

Leaders' Notes

The Prophecy of Micah

Introduction

Micah's prophecy is given in the latter half of the eighth century BC. He calls the earth – all people – to consider Yahweh's declaration. This declaration begins with accusations directed at Yahweh's own people. Their religious apostasy and consequent degenerate social conduct is exposed.

On this basis the destruction of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms is foretold in shocking language. It is the very judgement of Israel's covenant God. Their presumption of security is fiercely attacked by Micah.

Yet beyond this horrible judgement and punishment, Yahweh promises to regather a remnant. There is hope (beyond judgement) for those who seek Yahweh's kingdom. For Yahweh declares that a day is coming when men will dwell securely under his universal rule. From Judah itself will come Yahweh's King. Yahweh's enemies will be overthrown, his people pardoned. And so the promises to Abraham will be fully realized.

So we read in seven short chapters of the great themes of Biblical theology. They are presented against the backdrop of the religious, economic, social and political turmoil of Judah under Ahaz and of Samaria as it descends into anarchy.

a) Micah Himself – Who is he?

He is from Moresheth. This is probably the small town mentioned in 1:14, located in Judah in a relatively fertile pastoral region about half-way between Jerusalem and the coast. In 1:8-16 Micah uses the names of the towns in this region as the basis for word plays in announcing Yahweh's judgement. His personal attachment comes through clearly (eg. 1:8).

Most of Micah's prophecy is directed at the Southern Kingdom, focused on Jerusalem. But Jerusalem is seen as the centre of the covenant people, "Israel" or "Jacob", which of course includes the whole nation.

b) Historical Outline – When did he speak?

i) My estimate is that Micah's prophecy was given between approximately 732 BC and 700 BC. Micah 1:1 identifies the reign of three kings of Judah;

Jotham (b 774): 750 BC, began reign as a Co-Regent (father had leprosy).
740 – 732 BC: Monarch.

Ahaz (b 754) 743 BC: Co-Regent.
732 – 716 BC: Monarch.

Hezekiah (b 740) 729 BC: Co-Regent.
716 - 686 BC: Monarch.

(All dates approx only).

ii) The historical situation is outlined in 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 27-32. The main events on the international scene were;

734 BC Pekah (Israel) and Rezin (Syria) vs Ahaz (Judah), leading to vassalage for all three, under Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (2 Kings 16:5-9).

721 BC Samaria's destruction and the deportation of much of the Northern Israelite population (2 Kings 17:6).

701 BC Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage" in Jerusalem. Sieged by Sennac. Judah ravaged.

iii) These situations are reflected in Micah's prophecy as follows;

1:6 Samaria's destruction foretold (so pre 721 BC).

3:9-12 Located in Hezekiah's time, see Jeremiah 26:18ff (pre 701).

Note also the remnant – re-gathering themes (2:12 etc).

Note also the prophecy of exile on Judah (1:16, 4:10 Babylon mentioned, etc).

c) Theological Background

i) Yahweh's view of Israel – 1:9, 6:3, etc – they are "my people". The covenant framework is central to understanding this prophecy.

ii) Israel's view of themselves (using 'Israel' as Micah does, of the nation belonging to God, probably only Judah remaining at the time) – the people presume upon Yahweh's protection and favour (see 3:11, 1:12, 2:6-11, etc). They think that Yahweh will deliver them, regardless of their conduct.

iii) Micah on the course of history (Genesis 12:1-3) is on view throughout. The prophecy finishes on this note of fulfillment (7:20) and the promises of restoration are founded on it (4:1-2). Yahweh is Lord of history, working out his purposes in the events which Micah foretells (4:11-12).

d) Dating

The oracles are difficult to date. It seems clear that 1:6 is pre 721 BC – fall of Samaria. Also clear is that Micah preached to Hezekiah (Jeremiah 26:18) the oracle in Micah 3.

It seems likely that chapters 2 and following are given *after* 721 BC;

i) Since Hezekiah was most likely the sole monarch (post 716 BC) when confronted with Micah and responding for the nation (see Jeremiah 26:18ff).

ii) Since Samaria is not mentioned after 1:6.

iii) Since the term "Israel" is subsequently used of the whole covenant people (3:1, 5:3 etc).

iv) Prophecies in Micah 2 of judgement all focus in on Jerusalem (not Samaria).

Study 5 (Chapter 4)

This is a great passage of hope, beyond the coming judgement. Notice the contrast between the “failed leadership” and injustice of Chapter 3 and the faithful leadership or rule of God (4:1-4) and the justice that will result. Also notice that the hope of a great future includes blessing not just on Israel but on “the nations” – those Israel thought of as “the enemy”!

When we look to the New Testament, to the age of the Gospel and Spirit, a number of fulfillments are clear. So, regarding question 3b, you could highlight;

- a) John 12:20-23. Jesus knows it is time for him to be crucified, because Greeks (Gentiles) are coming to Jerusalem to learn from him (see also John 12:30-32).
- b) In coming to Jesus, we have come to God’s city (temple, etc) already. See Hebrews 12:22-24.
- c) Regarding all nations “walking in God’s paths” etc, see Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 8:4, Romans 13:10.
- d) But the final fulfillment of Micah’s words still lie ahead (Revelation 21:1ff etc).

Study 6 (Chapter 5)

The focus of this study is on the first few verses, in order to give time to look at this extraordinary prophecy regarding a new “ruler” God will raise up. In hindsight, we can clearly see that it points to Jesus. It is a striking prophecy for a number of reasons;

- a) Shows that Jesus’ birth, being in Bethlehem, fulfills God’s plan foretold long ago. It is worth noticing how this demonstrates the reliability of Micah’s prophecy.
- b) The language in v2 “origins are from of old, from ancient times” is very unusual. The Hebrew words could possibly be understood to mean “in the Ancient line of David”, as would be expected. (Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16 for essential background). However, the language would more naturally be understood to refer to some sort of supernatural background.
- c) The prophecy is also striking because once again blessing is promised BEYOND the nation Israel, through this King (contrary to Israel’s hopes and thinking).