

Micah (Part One): Hope For The Hopeless

Martin G. Collins

Given 18-Dec-21; Sermon #1630

The Minor Prophets speak directly and powerfully to present sins. It is just not possible to read them carefully without having one's life challenged and without determining to live differently.

First, they highlight God's sovereignty and truly they do more than merely highlight it. They breathe it throughout. Nothing is more central to the thinking of these twelve writers than the fact that God is the sovereign God of history and that nothing happens either to Israel or to the Gentile nations that is not the result of His direct determination. The locust plague of Joel was His doing, the destruction of Nineveh was from Him, just as its earlier repentance under the preaching of Jonah was God-given. And when Israel was invaded by Assyria and Judah by Babylon, it was the Lord who did it.

Whatever problems the prophets may have with the specific nature of God's action—Habakkuk is one who had great problems—those Minor Prophets never doubted for a second that the Almighty God is in charge of history.

The second great attribute of God seen in the Minor Prophets in general is holiness. An awareness of holiness was the driving force behind the sharp denunciations of sin. It made no difference where the sin was found, whether in foreign lands like Edom in Obadiah or Assyria in Nahum or among God's people, it was still an offense to God and called for judgment. Nowhere in the Bible are there stiffer denunciations of sin and stronger calls for a deep and firm repentance than in the Minor Prophets.

And third, the prophets speak of God's love. Love is not incompatible with justice, as many mainstream Christians believe. On the contrary, it is because of God's great love for His people, even His love for Nineveh, that He sends prophets with the message of judgment and eventually sends the judgment itself. God knows that sin is an outrage against Himself, against humanity, and even the one pursuing it, and He warns of the sin and how destructive it

is. So He judges sin, and in the case of His own people, in order to turn them back from sin to Himself.

We need these emphases today, we need them as individuals because we still sin and run away from God. Even though we are in the church, we do it occasionally. The world does it as a way of life, but we still have the problems that plague us with that. We need these emphases that the Minor Prophets give. We need them as a nation also because God will not deal with America or any other contemporary nation differently in regard to its sin than He dealt with the nations of the ancient times, Israel and Judah.

We need to learn deeply, and in a way that changes us, that as Proverbs 14: 34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach [or disgrace] to any people." Even one person's sin can affect the whole nation negatively. The domino effect. Even sins done in private, as the world tries to tell us, are harmless.

The Minor Prophets largely convey a message of God's judgment and this has been true of all the earlier prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah. And with the sole exception of Jonah, their messages of judgment were unheeded. Prophets appeared, their warnings were rejected, and judgment came. This is a dark, depressing picture, but suddenly we come to Micah. There is light at the end of the tunnel. This is not because Micah is any less concerned about judgment. He begins by describing the destruction of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. He continues in that vein.

But the encouraging part is not that some other message has replaced judgment in Micha's mind. It is rather that in Micah's case, the message of judgment was heeded, unlike the other prophets. Repentance followed and the disaster was postponed for a whole century. Hosea and Amos were ignored. Jeremiah was imprisoned. But here is one prophet who is listened to and whose preaching therefore changed history.

In coming to Micah we should be encouraged to learn that one inspired man did make a difference. Take this very personally and very seriously that we in God's church do make a difference, both individually and corporately.

God called Micah and gave him spiritual powers to perform the responsibility that God had planned for him. Micah writes,

Micah 3:8 But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.

Micah was also remembered long after he prophesied. The preaching of Micah about the impending judgment of God bore fruit during the reign of King Hezekiah, whose story is told in II Kings 18 through 20. During Hezekiah's reign, Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked the northern capital of Samaria and overthrew it, and then he deported the people of Israel or exiled them or took them into captivity. Eight years later, Sennacherib, Shalmaneser's successor, attacked the southern kingdom of Judah and Hezekiah was forced to pay tribute. On one occasion, the Assyrian field commander appeared before the walls and demanded that Jerusalem surrender. Shortly after that, Sennacherib sent a letter to Hezekiah, saying,

II Kings 19:10-12 "Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying: 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, "Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." Look! You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered those whom my fathers have destroyed?"

So, it was a mocking letter to Hezekiah. Hezekiah spread this letter before the Lord and he received an answer through Isaiah. The city would not be destroyed. Sennacherib would himself fall.

II Kings 18:3-4 And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done. [This is speaking of Hezekiah.] He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke them in pieces of the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.

The people call it the brass thing. That is what that word means, the brass thing. But it was actually in the image of a serpent. So you could see the guilt that they had, even wanting to call it the brass thing instead of the serpent knowing what the serpent represented. There was a repentant revival in Hezekiah's time, which was the main factor in God's decision to spare the city from Sennacherib.

The interesting thing about this is that Micah is not mentioned in the story of Hezekiah's reign as found in II Kings. Isaiah, the well known prophet of the aristocracy, is there and he is the one who brought the Lord's message to the king. But Micah is not mentioned. Yet we know from a later incident during the days of Jeremiah that it was because of his preaching that the people repented and Jerusalem was spared. Jeremiah lived about one hundred years after Micah. But like Micah, he had also been prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 26:4-6 And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord, "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded), then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.'"

The message offended the priests and other false prophets and so they seized Jeremiah and brought him before the officials and people and demanded his death. Jeremiah gave his defense and then the elders of the land said,

Jeremiah 26:18-19 "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.'" Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lord's favor? [this is speaking of Micah] And the Lord relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them. But we are doing great evil against ourselves."

It was a result of the elders' testimony, that the life of Jeremiah was spared one hundred years after Micah had prophesied and been spared himself. It was because of the memory of Micah he was heard in the days of Hezekiah. A repentant revival followed and then one hundred years later his words were still remembered and the memory of what happened earlier was used by God to spare the life of Jeremiah. Incredible how God plans so far ahead for even our individual protection.

Please turn with me to Micah. All that background was so that I could get to the book of Micah and speak to you about the book of Micah.

First, a little background on Micah. He was not from a distinguished family as his better-known contemporary Isaiah seems to have been. On the contrary, he was from an undistinguished small country village called Moresheth, which is why he was later called Micah of Moresheth by the Jerusalem elders. Archaeologists have identified Moresheth with the ruins of Tell el Judaidah and it was so small, that is, the place that Micah was from, that it was usually called Moresheth Gath. It was connected with the larger town near it.

Obviously Micah was a rural person and he was a stranger in Jerusalem. When he first went to the capitol to give his prophecies, he had not been familiar with city life. I am sure it was a very great challenge for him. It reminds us of Amos, who also had a rural background and appeared as a stranger in Bethel, the shrine city of the northern kingdom. And here Micah was going into Jerusalem in the capitol of the southern Israelites, so to speak, Judah, and Amos had done the same thing from a similar background in the northern tribes, the capitol of Samaria.

It is a notable feature of Amos that the open chapters pronounced judgments on a variety of nations—Assyria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel. These are arranged in such a way that the net of judgment closes in surely but unexpectedly around Israel. They were nations surrounding Israel. Remember this was Amos judging them. Assyria is northeast, Philistia is southwest, Tyra is northwest, Edom is southeast. So the first four nations marked out the four corners of the compass. You see that there is design in Scripture in many ways. After that came Ammon and

Moab to the east, Judah due south, and then Israel. When constructing his book in this way, it is as if Amos surrounds the people of the north and catches them off guard.

Micah's approach is not nearly as elaborate, but the pattern is the same. He announces that his prophecy concerns Samaria, capitol of Israel, and Jerusalem, capitol of Judah. These capitols represent, of course, the whole country. Micah takes the first section that is, chapter 1, verses 2-9, to deal with Israel of the northern kingdom. But after that, his message is entirely for Judah, the kingdom of the south, where he was then living and prophesying.

In other words, there was judgment for others, but his message was primarily for the people of Judah as a nation. Being primarily for Judah as a nation, we also have to take to heart the things that he prophesied on all nations, because when a nation commits sins, it is punished in a similar way by God. And certainly Israel and Judah were both very sinful nations. So thanks to Micah, there was a revival not with most of the other Minor Prophets.

Nevertheless, we need to take this personally ourselves. Quite often we read the Bible, we apply what we read to other people, and when we read of judgment on others, we almost have a sigh of relief, assuming wrongly that if judgment is spoken against them, it is therefore not spoken against us. It is just a human deficiency, so to speak. But this is wrong. God is no respecter of persons and so when something is said about somebody else or caution or warning about sin, *we* should also take it to heart. And so should our nation and all of the Israelitish nations of the world.

Consequently, if we are going our way and not God's way as the people of Jerusalem were doing, then we must do as they eventually did and turn back to God. It is the way we ourselves will escape God's judgment, speaking of both—us individually and especially our nation.

The first chapter of Micah has three main parts. The first is the descent of the Lord and judgment, the second is the fall of Samaria, and the third is the effect of the sin of Samaria on Jerusalem and a call for a proper repentant response to this infection of sin.

Micah 1:1-5 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. Hear, all you peoples! Listen, O earth, and all that is in it! [He is speaking to not just those nations, but all of mankind as well. But directly to those nations in a sense.] Let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple. For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; and He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?

The first of these sections is quite moving in one sense. Here, Micah portrays the Lord as swooping down from heaven to do battle on earth. Micah's language describes precisely what the judgment will do, such as sweep away everything before it. Notice the movement in verses 2-4. Micah begins with a picture of God in His holy temple in verse 2, and from there he speaks against the people. Next we see God coming from His dwelling place in verse 3. Then He comes down and treads the high places of the earth in verse 4. At the touch of God's foot, the mountains melt beneath Him. This also accompanied His descent.

So, Micah imagines the valley split apart to accommodate this new mass, which he says comes down like wax before the fire and water rushing down a slope. Destruction lies in its path. There is a lot of power shown in this, that God is a God of power, He is a God of judgment. When He decides to pass judgment, it is a horrible, terrible, terrifying thing. This is intended to be terrifying and it is. I do not mean my sermon, I mean the words of Micah to Israel and Judah.

Let me give you a description from history that might help us to visualize this. It is like the description that the Romans gave of the Celtic warriors they encountered in their earlier conquests in central Europe. To the Romans,

the Celts were barbarians. In battle they wore no clothes at all. They painted themselves with bright colors and greased their hair so that it stood up fiercely from their heads as though they had been electrocuted by a strike of lightning. Before battle they would be out of sight, then suddenly they would come swooping down the hillside, shrieking loudly in their unknown languages, and fall upon the enemy ranks. It scared the Romans witless. They had trouble keeping their stance against them.

Micah paints a similar picture of God coming to earth. It is not the horde of barbarians with whom they must deal. The attacking foe is God, the sovereign Lord, and He is so angered at the wickedness He sees that He leaves His holy temple to do battle Himself.

The second part of this chapter concerns the fall of Samaria, here pictured as a close future event. The city fell during the years of Micah's ministry. This description, the downward moving imagery of the opening sections, continues because Micah sees the stones of Samaria's great walls tumbling down the ridge of Samaria into the valley. And in the same way all her idols will be broken to pieces and will fall. Amos denounced the kingdom of Israel for its sexual immorality, especially its cultic prostitution. You do not have to turn there but in Amos 2 it says:

Amos 2:7-8 They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name. They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

Their sexual immorality mirrored their spiritual prostitution.

Continuing then in Micah 1, we have the same theme emerging as Amos described.

Micah 1:6 "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, places for planting a vineyard; I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations."

The threat here speaks of judgment and introduces the concept of public shame as well. Not only are they going to be punished in a physical way, they also are being punished by being shamed.

Micah 1:7 "All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her pay as a harlot shall be burned with the fire; all her idols I will lay desolate, for she gathered it from the pay of a harlot, and they shall return to the pay of a harlot."

Idolatry is spiritual infidelity against God and is equated with prostitution. Micah was telling Judah to repent of the immorality, as well as many other things, idolatry and so on.

The third section begins with verse 8, which describes the passing of the evils of the northern kingdom to Judah in the south, much like what the United States is doing to the rest of the nation with entertainment, movies, and it has entered the vocalists and the bands and all of the perverse things; the child trafficking, and on and on and on. How the sins of this nation are going around the world and encouraging it. What a sad image this nation has.

Micah's mourning is followed by a list of the cities that will face disaster.

Micah 1:8-9 Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches, for her wounds are incurable. For it has come to Judah; it has come to the gate of My people—to Jerusalem.

That "it" means the sins that had previously been committed and were still being committed. Except the northern tribe was now in captivity because of those things.

Verse 9 is still speaking of Samaria, but already the transition to Judah is apparent—that Jerusalem was going the same route as Samaria. The same thought appears in verse 12.

Micah 1:12 For the inhabitants of Maroth pined for good, but disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem.

In these verses, Micah is arguing that even as the sin of Samaria has spread to Jerusalem, so too the judgment befalling the northern kingdom will reach the southern one as well.

Now, in this last section, we see something of the inner heart of Micah and maybe get an insight into why he was so effective. Of course, it was God who did the inspiration and God who carried out the true spiritual aspect of it. But what was Micah like that he so successful, that God chose him do that?

Chapter 1 only has six verses in it. But even though he is covering a variety of subjects and is tracing the picture of judgment from the throne of heaven through Samaria to Jerusalem, Micah takes six verses, more than one-third of the whole, to list the cities of Judah that will be involved with the coming disaster.

You recall how I described Micah saying that he was naked and mourning very heavily and fiercely. Well, that is an indication of how a prophet should be. He should be able to identify, have empathy, and compassion with the people that he is prophesying to. The same with the ministry and the same with every individual. God's church must be able to have compassion for people, to put ourselves in their place in order to really be effective witnesses of God's way of life. He lists ten, including his own town of Moresheth Gath and it may be he does this because he feels pity for the people in these smaller towns.

The national leaders are insensitive to the plight of their own people. Maybe that is why Micah has particularly harsh words for the capitol cities in verse 5. But Micah knows these people and he is one of them and he does not want them to suffer the consequences of their rulers' sins. Micah sets the tone for this section by an introductory quotation from David's lament over Saul and Jonathan after the Israelite defeat on Mount Gilboa. David mourns in II Samuel 1,

II Samuel 1:19-20 "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon—lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

In Micah 1, verse 10, Micah says that his lament for the fallen cities of Judah is like the intense mourning of David for Jonathan and Saul. He uses similar wording.

In his dread at what is coming, Micah looks over the Judean cities and reflects on the sinister destinies suggested by their names and these reflections are puns. Now to us, puns hardly seem serious at all. We always think of them as something to chuckle about. But this was not the way it was with the ancient Jew who would have taken them very seriously. A name handled in this way, as a pun, became an omen, because names were significant in any case and the name suggesting disaster would have lingered over the city as a cloud awaiting fulfillment. So names were treated like omens which, once seen, haunted the localities until they were fulfilled. They are revealed as clues to the curse that is to come upon the country here in Micah.

We are going to continue in Micah 1, verses 10-16. First, we are going to read through this and then I am going to give an understanding of the meaning of each of the names of the cities, which I think you will find interesting.

Micah 1:10-16 Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; in Beth Aphrah roll yourself in the dust. Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitant of Shaphir; the inhabitant of Zaanen does not go out. Beth Ezel mourns; its place to stand is taken away from you. For the inhabitant of Maroth pined for good, but disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem. O inhabitant of Lachish, harness the chariot to the swift steeds (She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion), for the transgressions of Israel were found in you. (That is, Judah.) Therefore you shall give presents to Moresheth Gath; the houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel. I will yet bring an heir to you, O inhabitant of Mareshah; the

glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. Make yourself bald and cut off your hair, because of your precious children; enlarge your baldness like an eagle, for they shall go from you into captivity.

(That is a minister's nightmare to have to read through some of these names. And I am sure I did not get them all right, but you have my best effort.)

So the first of the cities is Beth Aphrah in verse 10. To Micah the second part of the name sounded like a-far, which means dust. He told the citizens of this city to roll in the dust. That is, they will cover themselves with dust in the traditional rite of mourning.

The next city, Shaphir in verse 11, sounds like the word beautiful, but Micah said it will not be beautiful for long. Instead its citizens will be marched away naked and in shame, as will others of the southern kingdom. Zaanana, also in verse 11, sounds like the Hebrew word for exit or go out. But just like the beautiful city which will not be beautiful, so this city will not go out to face its enemies. The citizens will be shut up inside their city like animals and they will remain there until the city falls.

Beth Ezer (verse 11 also), means the nearby city, but it will not be near in that day. It will be so preoccupied with its own mourning that it will be of no help to the other cities. The citizens of Maroth, meaning bitterness, will writhe in bitterness. In verse 13 is Lachish, a well known military city about 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, was famous for its chariot horses. Micah says that in the day of judgment, these will be harnessed up. But the implication is that they will be harnessed to flee, not to fight. An important city that was taken years later at the time of Sennacherib's invasion. Sennacherib considered its conquest significant because he used scenes from the city's encirclement and fall to decorate his great palace in Nineveh.

(When I was in London with John several years ago, we actually went into the British Museum and saw those very carvings. They were very impressive all these thousands of years later. They showed that conquering. I know that the king who actually carried that out had those done by his artisans. To stand there and see that just give you shivers. In it you could pick out the Israelite king. It was something to behold, but just an artifact.)

Moresbeth in verse 14, Micah's hometown, sounds like the Hebrew word betrothed. So he speaks of giving the city wedding gifts as she passes from the rule of her own family to the authority of her cruel new husband, the invader. Achzib, also in verse 14, sounds like the Hebrew word for deceitful or disappointing. Micah says she will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel.

Mareshah in verse 15, is related to the Hebrew word for possessor or heir. She will be possessed by someone else. Adullam, also in verse 15, was the place of refuge to which David had gone during the dismal days when he was fleeing from King Saul. Micah says it will happen again because the aristocracy of Israel will be forced to take refuge in this area.

The chapter closes with an appeal to Jerusalem as the father or mother of the outlying villages, her children. The people of Jerusalem are to shave their heads in mourning because the children in whom they delight are to be taken away into captivity or exile. That was part of the punishment, the judgment that got passed on them. Their children were taken from them. How terrifying and how sad that is not a strong enough words for having that happen.

To gain understanding ourselves we must feel the force of what Micah is picturing here. This nation here, I wonder what God has planned for it specifically. But these are some of the judgments He carries out on people. This nation is equally guilty of sin and these horrible perversions as Israel and Judah ever was.

Micah was successful in his ministry to Jerusalem. The people repented and the turnabout was so significant that it was remembered in Jerusalem one hundred years later. But we must not think that Micah's success came easily; as if he only needed to sow the seed and then reap the harvest. There are two important matters.

First, when he appealed to the citizens of Jerusalem, "Shave your heads in mourning" in verse 16, he was not asking them to do something he refused to do himself. He did the same thing. That is how involved he was. On the contrary, in verse 8, he says that he was already leading them in this repentance. He said, "Because of this, I will weep and wail. I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl." Without

doubt one of the reasons for Micah's success as a witness for God is that he genuinely identified with the people. Not that that was their common dress of the day. But that was the way they mourned back then, and he was showing it to them to make them be serious about what he was telling them. If we could not care less, how can we effectively warn against the disaster or an impending judgment? It must be done earnestly and with conviction.

Second, it is hard to miss the fact that although a revival did come to Jerusalem and Judah during the reign of Hezekiah, Hezekiah was not the only reign during which Micah prophesied. In fact, Micah tells us at the beginning of his book, that the Lord spoke to him during three succeeding reigns: Those in Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. The first two reigned for 16 years each. So at the very least, assuming that Micah began his work in the very last months of Jotham's reign and that the revival came in the very first months of Hezekiah's reign, Micah preached for 16 years without succeeding. And it is more likely, even highly probable, that there were 20-25 years of work before the awakening. That is a long time. At the end, success came.

(It just dawned on me that next month, Richard, John, I, and Ronny will have been on the board of directors of the Church of the Great God for 30 years. Thinking this is how long, 25 or 30 years, that Micah preached before he actually had success—a long time.)

God does not count time as we do and with Him 1,000 years is as a day. And He said to us through the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:9, "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season, we shall reap if we do not lose heart." God also said in I Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." We must always keep those scriptures in mind, every last one of us personally, so that we do not lose heart. We have had a lot of people come and go over the years, not because of death necessarily, but for other reasons. We saw that in Worldwide, same thing, they just went their own way.

Not many people study Latin today (changing the subject slightly), so we do not often see the old Latin phrase *Deo volente*, abbreviated D.V., that Christians used to include in their letters and other writings. *Deo volente*

means "God-willing" or "if God wills" in Latin and is therefore a useful reminder that our plans are not always the plans of God, that it is God's determinations rather than ours that prevail. I do not know if it is still done by the Catholics or not, but general mainstream Christianity, for hundreds of years, did use this in their writings.

Jesus' parable about the rich fool is an example of this. This man had such a good crop at the harvest time that he did not have a place to store it. You are very familiar with this parable. He had no thoughts about God or of giving some of what he had harvested to the poor. So he decided to tear his barns down and build bigger ones, thinking that then he would be able to sit back, take life easy, and be merry.

Luke 12:20-21 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

So, the man planned a self-indulgent future, a glorious retirement. But God's plans for him were quite different. We find the same truths in Proverbs where wise King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 19:21, "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand."

Please turn back to Micah 2. This is what we find as we begin the second chapter of Micah. The rich of his day were working dishonestly to increase their wealth. In itself there is nothing wrong with prosperity. In fact, it is a blessing of God. But these people were increasing their wealth through force and fraud, much like the wealthy, the elite today. They were not even able to wait until daybreak to form their evil stratagems. They lay awake at night plotting. And then when daylight came, they immediately rushed out to put their plans into effect. This is what we see in the second chapter of Micah.

Micah 2:1-2 Woe to those who devise iniquity and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

Today in this nation, there is an epidemic or worse of homeless people. Every city, and it has grown extremely worse ever since the Covid thing, and it is going to get much worse because the rents are no longer free. Now the people will have to pay them. Government is not going to keep the exemption on where people could live in houses for free. And so where are those people going to go who owe almost two years of rent? Can they pay it or will the landlord let them stay and start paying rent? We do not know what the impact of that is. But there is more homeless on the horizon, sadly. This nation is a mess. You can see why that is here in Micah.

Micah says they had forgotten that God had plans too and that His plans rather than theirs would prevail. They plan evil, but God says, "I am planning disaster against this people from which you cannot save yourselves."

Micah 2:3 Therefore thus says the Lord, "Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks; nor shall you walk haughtily, for this is an evil time."

He is going to humiliate and humble these people that are committing these sins. No amount of money or power could save them from God's judgment. Micah was similar to his contemporary Amos, the prophet who went to the northern kingdom of Israel some years before its fall. Both came from the country, both went to the city, and both had a way of gradually narrowing down their words from judgments on other nations, to judgments on those to whom they were speaking.

Please turn back to Amos 3. We have another similarity here. Micah's words against those who were plotting evil in Jerusalem were similar to Amos' words against the wicked of Samaria. Amos says that in Samaria, people had grown rich at the expense of those less fortunate than themselves. So for comparison, let us look at a series of passages from Amos that show the similarities of what transpired in the northern kingdom of Israel approximately one hundred years earlier that did have an effect on Jerusalem and the nation of Judah later.

Amos 3:15 "I will destroy the winter house along with the summer house; the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end," says the Lord.

Their furniture was of the finest quality. They had lush vineyards. They ate the best food and drank the most abundant wine. But it was all acquired by fraud, oppression, and corruption.

Amos 6:4-7 Who lie on beds of ivory, stretch out on your couches, eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; who drink wine from bowls [meaning it was abundant], and anoint yourselves with the best ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. [what we could say of our nation] Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, those who reclined at banquets shall be removed.

I do not know if this nation will go into captivity. God's judgment will be carried out, so we can certainly pray we are able to escape these things.

Amos 2:6-7 Thus says the Lord: "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go into the same girl, to defile My holy name."

Remember we read something like that earlier. In chapter 5, Amos set forth the reason for the judgment on Israel. Justice requires concern for others but the Israelites had no love except self-love.

Amos 5:7 "You who turn justice to wormwood [that is, to bitterness], and lay righteousness to rest in the earth!"

Wormwood is one of the bitterest of plants. Elsewhere the word is used metaphorically of bitter experiences. Perversions of Amos' day was causing deep bitterness for the disadvantaged people whose efforts were being subverted in the legal system of that time.

Amos 5:10 They hate the one who rebukes in the gate [the prophet who is warning the people], and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly.

Amos 5:12 For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: afflicting the just and taking bribes.

The merchants could not wait for the end of the holy days. They were keeping the holy days and they were keeping the Sabbath. So they could increase their wealth by giving short measure and raising prices. They even sold sweepings to increase the weight when they scooped up whatever they were selling, they would scoop up the scrapings on the floor, whatever they were, to make the weight seem more and they would get more money for it. These exploiters were careful to observe the Sabbath, but could not wait for it to be over. It is quite evident that their god was gain at any cost: affluence, material things, control.

Amos 8:4-6 Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail, saying: "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—even sell the bad wheat?"

Micah found the same horrible practices going on in Jerusalem that went on in Samaria. We read earlier in Micah 2, verses 1-2 that those who were planning iniquity rose from the earliest light to carry it out by force and fraud. They could not wait to live another day of dirty deeds.

I would like to focus in on one specific problem that existed in both these nations. Were the people of Jerusalem to think that they would be spared by God any more than the people of Samaria? Since they were doing the same

things, were they not to expect the same fate? In talking about this evil, Micah uses a very important word: covet. Of course, it comes from the last of the Ten Commandments in which God says in verse 17 of chapter 20 of Exodus.

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

Well, that is quite clear.

Micah accuses the people of breaking this tenth commandment and their covetousness is what led them into the plotting and violence they are blamed for.

Romans 13:9-10 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

So what does coveting mean? We all know that, but there are young people and new people in the audience or the audience broadly throughout the world. The word covet, in verse 9, is translated from the Greek word *epithumeo* and it is a compound word consisting of *epi*, meaning upon, and *thumos*, most meaning passion. Combined, the word *epithumeo* means to "fix passion upon." In other words, to become obsessed with something. *Epithumeo* vividly describes the mindset that often causes poor financial decisions, gambling, war, and poverty. It is very often motivated by the advertising industry we are very familiar with, sadly.

Covetousness means to overpoweringly want something you do not have, particularly something belonging to another person. A covetous person is not satisfied with what God has already given him, which makes him materialistic, greedy.

The tenth commandment reveals that sin is essentially a matter of the heart, because coveting is something that exists internally long before it expresses itself in an outward action. It is barely conceivable that a person could read the first nine commandments, and because of a blindness of heart, suppose that he or she had observed them. After all, one might argue, I do worship the God of the Bible, I do not worship idols, I keep the Sabbath, I do not kill or steal, I have not committed adultery, I do not even lie. But it is hard to see how even such a person could claim to observe the tenth commandment.

All of us are probably guilty at this point, at least a moment of a covetous thought or maybe more. But we all have experienced it, certainly. All of us are probably guilty in some way, at some time. The difference between us and the world, hopefully, is that they are living it as a way of life. And although we have it happen occasionally, we are able to overcome and submit to Jesus Christ.

We were sinners and needed to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, but we believe at times that most of us do not do these things. We do not kill people or steal or worship images. What about the last one? When we see someone who has a better car than we have, are there times we wish it was ours? When we are in someone else's house and think it is better than ours, are there times we are wishing that we could have it? Are the times we wish we were as rich as someone else who has more money? Of course we reason, "But everybody does it, it's only natural."

But that is the point. Everybody does it, everybody covets. That is something that we all have to work on overcoming. It strikes at the roots of our materialistic Western culture. We object to the sexual innuendos and come-ons in advertising, but even more pernicious is this ceaseless pitch for materialism, the constant temptation to covet. It comes in subtle forms, as in the suggestion that buying a particular car or home will make you a more attractive person or allow your children to grow up benefiting from a higher level of society. It comes in more vulgar forms, as in the advertisement for an expensive hair conditioner that says, "I don't care if it's more expensive because I'm worth it." (An old advertisement years ago, I believe.)

We are a generation of people never at peace with what we have. I am speaking of the society that we live in, the culture that we live in, always

seeking more. And we are as guilty of coveting our neighbor's fields, houses, or inheritance as were the citizens of Jerusalem. Talking about this nation we live in and hopefully not of ourselves as a way of life. Idols of today are often common objects in our modern lifestyle like cars or houses or children or pets. Upon idolatry, there follows luxury and pride.

The disaster God plans against such people is an example of what we call poetic justice or having the punishment fit the crime. As Micah describes it, this justice could have two parts. First, the possessions of the field of the guilty materialists would be taken from them when the invaders came and they had used violence to take those fields from the poor originally. Now they would suffer the same fate. As a way of punishment God will send conspirators to ridicule the guilty materialists. They will ridicule them with a proverb in the way of a sad song.

Micah 2:4 "In that day one shall take up a proverb against you, and lament with a bitter lamentation, saying: 'We are utterly destroyed! He has changed the heritage of my people; how He has removed it from me! To a turncoat He has divided our fields.'"

Now I would like you to listen to this translation from the New Living Translation. It expresses it in a more modern way or more a contemporary way.

Micah 2:4 (NLT) In that day your enemies will make fun of you by singing this song of despair about you: "We are finished, completely ruined! God has confiscated our land, taking it from us. He has given our fields to those who betray us."

Second, the ruin would be so complete that when the time came, as it did periodically for the land to be redistributed in portions returned to those who had lost their inheritance, they would have no one to represent them and their place in the nation would be lost forever.

In the Old Testament, there are two ways the land could be returned. One was of course by the Jubilee principle described in Leviticus 25. Every 50 years the land was to be returned to its original owners regardless of what had happened in the meantime. By this principle, even the poorest families

could hope for a better future. The second way was by lot, not the man, but by casting lots. This is the way land was originally divided among the tribes when Israel first entered Canaan. The procedure seems to have been followed in later years as well, at times.

Micah refers to this second custom, but he says when the lot is drawn there will be no one left from the wicked to draw the straw.

Micah 2:5 Therefore you will have no one to determine boundaries by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

So, it is God who passes judgment on the people by confiscating everything. The coming destruction was to be a thorough one, complete ruin.

As might be predicted, Micah's preaching triggered opposition just as Amos' preaching did in the northern kingdom. We would expect opposition from the greedy rulers that Amos and Micah were denouncing but that was not the original source here. Instead, the religious leaders spoke up to defend their rulers and denounce God's spokesman. They had been working hand-in-glove with the wealthy and had benefited from this association. So they too were guilty and they lashed out against God's prophets' honesty.

For example, Amos was oppressed by Amaziah, the priest of the cult city of Bethel. Amaziah regarded Amos' words as treason and wrote to King Jeroboam accusing the prophet of attempting to raise a conspiracy against him. We have no record that Jeroboam even took notice of Amos or Amaziah. Amaziah then was in direct rebellion and contradiction against God. Amos pronounced a terrible judgment against Amaziah. His sons and daughters would be killed in the invasion, his wife would become a prostitute in the city, and he would die in exile in a foreign land. Amaziah had told Amos in Amos 7:16, "Do not prophesy against Israel and stop preaching against the house of Isaac." The prophets of Judah were now telling Micah the very same thing. Do not prophesy. Stop your senseless babbling.

Micah 2:6-7 "Do not prattle" [that is, babble], you say to those who prophesy. So they shall not prophesy to you; they shall not return insult for insult. You who are named the house of Jacob: "Is

the Spirit of God restricted? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly?"

False prophets diabolically called into question God's pronouncement by an appeal to oppose, in their mind, the character of God. They claimed that God could not have said what He in fact did say because the Spirit of the Lord does not get angry and does not do such things. But He does. And that is the point here. The false prophets were prophesying the opposite character of God to what the true character was. The false prophets insisted that God would not judge His people because it was against His nature. In verses 7 and 8, God answered them. He acknowledged that He did indeed do good to those whose ways were upright. But that lately His people had risen like an enemy against Him.

Micah 2:8-9 "Lately My people have risen up as an enemy—you pull off the robe with the garment from those who trust you, as they pass by, like men returned from war. The women of My people you cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children you have taken away My glory forever."

They had become God's enemy by their treatment of other people. That is important here, the major point of what Micah is getting at. They had become God's enemy because of their treatment of other people. They were so hardened in their sin that they treated men, women, and children alike, exploiting them all. They robbed men of their clothes, women of their homes, and children of their inheritance. Was God not right to send judgment against such wicked individuals?

We can make a serious mistake in thinking that we have one relationship with God and a totally different relationship with other people. God declares that this is impossible. If we make others our enemies, we make God our enemy too. If we treat others with contempt, we have done the same thing to Jesus Christ. This is the principle Jesus enunciated so clearly in His sermon on the Mount of Olives. He told of people who had fed the hungry, given water to the thirsty, taking in strangers, clothe the naked, cared for the sick, and visited those in prison. And when the righteous appear before Christ, they will learn that they had been feeding and clothing and caring for Christ all that time. He told them,

Matthew 25:40 "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus warns that there were those who had turned their backs on the hungry, did not share their water with the thirsty, did not welcome strangers, did not clothe the naked, did not tend the sick, and did not visit the ones who were in prison. When they protested that they had never seen the Lord in any of these conditions, He replied,

Matthew 25:45 "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me."

Let us flip back to Micah, if you are not already there. The people of Israel and Judah applauded preaching that exonerated gluttony and greed rather than God's judgment of unethical and immoral behavior.

Micah 2:10-11 "Arise and depart, this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy, yes, with utter destruction. If a man should walk in a false spirit and speak a lie, saying, 'I will prophesy to you of wine and drink,' even he would be the prattler [or the babbler] of this people."

Canaan was mentioned to be a resting place for God's people. It is referred to this way in Deuteronomy 12:9 and Psalm 95:11. But those who had ruined it by taking away the rest others should have enjoyed, are now to suffer the restlessness themselves. Widespread injustice has denied rest to others and so the Lord demands that the people leave their place of rest. They are to be driven out of Judah to become exiles in a foreign land.

Micah makes one last point, a throwback to the false prophets. The people of Judah would not listen to true prophets. What prophecies will they listen to, he asks. The only prophet fit for them is one who foretells an abundance of alcohol because this is what the people want, oblivion until disaster comes. They do not want to think about the future. They just want to have fun. People want to eat, drink, and be merry even while the nation degenerates and collapses religiously, morally, educationally, medically, mentally, economically, politically, and militarily. Every aspect of society and of

government is being affected by the sins of the people, especially by the leaders.

Today it is much the same as the decadence of ancient Israel and Judah. We live in an evil world in which the innocent *do* suffer for the sins of the wicked. According to Exodus 20:5, "the sins of fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation." But what we see today is not the whole reality nor is our history the end of all times.

Let us begin to wrap this up. The first important section of Micah ends with chapter 2, which is now rounded off with a message of hope for a better day. This is common in the Minor Prophets, as I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon. No matter how absolute their messages of judgment, they always seem to end with a balancing note of promise. Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah all end this way.

Now, we are not ending the book, but we are ending this section of the book, and that is how Micah is doing it. The change of tone between Micah 1:1 all the way through to chapter 2, verse 11 has one tone. And Micah 2:12-13 as an extremely different tone. Micah has pronounced a judgment on those who have exploited the poor of the land. The city will fall. They will go into exile. This is just.

But what of the poor whom they have exploited? If the city falls and the wicked are punished, will not the poor be punished also? Will the innocent not suffer with the guilty? Micah seems to say that they will, but he has good news for them too, because for the remnant of the upright, there will be a restoration.

Micah 2:12-13 "I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; and they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. [this remnant is very large, extremely large] The one who breaks open will come up before them; and they will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the Lord at their head."

The first main section, that is, chapters 1 and 2 of Micah, ends with the Shepherd of Israel gathering His sheep into the protective fold and leading them out as their triumphant King. Micah's perspective of hope extends beyond a mere restoration from captivity, to God's glorious Kingdom on earth. It is then that Israel's hope will be finally, consummately realized.

The One who rules the future is coming. The King of kings will reign. So, regardless of the present, the way is bright for those who faithfully wait patiently for the coming of the Lord and His Kingdom.