

Introduction

Background

Name & Author: Unlike Amos, who shared with us his occupation, and unlike Hosea who gave a glimpse into his personal life, we know very little about Micah. Chapter 1, verse 1, tells us he is the son of Moresheth. Based upon the lament of Micah in 1:10, 14, we might guess that Micah's home was in Moresheth Gath.

While we do not know much of the man, his influence on the Jewish people was widespread. One hundred years after his prophecies, the elders of Judah quote Micah to validate the legitimacy of Jeremiah's ministry. Seven hundred years after his prophecies, the wise men from the East came to King Herod and asked him where the King of the Jews was to be born. The scribes of Jerusalem responded to this inquiry by quoting Micah 5:2, and stating that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

Date: According to Micah 1:1, Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, and that he spoke to both the northern and southern kingdoms.

For the northern kingdom, these were the last days. The nation was in a political and moral chaos. Tiglath-Pileassar of Assyria had conquered all the northern territories of Israel. Hoshea led a conspiracy against King Pekah of Israel. Hoshea took the throne, and paid tribute to Assyria. Later, however, he allied himself with Egypt, bringing about the final destruction of the northern kingdom by Assyria.

In the south, Jotham and Hezekiah both followed after God. However, Ahaz was an evil king, who reigned for 16 years during the height of Micah's ministry. Ahaz allied himself with Tiglath-Pileassar and tried to win favor with the Assyrian king by adopting the Assyrian religion in Judah. As a result, Ahaz burned his own son as a sacrifice, encouraged Baal worship, and he ordered the priest Urijah to build a new altar in the temple in the Assyrian style.

Audience: Micah prophesied to both the northern and southern kingdoms. His message seemed to focus on the leadership of those kingdoms.

Structure

Micah prophesied over a long period of time. However, the book of Micah is not laid out chronologically. The oracles of Micah are laid out in a format which alternates between oracles of judgment and oracles of restoration¹. The major section breaks are noted by the words "Hear now" in 1:2, 3:1, and 6:1.

¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2002), 235.

First Oracles of Judgment		First Oracle of Restoration		Second Oracle of Judgment		Second Oracle of Restoration		Third Oracle of Judgment		Third Oracle of Restoration	
1:1	2:11	2:12	2:13	3:1	3:12	4:1	5:15	6:1	7:7	7:8	7:20

Purpose

Both Israel and Judah were in times of moral and political chaos. The kingdoms were under threat from invasion by Assyria. Micah is calling on the people and their leaders to give up their corrupt ways and return to the Lord. He is also providing hope for these nations under attack by showing the restoration that the Lord will bring to Israel and Judah in the future.

Theme

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? (Micah 6:8)

Oracles of Judgment

Condemnation of the Leaders

Micah opens his book with a description of the coming destruction of Israel and Judah. The Lord himself comes down from his holy temple to tread upon the earth and bring destruction upon the kingdoms. Micah puts the blame for the idolatry and moral evil of the day squarely on the leadership in Samaria and Jerusalem.

(Micah 1:5 NASB) "All this is for the rebellion of Jacob And for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the rebellion of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?"

Micah lists the evil of the leaders in Chapter 3: They are unjust (v. 1), they take bribes (v. 11), they are lovers of evil (v. 2), they exploit the people (v. 2-3). This cruelty and inhumane treatment of the people is described very graphically to demonstrate their extreme evil. The leaders of Israel and Judah lack mercy, justice, and humility.

But is not just the kings who are to blame. The religious leaders of the day are also condemned for their corruption. The prophets always proclaim "peace" to those who pay well, but judgment on their enemies (3:5). The priests only tell the people what the people want to hear (3:11).

In chapter 7, Micah bemoans the lack of Godly leadership, and reiterates the extreme evil of the day:

(Micah 7:2-3 NASB) "The godly person has perished from the land, And there is no upright person among men. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; Each of them hunts the other with a net. [3] Concerning evil, both hands do it well. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, And a great man speaks the desire of his soul; So they weave it together."

You can trust no one. Even your friends (7:5) and your family (7:6) will betray you for their dishonest gain. The only one left who can be trusted is Yahweh:

(Micah 7:7 NASB) "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me."

The Call for Repentance

Part of the prophetic model is the call for repentance. After disclosing the people's sin and the subsequent punishment, normally a prophet would follow with specific actions needed in order to avoid destruction. Micah, however, does not have a clear call for repentance². Micah contends that God has already told the people what they need to do to avoid destruction. The people just have not responded.

Micah 6 describes how the LORD's has taught the people the right thing to do. He begins by challenging the people to prove that God has unjustly accused them. Then He shows how God led them from Egypt and taught them His ways, "that you may know the righteousness of the LORD (Micah 6:5)."

So how should the people respond (3:6)? One possible response is proposed: burnt offerings and sacrifices. And sacrifices not just of calves and rams, but even the first born! But God is not interested in sacrifice, and certainly he is not looking for the sacrifice of a human. God is looking at our character, not our willingness to sacrifice.

Rather God has shown us and the Israelites what is required:

(Micah 6:8 NASB) "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?"

Micah condemns the leaders of Israel and Judah for their lack of justice, their cruelty to their fellow man, and their prideful arrogance. Their heart attitude was exactly opposite of the characteristics that God requires of man to avoid punishment. This verse serves as Micah's call to repentance. A repentance that will result in redemption and restoration.

Oracles of Restoration

Micah intersperses prophecies of the coming restoration of Israel throughout the book. The longest section is in Chapters 4 and 5, and encompasses a description of the coming Messianic Kingdom and an immediate deliverance from Assyria.

The Messianic Kingdom

The LORD's reign on Mt. Zion, as described in Micah 4:1-8, is a marked contrast to the evil rule of Israel's leadership. The LORD "will teach us His ways" (4:2) and will judge righteously (4:3). He will gather the oppressed to him and protect them (4:6). In that day, there will no longer be any war, for the Lord himself will arbitrate disputes between the nations (4:3). This is in direct contrast that with the selfish, corrupt, oppressive governments of Micah's day. But before the coming of this righteous kingdom, Judah and Israel must be cleansed of their idolatry.

Deliverance from Assyria

Of immediate concern to the people of Micah's day was the seemingly inevitable invasion by the super-power to the north, Assyria. Micah, in a prophecy apparently addressed to the southern kingdom, declares that God will deliver them from Assyria. But this deliverance from Assyria will come with the destruction at the hands of another nation, Babylon (4:10, 5:6).

Babylon, at this time, was not a powerful nation. They had been ruled by the Assyrians for over 400 years. Israel had fallen to Assyria and was marching all through Judah. So it was unexpected that Micah should mention the comparatively weak nation of Babylon. So unexpected is this, that many

² C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, (Chicago:Moody Press, 1986), 121-22.

Biblical scholars date the book of Micah much later, or consider this portion of the book to have been added later.³

Even the captivity of Babylon has its redemptive side. The Jews will prosper in their captivity (5:8), and God will use this time to rid His people of their idolatry (5:13).

The Shepherd Ruler

After the people are rid of their idolatry, the Messiah will come and establish His kingdom. The Messiah will come from the city of Bethlehem (5:2), and he will bring peace to the world (5:5a). His leadership is a stark contrast to the corrupt and immoral leadership of Micah's day.

The Messiah is described as a shepherd who cares for His flock:

(Micah 5:4 NASB) "And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth."

Micah 7:14-20 describes God himself as a shepherd to His people who is full of mercy and compassion.

(Micah 7:18-20 NASB) "Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. [19] He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea. [20] Thou wilt give truth to Jacob And unchanging love to Abraham, Which Thou didst swear to our forefathers From the days of old."

What a beautiful picture of God's character: the faithful shepherd who delights in mercy and love. When we walk humbly with our God, he is faithful to shower us with mercy. Then he guides us like a shepherd.

Bibliography

Bullock, C. Hassell. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1986.

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

³ Bullock, 114.