

The Minor Prophets #16

Micah

by: Ronald L. Dart

Reading the Biblical prophets with understanding is no easy task at best, but when you try to do it without knowledge of the history behind it may become hopeless. For one thing there are parts of prophecies that have to do with the distant future and then and more distant future other parts deal with the prophet's own day. How can you tell which is which, well the place to start is with the past. The Prophet Micah for example tells us with some precision when he worked he listed the kings who were reigning at the time. You can open your Bible up and page back through and find the names of these kings if you got one of these Bibles that have marginal reference it would probably take you right to them from Micah's introduction. You can read that section from the book of Kings and get a feeling of the sequence of events. What the country was like the people were like and what was going on at that time. Now it's essential background to have that and it was Isaiah that gave me the first real solid clue it was so.

In Isaiah 41 Verse 21: he says this. **Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen. Alright that's what we want to know. Let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things for to come.**

Well that's what we want to know, what's going to happen and if you're going to understand what's going to happen you have to first go back and see what has happened before. There's still another mistake you can make as you read the prophets you can attempt a literal interpretation of the future. The prophets don't do that they use figurative language, poetic structure and imagery and their prophecies are not laid out in a linear form where you always know where you are and where you're going.

In a sense you have to feel the prophets you have to take them as a whole as a work of art, you have to let them speak to us. Each of us bring something of ourselves to our reading of the Bible and the spirit that inspired the prophets can open your heart and mind to grasp what is there as easily as mine. You kind of need to relax a little bit and take a little time you have to be willing to think about what you're reading and to allow it to kind of flow over you as you feel or experience what the prophet is saying.

Micah is a classic example of that just as you have him settled into historical context you know right where he is, who the kings were and what's going on. Suddenly you find

yourself in a totally different place in time. As Micah was writing Assyria was rising as a power in the world, Israel is prosperous and powerful but Israel is corrupt and they will in time fall to the Assyrian. Judah did not but the house of Israel did fall to the Assyrian but then something happens in this prophecy.

It's in the 5th Chapter Verse 1: **Marshall your troop's O city of troops for a siege is laid against us they will strike Israel ruler on the cheek with a rod.** Then it says. **but you Bethlehem Ephratah though you are small among the clans of Judah out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel who's origins are from old from ancient times.**

Now you don't have to be a Bible scholar to know that you suddenly have been thrust forwards hundreds of years to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. If you didn't know it you certainly would realize it when the Gospel writers tell you that's precisely what this scripture is about. So now we're looking at one that is to be born in Bethlehem but whose origins were from old from ancient times, so when Micah wrote these words he's looking for one to be born who is older than that. How old, well his terminology doesn't really give us that much of a clue, but Jesus origins are from before the creations of the world at least and in fact never really had any origins.

Therefore Israel will be abandon until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brother's return to join the Israelites.

Now I don't know exactly what that means but the imaginary coming to me from this is of one who is to be born of Mary who was in labor to give birth, of Israel in fact who was in labor to give birth to the Messiah the one who would save them and who would be born in Bethlehem. So that Micah is reaching way down through the future to the birth of the Messiah and even beyond.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God and they will live securely for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth and he will be their peace. When the Assyrian invades our lands and marches through our fortress we will raise against him seven shepherds' even eight leaders of men. And they will rule the land of Assyria with a sword and the land of Nimrod with drawn swords. He will deliver us from the Assyrians when he invades our lands and marches to our borders.

Now here's what's strange about this, when the Assyrians invaded their land, that is the land of Israel the house of Israel in the north, nobody stopped him. He did go down and besiege Jerusalem but he was not able to take the city. And so when you look at this and wonder what exactly we are looking at, we see one who is to be born in Bethlehem, who origins are from ancient times, who destiny is to be a ruler over all of Israel. And then we look at ruling over the land of Assyria with the sword how in the world does that work.

Well commentators note, that they know the problem that Assyria present here, Zachariah will be prophesying for example long after Assyria cease even to exist and still speaks of them as factors in the future now how on earth is that possible. The solution the commentator offer is that Assyria is typical, it is symbolic of the broad range of all the enemies of Israel. In a way this is what I was driving at when I said, if you try to, in detail, predict these things out of the future from the prophecy you tend to miss things, if you do it literally because too often something will be picked up and used as an icon.

Right now the territory of old Assyria and Nineveh its capital is in the far northeast corner of Iraq, where the Tigris River enters the lowlands of Iraq. It isn't hard to imagine enemies of Israel arising from this geographical area but it is a little difficult to imagine how Israel will manage to conquer and rule that part of the world. It would certainly seem that is something far into the future of Micah and even far into the future of Jesus when he walked on this earth and well into the future from where we are right now.

Micah 5 Verse 7: The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many people like dew from the LORD, like the showers on the grass, which do not wait for man nor linger for mankind. What a strange image this is, basically he's saying they'll be everywhere but they won't stay. You know dew from the LORD on the grass is gone as soon as the sun gets up. **The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flock of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue. Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed.**

This is really curious because it's hard to put your finger on anything in history that would compare with this. The remnant of Jacob, when you understand the concept of a remnant as it's presented to us in all the prophets. This is the people that are left after the destruction that precedes their captivity.

In one case in Ezekiel the comparison is made of thirds, one third of the people are going to die by famine, another third by pestilence, and another third by the sword. All that there is, is a tiny remnant that is left to go into captivity and the sword follow them where they go. Now Micah is telling us, that remnant will be scattered all over the place in the midst of many peoples. The logical comparison of it is the Jews who are everywhere in the world among all the population of people and for the longest period they lasted out there and survived without having a home land per se, now there is a Jewish homeland but still the Jews are everywhere. I don't know if that's what Micah is talking about or not but it is a comparison to what he's talking about. Then he looks forward in time to some kind of a triumph.

In Verse 10: **"In that day," declares the LORD, I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots.** Because of the context of this I'm thinking and I'm quite certain that this verse, in that day I will destroy your horses is directed at the gentiles not at Israel. I will demolish your chariots.

I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells. I will destroy your carved images and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles and demolish your cities. I will take vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations that have not obeyed me.”

Note that well it's the nations not merrily Israel and a reminder about icons in prophecy, mountains and hills in this context are icons for gentile nations large and small.

Micah 6 Verse 1: Listen to what the LORD says: “Stand up, plead your case before the mountains:” let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD’s accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

OK God calls the whole world as his witness, all the mountains, the hills, the nations and all the small nations; I got a charge I'm going to charge against Israel. And he turns and speaks to Israel,

“My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD” now, with what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? You do understand that's precisely what the Gentile nations did. They often offered in human sacrifice their first born babies as a sacrifice to their Gods.

Verse 8: He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? Now I suppose that is a question a lot of us might like to have an answer to. What is good, what does God want from me? Well here's the answer, **to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.** You know that's not climb every mountain fiord every stream, just do justly, fairly, truthfully with people, love mercy and walk in humility with your God. **Listen! The LORD is calling to the city and to fear your name is wisdom. “Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.” Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed?** Now what in the world would that mean?

He said to Israel am I just supposed to forget about how you got yourself as rich as you are? You cheated, do you think I **Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a**

bag of false weights? He weights out whatever it is he's trying to sell you and puts his own weight on the scales and it's false. **Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.** Good grief, he could be writing, about us. **Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins.**

What sins, well the violence, the lies, the deceit, I mean it's a way of life among our people, you can no longer trust journalism in this country. The newspaper lie, the televisions lie, the politicians lie, where are the people who will not, at whatever the cost, lie to us.

He said **you will eat and you will not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You'll store stuff up and you won't save anything, because what you save I'll give to the sword. You will plant you will not harvest; you will press olives but you will not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes and you will never drink the wine. You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab's house, and you have followed their traditions.**

I guess this is a point where you would need to go back to the book of kings and read what Omri and Ahab's house had done. The Bible because it's a family book does not tell you with precision exactly what these men did but through history through archeology we know what was involved. In their land and in their time little boy and little girls were sold into temple slavery to serve as temple prostitutes and children were sacrificed to their Gods.

If you really want to know how bad all of this was read the story of Elijah and the priest of Baal on Mount Carmel because once they had no success with the offering and whatnot. Elijah called down fire from heaven and all the people said the Lord he is God, the Lord he is God and Elijah took everyone of those priest of Baal down to the brook and killed them to a man. Why? Because they were evil to the core and they should not have been allowed to live. The disturbing thing about this prophecy is it fits our society just all too well and history does repeat itself in spite of everything.

Micah 7 Verse 1: What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.

It's interesting anybody who wants to be a prophet is a fool because here's Micah speaking out of his heart and he says; what misery is mine I'm not happy here the message I have is nothing like a cluster of grapes to enjoy.

The godly have been swept from the land, not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire, they all conspire together.

Candidly sometimes you look around at our own society and you begin to wonder where in the world we are going. Yea there are still upright men here and there in the land but the climate is deteriorating as we go. It came to a place for Micah and he said, **the best of them is like a brier, the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion.** Then he says something that's truly disturbing.

Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law a man's enemies are the members of his own household.

You know these words echo down through time even in the word of Jesus and he's looking for a time when free speech no longer means a thing, you got to be careful in what you say even to your closest friend.

Micah says, **but as for me, I watch in hope for the lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me. Don't gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Thought I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness. Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" my eyes will see her downfall, even now she will be trampled underfoot like the mire in the streets.** Which in itself by the way kind of sound a little bit like happened to Ahab wife Jezebel. **The day for building your wall will come, the day for extending your boundaries. In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.**

What on earth is he talking about here? He talking about a time when Israel under Christ will be established and everyone in the world will be looking to her.

The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds. Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago. As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake; they will be so low like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you. You know this is way off in our future today much less anything from Micah's day. **Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and**

hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.

Thus ends the book of Micah on a positive note but a thought occurred to me as I worked my way through this prophecy. I think the day is coming and it's not far off, when to speak of the sins of our own people will be considered a hate crime. Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are I think becoming threatened, for example there are those who even now are trying to make it a hate crime to even read the scripture that condemned homosexual behavior. I believe I've heard that in Canada that time is already here.

It's only a small step from that to make it a crime to condemn adultery because you are after all condemning, what certainly is far more than half the population. To condemn fornication which gets possibly the other half of the population and then to condemn abortion, abortion will not only be no crime it will also be no sin we may not even be allowed to speak of it. This is what I think we may be looking at when the prophets speak of a time coming when there is a famine of the hearing of the word. It won't be because no one is willing to speak; it will be because of a government not letting them hear.

This article was transcribed with minor editing from a message given by
Ronald L. Dart titled: "The Minor Prophets #16" (MP16) 5/31/07
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