

Reading from *The Message* version

Micah 1 vv.1-7

God's Message as it came to Micah of Moresheth. It came during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. It had to do with what was going on in Samaria and Jerusalem.

² Listen, people—all of you. Listen, earth, and everyone in it:

The Master, God, takes the witness stand against you, the Master from his Holy Temple.

³⁻⁵ Look, here he comes! God, from his place!

He comes down and strides across mountains and hills. Mountains sink under his feet, valleys split apart; The rock mountains crumble into gravel, the river valleys leak like sieves.

All this because of Jacob's sin, because Israel's family did wrong.

You ask, "So what is Jacob's sin?"

Just look at Samaria—isn't it obvious?

And all the sex-and-religion shrines in Judah - isn't Jerusalem responsible?

⁶⁻⁷ "I'm turning Samaria into a heap of rubble, a vacant lot littered with garbage.

I'll dump the stones from her buildings in the valley and leave her abandoned foundations exposed.

All her carved and cast gods and goddesses will be sold for stove wood and scrap metal,

All her sacred fertility groves burned to the ground,

All the sticks and stones she worshiped as gods, destroyed.

These were her earnings from her life as a whore.

This is what happens to the fees of a whore."

Micah 2 vv.1 - 5

¹⁻⁵ Doom to those who plot evil, who go to bed dreaming up crimes!

As soon as it's morning, they're off, full of energy,

doing what they've planned.

They covet fields and grab them, find homes and take them.

They bully the neighbour and his family,

see people only for what they can get out of them.

God has had enough. He says, "I have some plans of my own:

Disaster because of this interbreeding evil! Your necks are on the line.

You're not walking away from this. It's doomsday for you.

Mocking ballads will be sung of you,

and you yourselves will sing the blues:

'Our lives are ruined, our homes and lands auctioned off.

They take everything, leave us nothing!

All is sold to the highest bidder.'"

And there'll be no one to stand up for you,

no one to speak for you before God and his jury.

Intro Judah 742 – 686BC Under the reigns of Kings Jotham, Ahaz & Hezekiah. It may have been 2,700 years ago but there are many parallels with our present age. It was a time when Israel had grown more affluent than it had ever been since the days of Solomon; but also a time when that affluence had become more and more concentrated in the hands of a few, a time of growing injustice, callousness and greed. *viz As soon as it's morning, they're off, full of energy, doing what they've planned. They covet fields and grab them, find homes and take them. They bully the neighbour and his family, and see people only for what they can get out of them .*

It was also a time of a growing threat to their very existence. For us: climate change. Paradise, California. President Trump. None of us v. willing to change. Also growing nationalism. Conflict leading to mass immigration. For Israel and Judah, the Assyrian empire – powerful, cruel.

Despite outwardly continuing to worship God the people of Israel and Judah showed a blatant disregard for God's laws. Religion was only for show and had no influence on their daily lives and business practices.

In reality Israel and Judah were becoming more and more secular.

Micah's message starts off with God's court case against Judah and God being the chief witness for the prosecution. ² Listen, people—all of you. Listen, earth, and everyone in it: The Lord, God, takes the witness stand against you,

What God attacks first though is not the *injustice* but the *idolatry* of the people. Yes they still

claimed to worship the Lord and maybe even went to the Temple once or twice a year at Christmas and Easter or Tabernacles and Passover but, day to day, they were worshipping local pagan idols. This is the heart of the problem from which injustice, callousness and greed flow. Idolatry leads to injustice. What has all this to do with you and me? After all, you and I don't worship pagan idols – or perhaps we do...

What are our idols today? Profit, bonuses, wealth, sexual or romantic excitement, power or influence, career and social status. Whenever we make something other than God the priority in our lives, it's not long before other people start getting hurt. The greed of banks lending on sub-prime mortgages and then raising interest rates - so many losing their homes. CEOs being awarded obscene bonuses or plundering pension funds, robbing employees of their pensions and sometimes their jobs. Adultery - the betrayed wife, husband, family; ambition - the oppressed colleague, career success - the neglected family or marriage.

How can a God of justice, a God of love stand by and do nothing?

Whenever we see injustice, we think something must be done, the perpetrators of injustice should be brought to account *#MeToo movement*, exploitative loan companies, the adulterous husband or wife. If we think that, how much more must God who is infinitely just and loving intervene. No wonder Micah says God is doing something about it and He is coming in judgement. If as a loving parent we see a child destroying themselves with an addiction or obsession, our love will make us angry and at times take radical action to bring that destructive behaviour to an end.

For God's people to worship idols is like the adulterous husband who claims he still loves his wife and yet continues to be unfaithful. It's the same with Christians who claim to love God and expect to be blessed by him and yet continue to have idols – other greater priorities – in their lives. So we shouldn't be surprised if God decides to do something about it.

So in ch.1 vv.10 ff. Micah tells Judah *The Lord is coming*. They probably thought *Great! God is coming to judge our enemies*. But Micah says:

No, he's coming to judge you! In your Bible you'll see there's a load of footnotes to show Micah is making puns on the Judaeen town place names. Listen to this paraphrase from the Message

Micah 1 vv.10-16

Don't gossip about this in Telltown. Don't waste your tears. In Dustville, roll in the dust.

Strip off in shame you who live in Beauty City.

The citizens of Exitburgh will never get out alive.

Lament, Last-Stand City: There's nothing in you left standing.

The villagers of Bittertown wait in vain for sweet peace.

Harsh judgment has come from God and entered Peace City.

All you who live in Chariotville, get in your chariots for flight.

You led the daughter of Zion into trusting not God but chariots.

Similar sins in Israel also got their start in you.

Go ahead and give your good-bye gifts to Goodbyeville.

Miragetown beckoned but disappointed Israel's kings.

Inheritance City has lost its inheritance. Glorytown has seen its last of glory.

Shave your heads in mourning over the loss of your precious towns. Go bald as a goose egg— they've gone into exile and aren't coming back.

It may sound a bit cheesy to your ears, but if you live in one of those towns it really hits home:

It's like: *There'll be hunger in Hungerford; you won't be ready in Reading; you will be hunted in Huntercombe, your chickens are coming home to roost in Henley, dark times will come to you in Brightwell and you'll no longer be cosy in Cholsey*

It is also a brilliant way of saying that the thing you value most in your community will either fail you completely or lead you to disaster.

This is not easy to hear. It makes us feel very uncomfortable and we will try all sorts of different ways of avoiding the challenge of such accusations.

1. Many will say *Well surely we are not that bad – we're good people!*

It was no different in the days of Micah

Micah 2 vv.6-10

*6-7 “Don’t preach,” say the preachers. “Don’t preach such stuff.
Nothing bad will happen to us. Talk like this to the family of Jacob?
Does God lose his temper? Is this the way he acts?
Isn’t he on the **side** of good people?
Doesn’t he help those who do their duty?”*

But perhaps we are not as good as we like to think...As God says through Micah:

*8-10 “What do you mean, ‘good people’! You’re the enemy of my people! You rob unsuspecting people out for an evening stroll.
You take their coats off their backs like soldiers who plunder the defenceless.
You drive the women of my people out of their ample homes.
You make victims of the children and leave them vulnerable to violence and vice. Get out of here, the lot of you.
You can’t take it easy here!
You’ve polluted this place, and now **you’re** polluted—ruined!*

We like to think of ourselves as good people and yet we continue to buy cheap food and clothing that is produced by something approaching slave labour – often including children; we continue to enjoy a free health service that can only survive because of the huge numbers of qualified doctors and nurses we recruit from 3rd world countries where the need is a hundred times greater. We continue to live a life-style that contributes to a change in the world’s climate which produces more and more severe weather events – hurricanes, floods and fires - which kill hundreds and drive thousands out of their homes.

2nd Some will say well all this talk of judgment is not my idea of God – I’m not going to sit here and listen to this. I’ll go to a church where the preacher, preaches the sort of things that I want to hear. It was no different in the days of Micah...

Micah 2 v.11

*If someone showed up with a good smile and glib tongue and told lies from morning to night—
“I’ll preach sermons that will tell you how you can get anything you want from God:
More money, the best wines . . . you name it!”—
you’d hire him on the spot as your preacher!*

In the end we have to decide what is the most loving thing to do:

Is it to tell people what they want to hear: that God will overlook all their self-centred behaviour, however much they continue to ignore Him;

or is it to tell them the truth. All that Micah spoke about came true.

Not long after he preached this message a huge and terrifying Assyrian army of nearly 200,000 men swept through most of the towns of Judah just as Micah promised, and ended up camped outside the gates of Jerusalem

3rd Another danger for us is to say well of course this doesn’t apply to us today – this is the Old Testament with its typical Old Testament prophets ranting and raving. We of course no longer see God as venting wrath and anger and meting out punishment to his people. We might be tempted to think that this is not the God and Father we have got to know through Jesus Christ. Once we start thinking that, we stop listening.

But the God of the New Testament is of course the God of the Old Testament.

He is one and the same; and Micah gives us an insight into God’s heart in the next verses:

Micah 1 vv.8-9

*8-9 This is why I lament and mourn. This is why I go around in rags and barefoot.
This is why I howl like a pack of coyotes, and moan like a mournful owl in the night.
God has inflicted punishing wounds; Judah has been wounded with no healing in sight.
Judgment has marched through the city gates.
Jerusalem must face the charges.*

Micah can see that his people must face God’s justice, but the thought of it breaks his heart. Now Micah’s name means *Who is like God*.

If Micah's heart is breaking at the thought of his people facing judgement, how much more in God's heart breaking?

We cannot understand the full extent of God's love and grace until we understand the full extent of our sin and of the judgement which we deserve, but which God in his mercy has stepped in to save us from.

When Micah steps forward as an advocate for his people he is a precursor for another Advocate who stepped forward on behalf of his people, another Advocate who like Micah wept over Jerusalem at their stubborn folly and the judgement they were going to face. Remember this account of Jesus? ⁴¹*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it* ⁴²*and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – an Advocate not only empathised with their plight but who took their judgement upon his own shoulders. Jesus is Micah's counterpart.*

If Micah's name means *who is like God*? Jesus is the one who's life and ministry tells us *I am like God*. And how about you and me?

If Jesus wept for his people as did Micah, do we? Of course such concern only arises if we take seriously the message of Micah and the message of Jesus that unless people repent, they will come under God's judgement. Micah isn't telling people about God's judgement just to make people feel bad about themselves, he isn't venting like a grumpy old man; he is giving it to them straight because he *loves* his people and longs for them to turn back to God so that they might be rescued and saved. Do you take God's word seriously? Do you weep for your friends, neighbours, colleagues, members of your family, who shut God out of their lives? Perhaps it's only when we weep for them that we start seriously praying for them and seeking opportunities to tell them about the love and grace of Christ.

Micah himself does just this at the end of chapter 2. He says that God's longing is to rescue his people, to bring them together and bless them and indeed this will happen for those who turn to him (whom Micah calls the remnant of Israel).

Micah 2 vv.12-13

¹² *'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 sheepfold,
like a flock in its pasture;
the place will throng with people.*

¹³ *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.'*

This is a vivid picture for the inhabitants of Jerusalem who would face siege by the vast and vicious Assyrian army. God would give them a foretaste of this promise shortly after Micah preached this message.

As a result of the advice of Micah and Isaiah, in desperation King Hezekiah turns to God and pleads for deliverance. God responds by completely destroying the huge Assyrian army nearly - 200,000 men – possibly through an outbreak of cholera or, according to the Greek historian Herodotus, bubonic plague. Tragically in the years that followed Jerusalem would turn away from God again and completely forget his word and as a result it would be utterly destroyed about 100 years later by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army

But God's promise of rescue still stands today. Jesus made this promise his own when He called himself the Good Shepherd who would lead us out of the gate into green pasture. He himself would face the judgement that all of us justly deserve, destroying the enemy and bringing us out into the open pastures of peace and freedom. As the good shepherd he promised: ²⁷*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* ²⁸*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.*