

Introduction to Micah

To Read:

1. II Kings 15:27-17:41
2. II Kings 18-19

1 I. Introduction

A. This morning we are returning to the Old Testament and starting a new book: Micah

1. And, as I usually do, I'm going to start our study of Micah with an introduction sermon, to try to set up the historical context of Micah and to try to understand the flow of the story of Micah across the whole book
12. I really enjoy these introductory sermons because they give me a chance to work through what the story of the book is without getting bogged down in the verse by verse details - those details are very important and very good and we'll look at those details for the next two months together, but first I want us to see Micah and be able to understand what Micah, as a book, is about

B. So, this morning, I want to spend a few minutes thinking about the background, the story, and the purpose of Micah and how Micah connects to us, and we'll do this by looking at three main points:

11. Background to Micah (who, what, when, where)
12. Overview of Micah (the theme and story of Micah)
13. Connections of Micah (how does Micah belong to the story of God?)

1 II. Background to Micah

A. The book of Micah starts with a short prelude helping us understand when and why Micah prophesied

1. Micah 1:1 - *The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.*
2. This introduction tells us three important things: the author of the book, the historical setting of the book, and the recipients of the book
3. The final compiler of this book, the scribe that cared for the Scriptures, knew that to understand this book well, we needed to understand who wrote the book, when they wrote it and why - so let's look at these

2 B. We'll start with the historical setting

1. Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, living some seven hundred years before the birth of the Messiah
 - a. Those of you who go through Bethlehem Revisited every year probably know those words well - especially those of you who have guided at Bethlehem Revisited or played the prophet Micah
 - b. And this is exactly right - the first verse of Micah tells us that Micah was a prophet during the reign of three kings in Judah - Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah - and this is the same time period during which Isaiah prophesied
 - c. Micah may actually have been slightly before Isaiah with the end of his ministry overlapping the beginning of Isaiah's ministry in Jerusalem and therefore he may also have been a contemporary of the prophet Hosea who also preached near the beginning of Isaiah's ministry
2. The period in which Micah was a prophet was a time of turmoil
 - a. But, to understand Micah, we need to step back and see what had happened right before
 - i. The dawn of Micah's ministry coincides with the end of a period of peace and prosperity in both the northern and southern kingdoms
 - ii. Uzziah was reigning over the southern kingdom and Jeroboam II was reigning over the northern kingdom and both kingdoms had peace from their enemies for a time and both kingdoms grew in prosperity and wealth
 - iii. In fact, Jeroboam and Uzziah were both one of the longest reigning kings of their respective kingdoms
 - iv. But, during this time of prosperity and peace the people did not seek after God and embrace the covenant, instead a wealthy class rose up that oppressed the poor, they refused to deal justly, they won their riches by trampling on the poor, and they served the gods of the people around them
 - v. To many, especially in the upper classes, the land appeared to be experiencing the best blessings of God even as they completely disregarded His covenant and despised His rule
 - b. After the period of peace under Uzziah and Jeroboam closed, the Assyrians appear on the scene
 - i. God had promised to bring an agent of judgment against His people by raising up an adversary, Amos 3:11 - *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "An adversary shall surround the land and bring down your defenses from you, and your strongholds shall be plundered."*
 - ii. And that adversary appeared in the people of Assyria - the Assyrians came out of the north and quickly captured the northern half of the northern kingdom, the land of Gilead, Galilee and Naphtali
 - iii. But for a time the Assyrians stopped their advance and both kingdoms endured but they endured under the continual threat of a continued Assyrian invasion, and it is at this point that Micah appears on the scene
3. Both kingdoms endured, but the appearance of God's agent of wrath does little to change the hearts of God's people
 - a. Now, the first king of Judah mentioned in Micah, Jotham, was a godly king who ordered his ways before God according to II Chronicles, but the people's hearts did not follow their king, so II Kings 15:35 says - *Nevertheless, the high places were not removed. The people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.*
 - b. After Jotham, Ahaz reigned in Israel and he was a man of the people and a very ungodly king - he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and sacrificed to the gods of the nations, even sacrificing his own son to Moloch - and Ahaz did not trust in God to save Judah, but instead when Syria and Israel invaded Judah, he turned to the Assyrians and sought their help
 - c. And the Assyrians came and captured Damascus and turned away the invaders so Ahaz went to Damascus to meet with his allies and saw the altars that they had built, and had a copy built in Jerusalem and had the people worship at the pagan altar instead of God's temple
4. The northern kingdom still endured, though, through paying tribute to Assyria and becoming a vassal state
 - a. But this situation did not last long, shortly into the rise of the third king mentioned, Hezekiah, the kingdom of Israel rebelled against Assyria and the Assyrians returned and completely destroyed Israel and carried the people away to captivity
 - b. So, the slow Assyrian invasion is the backdrop of the prophecies of Micah and Micah is God's mouthpiece to describe the theological implications of the Assyrian invasion - the Assyrian invasion was not merely a chance political event in world history but was God's action of judgment against the people who broke His covenant

15. So Micah is prophesying in Judah and Jerusalem while the Assyrians get closer and closer to the city
 - a. At the beginning of his ministry, Micah prophesies about the destruction of Samaria and Israel, but in the last two oracles, Samaria has vanished and likely has already been destroyed
 - b. After destroying Samaria and carrying the people off captive, the Assyrians continued to come south, they ravaged northern Judah as well and surrounded Jerusalem and there looked like there was very little hope
 - c. But Micah's ministry seemed to have an effect because the third king, Hezekiah, was a different king and there was a short period of revival in the land of Judah, a return to the Lord their God
 - d. And though the Assyrians came even to the gates of Jerusalem, Hezekiah turned to seek God and God intervened in a miraculous way to destroy the Assyrian invaders as we read a few minutes ago

2 C. So, now that we understand a little of the historical setting, let's turn and look at who is Micah?

1. The first verse doesn't tell us much about Micah except that his name was Micah, that he was a prophet and that he was from Moresheth, but all of these details are important
12. We shouldn't overlook the first phrase of Micah - *The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth*
 - a. The word of the Lord came to Micah - he was a prophet in every sense of the word, one who spoke the very words of God - God's Spirit empowered and enlightened him somehow so that Micah could speak with God's authority
 - b. So Micah's words are God's words - Micah's words are God's indictment against His people, God's warning of His judgment, and God's promises to His people
 - c. Kids: these are your questions for this week: Who was Micah? A prophet. And what does a prophet do? Speaks the Word of God.
13. And Micah was from Moresheth
 - a. Moresheth or Moresheth-Gath is a small town that is near to Jerusalem in the north of Judah and was in the path of the Assyrian invasion - in fact it is likely that the Assyrians sacked the town as they approached and surrounded Jerusalem
 - b. So Micah had a personal connection to the words of His prophecy - a connection that we can feel in the book as Micah wrestles with how to respond to God's judgment
 - c. Micah sees the judgment of God come against Israel and Samaria and he can agree that it is good, but as judgment comes even to the gates of Jerusalem, to his own town of Moresheth, Micah must wrestle with the meaning and the purpose of God's judgment
14. And Micah's name is significant because its meaning embodies the questions that Micah is wrestling with
 - a. Micah's name is a question that means 'who is like YHWH?' and this is what Micah wants to know
 - b. How could YHWH come and destroy His people? How could YHWH bring foreign invaders who did not know him to dispossess those who were covenanted to Him? How could this be part of YHWH's plan?
 - c. Micah's prophecies are going to answer these questions and show us who is like YHWH - in the last verses, Micah is going to ask that question again, "Who is a God like you?"

1 III. Overview of Micah

1 A. Micah's book is a series of oracles or spoken prophecies that Micah speaks out to the people of Judah

1. And there is actually a very clear organization to the book, the book is divided into three oracles that each start with a specific command: Hear!
 - 1 a. So, Micah 1:2 says - *Hear, you peoples, all of you; pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.*
 - 1 b. And then Micah 3:1 says - *And I said: Hear, you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel!*
 - 1 c. Micah 6:1 says - *Hear what the LORD says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.*
2. These three oracles make up the book of Micah along with a very brief introduction and conclusion and each oracle follows roughly the same pattern
 - a. The oracle starts by proclaiming God's judgment and giving the reasons that God is coming with destruction
 - b. But after proclaiming destruction, each oracle moves to a promise of future restoration and salvation
 - c. The balance of judgment and promise is different in each oracle, but each oracle contains both judgment and promise - in fact judgment and promise are inseparable in Micah - most of the promises are rooted in judgment and only find their glory and their purpose against the background of God's justice

1 B. And this is closely related to the theme of Micah

1. I've called the book of Micah 'The Goodness of God's Judgment'
2. In Micah, God proclaims the absolute destruction of both Israel and Judah, saying that Jerusalem will be raked like a field, not a single stone will be left standing in her
3. And Micah wrestles with this truth, at points in the book he cries out that he is weeping and moaning over the judgment that will come to his people because he knows that their wound is incurable
4. But, through both the explanations of judgment and the promises of restoration, Micah begins to see that judgment is not only necessary but good - God's judgment will bring about God's purpose in God's people
5. And this is what we are going to look at as we study Micah - how is God's judgment good?
6. In each section we're going to see that God's judgment is good, it brings about His purposes and enacts His salvation
7. Who is a God like our God? No one! Micah's name means 'who is a God like YHWH' and his book concludes that there is no God like YHWH 'Who is a God like you?' Micah is overwhelmed by who God is because God is perfectly just but also infinitely gracious. How can such things be? Micah will show us this God who works justice to bring about salvation. The glory of YHWH is that His perfect justice brings about a merciful salvation. God's judgment must come, because apart from judgment there is no salvation.

1 C. So my outline of Micah is going to be pretty simple this morning, I'll just give a title to the three oracles of Micah

11. In Micah's first oracle we'll see that God's judgment is gracious - it ends in salvation
 - a. God is coming to judge His people because the land is full of evil and oppression but God will not completely abandon His people but will save a remnant and deliver them from His destruction
12. In Micah's second oracle we'll see that God's judgment is good - it brings about God's purposes
 - a. God's judgment will purge God's land of evil and then bring about restoration in the land and a king will be established over the people of God once again
13. In Micah's third oracle we'll see that God's judgment is faithful - it keeps the promise of His covenant
 - a. God's people have failed to live in covenant and God must destroy them, but God will be faithful to His covenant and provide what His people could not

1 IV. Connecting Micah to the Rest of the Story

A. Micah is one of the minor prophets which is part of the larger genre of the writing prophets

1. In fact, this is one of the major epochs of redemptive history - the epoch of prophets
2. And one core thing that the prophets did was look back and look forward: they looked back at what God had done before and tried to understand it in light of what God was doing now and they looked forward to what God was going to do - in fact, I've said in other contexts that the prophets invented Biblical Theology
3. So, for our last point this morning I want to join Micah in looking back and looking forward: how is Micah connected to the older stories of the Old Testament and how is Micah pointing us forward to what God was going to do

1 B. Let's start by looking at Micah and the Old Testament

1. The connection of Micah to the Old Testament can be seen in one of the core verses of Micah
 - 1 a. Micah 6:8 - *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*
 - b. Micah says that God desired two things from His people justice and kindness, and that they were to do these by walking humbly with their God
 - 2 c. Justice or *mishpat* is a word we've studied before - if you remember from Exodus, it means 'well-ordered' with the connotation that God's people live under Him in a well-ordered household, which practically means that we try to do the right thing by our neighbor
 - 1 d. And *hesed* is also a word we've studied before - it means something like 'covenantal love'
2. But these two requirements, justice and loving-kindness (or steadfast love), *mishpat* and *hesed*, have a rich history in Israel, they are words that are at the center of God's covenant
 - 1 a. God's covenant was an expression of His steadfast love (*hesed*), in fact the first commandment was founded on God's steadfast love, Exodus 20:5-6 - *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
 - 1 b. And steadfast love, *hesed*, is the repeated word in the proclamation of God's name, Exodus 34:6-7 - *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,*
 - c. Since God had shown His steadfast love to Israel, Israel was to show steadfast love or loving-kindness to each other - God had entered into covenant with them, they must live in His covenant
3. And *mishpat*, justice, is the same way - a word found at the core of the covenant
 - a. In fact, after the Ten Words, God gave the people a long list of judgments that described how they were to live in His land - the attitudes and actions that would constitute living in the covenant
 - 1 b. And these were titled with the word *mishpat*, the judgments or the rules, Exodus 21:1 - *Now these are the rules (mishpat) that you shall set before them*
 - c. Justice was at the heart of the covenant, God's people were to live as a well-ordered household under His rule
 - d. To do justice, to act in a right way toward your neighbor, would be the practical outworking of living under God's covenant; justice would fulfill God's covenant
4. So the covenant of God is at the heart of Micah - God's people should live according to God's covenant
 - a. But God's people have not lived in God's covenant, they have not been full of justice and kindness, instead they have been full of oppression and greed, they have grown rich and done evil to their neighbors
 - b. The people of God's land are not living as part of God's covenant and they must be thrust out, they must be destroyed, God's covenant must be upheld
 - c. Micah is an indictment against the people of God claiming that they have failed to keep God's covenant
5. But God's covenant will not fail, because God will keep His covenant
 - a. God's people have failed to live in covenant and must be destroyed, but God will still do what He promised
 - b. So Micah will end with a promise that the blessing of God's covenant will prevail: that God will pardon iniquity and pass over transgression, He will not retain His anger forever but will delight in steadfast love and compassion
6. At the heart of Micah is God's covenant with the house of Israel - how will its promise be fulfilled?

2 C. And then we can turn and look at Micah and the New Testament

1. Micah is not quoted often in the New Testament, but there are some clear connections between Micah and the New Testament, themes from Micah that permeate the New Testament
- 1 2. The first theme is purification - God will purify His people through judgment, removing evil from the land,
 - 1 a. We see this in Micah 4 portrayed as God bringing threshing sheaves - *But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.*

- 1 b. And the New Testament opens with these words from John the Baptist, Luke 3:17 - *His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.*
- c. The story of the New Testament would be the ultimate and final purification that God promised in Micah - the story of the New Testament will be a story of judgment that will destroy sin from among God's people and bring restoration to the land - God's judgment will purify His people
- 2 3. The second theme is the reign of a better king - God will raise up a better king in the midst of judgment to rule His people in righteousness
 - 1 a. So Micah 2 finishes by promising that a king will lead God's people out of judgment - *He who opens the breach goes up before them; they break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the LORD at their head.*
 - 1 b. And Micah 5 promises that a king will be raised up - *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*
 - 1 c. And again the New Testament opens with these words, Matthew 2:4-6 - *and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."*
 - d. The story of the New Testament would be the story of the king promised in Micah - in the midst of judgment a king would rise up and deliver His people, a new shepherd would lead them into the land

2 D. So, we can easily connect Micah to Jesus

- 1. Jesus fulfills both of these themes, in fact both of these quotations are directly about Jesus
 - 1 a. Jesus was the king born in Bethlehem of Judea who fulfilled the promise of Micah
 - 1 b. And Jesus was the judge who would purify God's people from sin - we can return to Luke 3 and see this clearly, Luke 3:15-17 - *As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*
- 1 2. And it should be no surprise that Jesus is the answer to Micah
 - a. Micah is wrestling with how God's judgment could possibly be good - assuredly it is necessary, but how could it bring good to God's people? From Micah's vantage point it must have seemed impossible.
 - b. Yet God promised that His judgment would bring good to His people, and that is because Jesus is able to reconcile God's judgment and God's mercy - it is Jesus who will bring great good to God's people out of God's judgment
- 3. So the book of Micah is calling us to see Jesus at the center, the answer to Micah's question
 - a. Through Jesus, God's judgment will purify a people for God
 - b. Through Jesus, God's judgment will restore the land and bring God's people back into the land
 - c. Through Jesus, God's judgment will set a king over the people of God
 - d. And through Jesus, God's judgment will provide the covenant promises to the people of God

2 E. So how do we connect Micah to Us

- 1. I'm not going to do much application this morning because we're just doing a quick overview of the book, but I do want to describe the attitudes of application that we should come to Micah with
- 1 2. First, as we approach Micah, we should find an exhortation
 - a. Micah is calling God's people to live in covenant with God - to do justice and love kindness
 - b. And we have been called in to live in covenant with God through Christ, so we ought to take these exhortations to heart - justice and kindness ought to mark our lives because they mark God's character
 - c. So we should listen to the exhortations and apply them to ourselves as members of God's covenant
- 1 3. Second, as we approach Micah, we should find a warning
 - a. Micah sternly warns God's people that those who fail to live in God's covenant will be destroyed by God
 - b. And God's character hasn't changed since the Word of the Lord was revealed to Micah
 - c. If we are members of God's covenant we should take heed: despising God's covenant will only lead to destruction
- 4. Third, as we approach Micah, we should find a promise
 - a. Beyond exhortation and warning, Micah promises that God will be faithful to His covenant and provide salvation
 - b. And this is our hope and our rest in the midst of exhortation and warning - we must take heed to the exhortation and warning, but amidst our failures, we have something to cling to - the promise found in Jesus Christ