

The Minor Prophets #14

Micah

by: Ronald L. Dart

It's a small wonder that people have a hard time understanding Biblical prophets. The truth is unless you know something about the situation on the ground when they wrote; you're just left with to come up with your own interpretation. If you think the symbolism of a fox or a flying fiery dragon means this, well hey, your interpretation is as good as mine lets go with it. But when you take the trouble to paint in the background a lot of things become a lot clearer and you're not nearly so likely to go off on the wrong tangent. It's very, easy though to become confused when you're reading the historical books of the Bible.

One wonders for example how many casual readers understand the difference between the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The truly great stories of the Bible all come from the period when Israel was united under one king, first Saul then David then Solomon but after the death of Solomon the kingdom was divided, the house of Israel in the north their capital in Samaria and the house of Judah in the south their capital in Jerusalem. They continued for many years after this, about 240 years, I think, for the house of Israel in the north, and nearly 400 years for Judah in the south.

The history of the house of Judah was a story with a lot of ups and downs, but the story of the house of Israel was a tragedy from day one. The tragedy basically was precipitated by the acts of one man. His name was Jeroboam his dad was Nebat and he is mentioned again and again through the book of Kings. Jeroboam and the kings that followed him continue in his sins and his sins that he brought on all of Israel and if you didn't read or don't know you can easily get lost.

What happened was there came a day that Jeroboam got worried, first of all the kingdom had been handed to him on a silver platter by God. He's now king of all the house of Israel and Samaria but he couldn't sleep and he was worried. He was fretful and thought I know what's going to happen to me, the law of God and the worship of Jehovah requires a person to go to Jerusalem three times a year to worship God at the temple.

I know what's going to happen once my people start going down there to worship their hearts are going to turn again to the king of the house of Judah, they'll kill me and put the nation back together again. So, here's what I'm going to do, I'll set up two alternate centers of worship, one in Bethel the other in Dan. We'll set up golden calves for the people, idols for the people, we'll tell them, aah, it's too much to go to Jerusalem you don't need to go all the way down there. We have these places where you can worship up here. Now at the

same time, he basically, either altered the calendar or else he abandon it entirely and set up a whole new series of festival.

Hosea when he talks about them he'll called them your feasts as opposed to God's feasts, they had definitely made some significant changes there. And the result of this was a complete abandonment of the worship of the true God in favor primarily of the dominant God of the region, his name was Baal. It was corruption from the first day they began and it had no chance. There was nothing good and it was downhill all the way from when Jeroboam made that terrible mistake and imposed it on Israel. Thereafter you find king after king departed not from the sins of Jeroboam who did sin and who caused all Israel to sin.

Now if you're reading this through the book of Kings, 1st and 2nd Kings, it's very easy. It goes back and forth between, here's a king of Judah here's a king of Israel, here's a king of Judah here's a king of Israel. You almost have to, if you're going to study it seriously, get yourself a yellow pad and start diagramming, who's who and where they are, otherwise it's not at all clear who they're talking about in some occasions.

Salted into this time period are the writings of a small group of prophets, very important prophets, these were men who went down and spoke in the public square. Now thankfully they also wrote down what God told them and it rings down through the ages like a warning for every generation of man. The first of these men to finally write down his words seem to have been Amos the prophet.

He was not the first of the great prophets that really was Elijah but it appears that Elijah's works were entirely oral and so was that of Elisha, who had a double portion of Elijah spirit and went on with his ministries after that. We only know what Elijah and Elisha did and said from the testimony of witness who did write what they did. Then there came the writing prophets, first Amos then Hosea followed closely by the great Isaiah all falling in this same time period.

The prophet Micah who was the third of the Minor Prophets to put pen to paper seems to have lived in Jerusalem when he wrote. He was active for a long time perhaps as long as 50 years which raises an interesting point, you'll see it if you've read Jeremiah and I think it has to be true also of Isaiah. All of these prophets seem to have been quite young when they began their work and when you think about it they would have had to be in order for them to have worked for 50 years as a prophet. I remember that Jeremiah and when he was talking to God about what God was sending him out to say he said: **Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.** I don't even know how to go out or come in why are you sending me to do this job? I think a couple of reasons probably, one is the young have the energy they have the drive they have the stamina and they can handle some of the things the prophets are going to be put through. The work of the prophets in the Old Testament was a hard one and by starting young it gave them a lot of years to build a reputation so as they became old prophets there were a better chance that someone, somewhere might listen to what they said. So in their lifetime they became well known figures and their names endure

in our Bible to this day. They lived in good times and in times of danger at the time Micah was writing both Israel and Judah were prosperous and powerful but a greater power was looming on the eastern horizon. Assyria with its capital at Nineveh was beginning to develop an empire, and while Assyria was growing more and more powerful, Israel and Judah were in a serious moral decline so it's worth noting what the prophet said to them.

There are times when the prophets seem to be reading our newspapers, the parallel between that society and ours are so very strong. Why do you suppose they wrote this stuff down? Elijah didn't. It may be that the Holy Spirit moved them to write for the very reason that the apostle Paul stated in his letter to the Corinthians. 1st Corinthians 10 Verse 11: **Now all these things happened to them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

That's a remarkable statement; he said all this stuff that happened back there happened for examples to the people upon whom the ends of the world are come. There is of a great danger that we will tend to think this is all about those people and well we're just fine. We don't need to pay any attention to what happen to those people, lest he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. So Paul clearly thought that the Old Testament was relevant even to the ends of the age. So what was it that the prophets had to say that we can learn from?

Micah 1 Verse 1: from the New International Version. **The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Morasthite during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.**

Now when you hear that a lot of people read that and think, oh that's just about those old places back then. I don't need to read that and it doesn't apply to me. He said this is what the visions about and then he goes on to say this.

Hear old peoples all of you, listen O earth and all who are in it so that the sovereign LORD may witness against you the LORD from his holy temple.

So the prophecy is deliberately not only for Judah and Israel to hear, it's a warning for the whole earth. Which I suppose explains why it needed to be written down, and one then can assume that it's intended not only for all people, but for all time. If we're going to be talking about the earth and everybody in it that's us here we are planet earth and we're still here. And this is what God has to witness against us, look he would have said, because this is what I'm saying this is for all people for all time.

Verse 3: **Look the LORD is coming from his dwelling place, he comes down and treads the high places of the earth, the mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope,** like some terrible huge volcanic eruption, this is pretty sobering and very much apocalyptic.

It sounds like we've gone clean back to the book of Revelations, here's God coming down putting his feet on the earth. In fact we're told that when Jesus comes back, he's coming back to the place he left, The Mount of Olives. When he returns the mountain will split in two north and south, the water will flow out in two different directions from the Mount of Olives. The illusion here finds expression in the return of Christ, so why shouldn't we just look at this as for all people for all time? Listen carefully to what he has to say.

Then he says **all this is because of Jacob's transgressions, because of the sins of the house of Israel.**

Now you might stop and ask yourself, wait a minute, ah is this really about Judah, about Samaria and Israel and all that stuff, why is it being spoken to all people in the world?

Well it's this way, God commissioned Abraham and later Moses and Israel and Judah, to be a blessing in the earth. That in fact points in their world at that time and they were what kept the world out of chaos, King David for example; there came a point in time that things were getting so bad he went into what is now Iraq, and he was the first king ever to disarm Iraq. The Assyrian headquarter in Damascus thought that well the Iraqis need our help, and they came charging out of their readouts to take battle against David . He whipped all of them, put garrison in Assyria as well and made them pay tribute to pay his expenses. So you begin to see that Israel's task of old was to maintain some kind of an order in a world that would descend into chaos if they did not.

Do you ever look around yourself in modern history and wonder at the role of the English speaking people of the world and how we have stood again and again as a bulwark against the world collapsing into utter and complete chaos. In fact in Micah's days it was becoming unstuck because of the failures of the house of Israel and the failures of the house of Judah. I suppose we can look at the same thing happening sometime in our future when everything begins to come unstuck at the end time. When our failure to maintain our moral integrity to maintain our position of leadership in the world our position of being that one people who can come and help and rescue when there's a tsunami, tidal wave or a volcano, an earthquake we're a blessing to the world of being there. We are the people who helped conquer an entire continent and it's us who go in and defeat them and destroy them. Well, you know when you fail to carry the burden that God has placed upon you; it's not just you that suffers its everybody.

So he said, **what's this all about, well I'm going to make Samaria a heap of rubble, it's going to become a place you plant vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley, I will lay bare her foundations, all her idols will be broken to pieces, all her temple gifts will be burned with fire, I will destroy all her images and since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used.**

Now that's really an odd expression, I'm not exactly sure how to take it but there is one thing I do take away from it. This is not just figurative language because the worship of Baal did involve cult prostitution. I've pointed this out before how that little boys and little girls were sold into these temples to be used and abused as temple prostitutes. It wasn't as though an adult woman who thought well I need a little money, I'll just go down to the temple and earn it as a temple prostitute. No, these people were temple slaves, sex slaves and it's quite literal. It's all a part of the worship of Baal in this part of the world, so consequently this imagery just keeps cropping up.

It came up in Hosea and here it is again in Micah, **because of this he said I will weep and wail**, now Micah is responding to what's coming, **I'm going to will weep and wail, I'll go about barefoot and naked, I'll howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.**

You know this isn't just a preacher just walking across the stage holding his Bible up with the leaves flapping in the breeze. This is a man who in vision has seen what's coming and it is so bad that he weeps he wails, he howls like a jackal and moans like an owl.

Jerusalem and **Samaria womb is incurable, it's come to Judah it's reached to the very gate of my people even to Jerusalem itself. Don't tell the story in Gaft, don't weep at all and Beth Aphrah roll in the dust, pass on in nakedness and shame you who live in Saphir, those who live in Zaanan will not come out, Bethazel is in mourning it's protection has taken away. Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain waiting for relief because disaster has come from the LORD even to the gate of Jerusalem. And you who live in Lachish harness the team to the chariot you were the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion for the transgressions of Israel were found in you.**

What he is saying is this Lachish, a little bit north of Jerusalem if my memory serves, actually had bought the kind of worship that was going on in the house of Israel.

And so it went, **therefore you will give parting gifts to Moreshethgath, the towns of Achzib will prove to be deceptive to the kings of Israel. I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah, he who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam, shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you do delight, make yourselves bald as the vulture for they will go from you into exile.**

All these little towns were taken captive by the Assyrian they were stripped naked and marched off into exile. Some 200 thousand plus people were carried away in this invasion. The Assyrian were the Nazi of their day, they were piker compared to Hitler's gang because Hitler had a technology to move bodies of people around that they didn't have but the spirit, the evil was the same.

Micah Chapter 2: **Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds, at morning light they carry it out because it's in their power to do it. They covet**

fields and seize them, houses and take them, they defraud a man of his home, a fellow man of his inheritance.

Now you know I have a hard time with that, here is a guy who's lying awake at night and plotting evil in his bed, he can't even sleep at night because he's got so many things on his mind that he's plotting to do. He wakes in the morning he gets out and he does it, why does he do it, because he can. You know the fact that I got the power to do something, and that's why I am doing it, is evil of itself. This whole thing is uncanny, these people covet fields and seize them, houses and take them and defraud a man of his home.

You know when the founders of this country laid out our constitution they considered this type of tyranny which happen in Europe all too commonly. So they included a constitutional provision against this very thing Micah is railing about, it's the 5th amendment, the takings clause. Private property shall not be taken for a public use without just compensation, it's also worth noting the motives of these guys, and they do it because they can. Now here we are in a situation where people are going out there using eminent domain and abusing eminent domain. Taking people homes away from them and what's really tragic about this is that in some cases what they're doing is moving these people out. They're going to destroy their homes so they can put in homes that will bring in a much larger tax base for the people, I mean for the community. They'll be very attractive they'll put in shopping centers, malls and all this kind of stuff and here's the thing you need to understand. When the constitution was written requiring them to be given just compensation for that, they didn't have in mind you're giving compensation at today's market value, if you're going to take their home away from them you need to give them some privileges or some rights in the future value of that property. Now if the courts would require that we might have a very different picture. Here they were back in their day doing exactly what the Supreme Court now allows people to do in our generation, take peoples home away from them. Why? Is it something they have to do, No, is it because they have to build a highway through here, No, is it because they need to put a bridge across the river, No, it's usually because of economic development that they got to do this sort of thing.

So God said I am planning disaster against these people from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly because it will be a time of calamity, in that day men will reticule you, they will taunt you with this mournful song we are utterly ruined my peoples possession is divided up, he takes it from me he assign our fields to traitors.

Can you imagine anything worse than taking away a man's home and giving it to a treasonous person?

Therefore you'll have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot. Do not prophesy their prophets say, don't prophesy about these thing disgrace will not overtake us.

What's he saying? What Micah's telling us right here is, that their prophets; the prophets of Baal their own prophets that the king have set up said to him, don't you tell us this type of thing, don't prophesy about these things, there's no one no disgrace that's going to overtake us.

Should it be said **oh house of Jacob is the spirit of the LORD angry, does he do such things? Do not my words do good to him who ways are upright?**

I don't know exactly if they got the translation just right but I think what Micah here is saying is Hey there is nothing wrong in what I'm telling you. My words do good to him whose ways are upright, if you're living a righteous life why in the world would you mind what I have to say. **Lately my people have risen up like an enemy.** So tragic. We'll go on next time.

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