

(Wk1) Micah Part I (Study)

Overview

Prophetic books in the Bible are sometimes difficult to read because they are a collection of poetic writings with little or no story structure. In general, think of each book of prophecy as a collection of the prophet's works arranged by an editor according to various themes to convey an overall message. Likely, editors assembled the collections well after the actual writing of the individual prophetic speeches/poems and thus the arrangement was designed for an audience other than the first hearers of the prophet's words.

Prophets play an important, but difficult role in Israel. After the establishment of kingship in Israel, the prophet emerged as a check-and-balance among the political roles of king, military leaders, advisors, etc. Some of the prophets have the not-so-fun task of announcing imminent judgment or doom knowing that their audience will not change. Some prophets speak the word of the Lord to the people after the fact to provide the proper spiritual understanding of the historical events. Micah was one of the few prophets to change the course of history. According to Jeremiah 26, Micah was at least partially responsible for influencing Hezekiah to turn to God and avert disaster for the Southern Kingdom (Jer 26).

Micah is one of the 8th Century BC prophets along with Isaiah, Hosea and Amos. Micah and Isaiah both prophesied during the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah in the midst of a very complicated period of history for Israel and Judah.

Historical Setting

The general history for this time period is captured in 2 Kings 15-19, Isaiah 36-38 with other notes provided by Isaiah 7, 30 and Jeremiah 26. A brief outline of the period follows:

- From 745-734 BC Assyria is ruled by Tiglath-Pileser III who greatly expands the empire capturing Aram in the south and Urartu in the north before setting his sights on Palestine and Egypt. The Northern kingdom of Israel is forced to pay tribute to TP-III to avoid being destroyed. The payments are onerous and the northern kings of Menahem, Pekah, and Hoshea attempt to form a series of alliances with Edom, Damascus, and Egypt to rebel against Assyrian control. These alliances fail and the final cities of the Northern Kingdom are taken into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. (2 Kings 15-17)
- During this time the Southern Kingdom of Judah under the kings of Azariah, Jotham and Ahaz refuses to join the alliance of Edom-Israel against Assyria and instead pays Assyria for protection against the alliance. Judah survives the Assyrian invasion that captures the Northern kingdom, but it is forced to maintain vassal payments to Assyria and to honor Assyrian gods. Isaiah tells Ahaz, "don't be afraid." (2 Kings 16; Is 7-8)
- King Hezekiah (714-686 BC) initiates religious reforms removing the high places of idol worship. Judah rebels against Assyria refusing to pay the tribute tax. At the same time Egypt is gaining power and forms a regional alliance (without Judah) against Assyria. Assyria responds by capturing several fortified cities in Judah and surrounding Jerusalem. It appears that Assyria surrounded Jerusalem twice. During the first siege, the Assyrian armies taunt Israel but are then called away to fight Babylon. During this siege it seems that Hezekiah sent secret envoys to Egypt for help. When Assyria returns from fighting Babylon, Hezekiah seeks counsel from Isaiah, who returns the word of the Lord saying that Jerusalem would survive. Miraculously 185 thousand Assyrian troops die in one night and they retreat to Nineveh. (2 Kings 18-19; Isa 20, 36-38; Jer 26)

Micah 1-5

Micah and his calling (Micah 1:1, 3:8)

Chapter 1

- Two poems/sermons that depict the general judgment of God against Judah and Samaria
- (1:3-7) Depicts the lord coming from heaven in power to judge his people
- (1:7-16) describes a series of towns...indicating they will all be destroyed and go into exile

Chapter 2

- Three poems / sermons
- (2:1-5) targets those in power, those who enjoy honor in society that they will live in shame. Two specific examples of their sins are listed in 2:2, both are examples of injustice
- (2:6-11) targets false prophets and the people who are unwilling to listen to God. Lists further examples of the sins in 2:8-9
- (2:12-13) statement of judgment that mentions a “remnant” and a return to following God as king

Chapter 3

- One poem / sermon
- (3:1-12) targets leaders, prophets, and priests who don't know “justice” and redefine evil and good and predicts the destruction of Jerusalem (3:12).
- (3:8) in the voice of Micah who is charged with declaring the sins of nations
- (3:11) contrasts the inconsistency of corrupt activity while still claiming to be God followers

Chapter 4

- Two poems / sermons
- (4:1-5) a future setting of “last days” when the Lord will reestablish his nation as a voice to other nations. In that day they will follow the lord, he will be their judge, leader, king and there will be peace
- (4:6-13) also set in the future using the phrase “in that day” and depicts the return from exile.
- (4:10) speaks of Babylonian exile
- (4:11-13) depicts the false assumption of other nations that Israel has been defeated forever and they have escaped the judgment of God

Chapter 5

- Two poems/sermons
- (5:1-5) predicts the destruction of Jerusalem for a time. Also predicts that a leader will arise from Bethlehem to rule the people as a good shepherd in strength and majesty. (parallels Is 7-9)
- (5:6-15) speaks of Assyrian invasion, but also delivery from that invasion. The majority of the sermon depicts a situation of exile “among the nations” and the subsequent return and cleansing from evil. (note Is 10)