



[Leader Note: PowerPoint presentation slides are noted along the way.]

[Slide 1] Today is the first of three messages on the book of Micah; one of the twelve books that make up what we call the minor prophets. Minor doesn't suggest that these prophets are less important, only that their books are shorter. Micah is only a handful of pages long.

[Slide 2] We don't know much about the prophet Micah; he's not really mentioned anywhere else. He lived during the time of the divided kingdom, where following the reign of Solomon, the Israelites had fractured into two nations, Israel in the North, Judah in the South.

This map of the divided kingdom highlights where different prophets were from; you can see Micah's town, Moresheth-Gath, highlighted down in the lower left, in Judah. It was a small nation; he lived only about 25 miles from the Jerusalem.

There was a lot of tension between Israel and Judah. The kings in Israel had wandered away from God; they were worshiping other gods and had put pagan idols in the temple. Judah did a little better; they had some good kings, but they had a lot of bad ones who ignored God as well.

[Slide 3] There are a few things that we know about Micah; **he seemed to have been educated**. Even though his book is short, he wrote in several different styles. He knew different audiences and regions would need to be communicated to in different ways and (apparently) he had the education to do so. **He was a prophet for decades**, spanning the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

We know approximately when the book of Micah was completed; it's a collection of his prophecies put together over time. It was finished around 700 or 710 BC, which means it is at least 2700 years old.

**Micah had a great concern for the poor.** This series is called "The Poor Man's Prophet"; Micah wasn't just speaking to the poor, he was speaking to everyone and advocating for the poor. For the time period, this was considered **deviant theology**. It was, and is, godly to advocate for the

poor, but it was deviant to the people at the time because their assumption was that if you were wealthy, it was because you had done something right and God was blessing you. Therefore, if you were poor, which described about 85-90% of the people, it was because you or your ancestors had sinned in some way and God was punishing you. The wealthy would use this belief to justify not helping the poor; after all, it must have been God's will that they are suffering and starving.

Throughout Scripture, God communicates a deep concern for the poor, the downtrodden, and the abused. Scripture communicates that God has blessed the rich so they are able to help those in need. There is a shocking example of God's concern for the poor found in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. People tend to say that God destroyed them over sexual sin, but in Ezekiel 16:49, we find the one place where Sodom's sins were clearly spelled out:

[Slide 4] *Ezekiel 16:49 (NLT) Sodom's sins were pride, gluttony, and laziness, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door.*

Sodom's biggest sin was ignoring the poor and needy. God goes on to say in *Ezekiel 16:50, "So I wiped her out" (NLT)*. So, while Micah addressed this topic more thoroughly than most, it is a concern of God's that shows up throughout Scripture.

[Slide 5] Micah is essentially **three sets of prophecies**. The pattern for each is moving from **doom to hope**, with three themes repeated throughout the book: **judgment, restoration, and justice**.

Today, we're going to look at the first set of prophecies: chapters one and two. We don't have time to look at every verse, but here's the big picture outline:

[Slide 6] **Outline of Micah 1-2**

1. God's people are toast (1:2-16)
  - a) Going to toast Judah just like He toasted Israel (1:2-7)
  - b) It's super sad, because it's going to be really bad (1:8-16)
2. Here's why they're toast (2:1-11)
  - a) The rich people are mean (2:1-5)
  - b) They're ignoring God (2:6-11)
3. A few won't get toasted (2:12-13)

The people of Judah would have been stunned at the idea that they would be judged like Israel had been. From their perspective, Israel deserved it for following pagan gods, while Judah still claimed to follow God. The idea that they were guilty of that level of sin would have been a shock to them, but it was the truth. So, let's dive into it and see exactly what Micah had to say to them.

Each of the three prophecies start with the word, "attention." Some Bibles translate it as "hear." Micah is formally calling their attention to what he's about to say.

**[Slide 7] Micah 1:2-9 (NLT) <sup>2</sup> Attention! Let all the people of the world listen!** This is fascinating; he was speaking to the people of Judah, but his message is for the world. We all can learn from the mistakes they have made.

***Let the earth and everything in it hear. The Sovereign Lord is making accusations against you; the Lord speaks from his holy Temple. <sup>3</sup> Look! The Lord is coming! He leaves his throne in heaven and tramples the heights of the earth. <sup>4</sup> The mountains melt beneath his feet and flow into the valleys like wax in a fire, like water pouring down a hill. <sup>5</sup> And why is this happening? Because of the [Slide 8] rebellion of Israel—yes, the sins of the whole nation. Who is to blame for Israel's rebellion? Samaria, its capital city!***

Up to this point, the people listening to him were thinking, this is awesome; God is coming. They are looking forward to the day God will return and give them the full Promised Land, and the prestige and status they once had. They were excited because they thought this might be it. And the stuff about Israel just made sense; Judah knew Israel is messed up. But then, Micah takes a shocking turn:

***Where is the center of idolatry in Judah? In Jerusalem, its capital!***

Jerusalem was the capital of Judah; it was home to the temple, and the people of Judah claimed to still be following God. While Israel had been blatant in how they stopped following God, Judah was more subtle in their sin. They may not have had pagan idols, but Micah revealed that they made money, power, and possessions their idols. So much so, in fact, that they would trample over anyone to build their wealth and power – even

their own people. God, through Micah, called them out, revealing that their sin was just as heinous as the Israelites in the North.

*<sup>6</sup> “So I, the Lord, will make the city of Samaria a heap of ruins. Her streets will be plowed up for planting vineyards. I will roll the stones of her walls into the valley below, exposing her foundations. <sup>7</sup> All her carved images will be smashed. All her sacred treasures [Slide 9] will be burned. These things were bought with the money earned by her prostitution, and they will now be carried away to pay prostitutes elsewhere.”*

This comment on prostitution wasn't a metaphor. Pagan religions involved prostitution at their temples. God promised Judah that everything would be destroyed and all the wealth taken by a conquering enemy, the same way that it happened to Israel. In a way, the Jews had been relying on God's promise that they would be a nation as almost a “get out of jail free” card; but that covenant was not a good luck charm and God promised judgement if they didn't follow Him.

In verse eight, Micah began what is called a lament. This was a common practice. So, when he said,

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore, I will mourn and lament. I will walk around barefoot and naked.* He's not literally naked; the practice was to be in a loin cloth.

*I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.*

A funny bit of trivia; they recently realized the Hebrew word translated to “owl” in verse 8 was a mistake – it should actually be translated “ostrich!” Ever hear a moaning ostrich? Neither have I. The practice 2700 years ago was that when you were grieving over a huge loss, you would go barefoot, wear fewer clothes, and weep loudly to symbolize brokenness and the depth of your pain. Micah is using the loudest animals he can think of to communicate tremendous agony.

*<sup>9</sup> For my people's wound is too deep to heal. It has reached into Judah, even to the gates of Jerusalem.*

The news was bad; it was too late to avoid judgment. In verse 16, at the end of this lament we read,

[Slide 10] <sup>16</sup> *Oh, people of Judah, shave your heads in sorrow, for the children you love will be snatched away. Make yourselves as bald as a vulture, for your little ones will be exiled to distant lands.*

This is a call to repentance; it is a little hint of hope. Micah wasn't just putting on a big show, he was genuinely lamenting and inviting the people to join him in this lament. He was saying, "We all need to recognize how far away we've fallen from God because maybe we can stop this train." Which gets us to chapter two.

One of the things to notice is that there were a lot of false prophets. They were telling the people what they wanted to hear: that God was blessing them, that they were wealthy because God wanted them to be, and they were okay to take advantage of the poor to steal their food, land, and income because it was God's judgment on the poor.

For us today, moving and changing locations is a common thing. There isn't the same sense of family identity tied up in a specific property. In ancient times, there was a deep family connection to their land; it was passed from generation to generation. Family land would provide their status, their influence and identity in the community. The wealthy had taken advantage of the hard times by robbing these people of their family lands, ruining that family's status, influence, and voice they had in the community. The false prophets were telling the wealthy and powerful what they wanted to hear. When Micah opposed them, the wealthy chose to listen to the false prophets.

I read this passage and wonder how they could rationalize the idea that God would want them to rob the poor. Then I thought about reality TV. Have you seen some of the awful American Idol auditions? I feel so bad for the people as they get ripped to shreds. And they're genuinely shocked! How could they be so blind to the reality? Did you know that by the time someone appears in front of a Simon Cowell, they have gone through months of interviews and further auditions? Each step of the way, producers are telling them they are amazing, their story is one America needs to hear, their voice is powerful – it's exactly what they want to hear. So, they believe it in spite of all the evidence to the contrary until the show finally gets what it wants: a horrible audition it can use to get a laugh. How do these people not know their voices aren't good enough? Because they listen to the wrong people.