LESSON OF MICAH:

As has already been noted, Micah much like Isaiah provides warnings and a call for repentance combined with a message of hope and redemption. God will punish and discipline His people for their sin but He will also preserve a remnant and redeem them, keeping His promise to Abraham. Ultimately, God will fulfill His promise through the Messiah who will be born not of the capital but the small town of Bethlehem. Micah consistently provides a message of humility, mercy and love. Micah calls us to live our lives in a close, humble and loving relationship with God.

(Prediction of Babylonian exile and return from exile)

Micah 4:10

(10) "Writhe and labor to give birth, Daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth, for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies."

Comments:

Here, about a century before Babylon even became the dominant empire in the region, Micah predicted both the reality of the Babylonian exile and the return. What was an isolated verse in Micah became an ever growing body of prophetic material, as the date of the exile approached.

(Prediction of Bethlehem to be the place of the Messiah's birth)

Micah 5:2

(2) "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."

Comments:

The Jews of Jesus' day were not in total agreement about where the Messiah would originate. Some thought that His source would be unknown (John 7:27), but those who believed His place of birth was foretold turned to Micah 5:2 for the answer. Hence, when Heod was approached by the wise men from the East and he asked his religious experts where the Messiah was to be born, their response was “in Bethlehem,” and they quoted

Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:1-6). This caused some confusion during Jesus’ ministry, because He was known to be from Nazareth, but, based on Micah 5:2, many expected the Messiah to come from Bethlehem, David’s town (John 7:41, 42).

(A model for religious devotion: What God sees as good!)

Micah 6:8

(8) He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Comments:

Nowhere in the rest of the Old Testament is the type of religious devotion that God wants described in a more succinct and elevated manner. Love of God and man are inextricably connected in what can be described as the high-water mark of religious thoughts of the Old Testament. The message of the prophets concerning the desired conduct of Israel, which was preached over several centuries, can be boiled down to this verse. (See Matthew 22:37-40).

THE PROPHET ODED:

As has already been noted, the account of the life and prophetic message of Oded is limited to 2 Chronicles 28:9-11. In 2 Chronicles 28:1-4 we learn that King Ahaz, the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, has walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, worshipping the Baals and conducting human sacrifices, which were forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18:10). In verse 28:5 we learn that the Lord delivered Ahaz into the hand of the king of Aram, and in verses 28:6-8, we learn that King Pekah, the king of Israel slew in Judah 120,000 in one day and that 200,000 women, sons and daughters were taken and brought to Samaria. While God has allowed the kings of Aram and Israel to punish Ahaz through defeat, it is not God’s will for Israel to carry off their kinsmen in Judah away into captivity. Thus, the prophet Oded is sent to meet the returning army and remind the people of Israel that they too have sinned and do not have the right to enslave their brethren. He convinces them not to act beyond God’s command and persuades them to return their captives. Perhaps the key lesson of Oded is that even when God uses us to discipline others we do not have the right to subjugate or take advantage of their demise. None of us are without sin and all of us are dependent upon God’s mercy.

