

Lessons from Micah

he prophet Micah ministered in one of the darkest periods of Israel's history. The country long had been divided into two kingdoms. Finally, Assyria put an end to the northern kingdom, and Micah could see evil and violence creeping into Judah in the south. He preached against the fatal sins of dishonesty, injustice, bribery, and mistrust. Micah was the first biblical prophet to predict the destruction of Jerusalem (Mic. 3:12).

Yet, through divine inspiration, the prophet saw light in this dark time. With the help of God's perspective, he looked beyond the coming punishment. Micah offered encouraging words and said that the Lord's anointed Leader would come from Bethlehem. The Messiah would be the leader who would save Israel and speak peace to the nations by teaching them to "beat their swords into plowshares" (Mic. 4:3). God's rebuke would be the channel of restoration and ultimate blessings.

Agony of the Prophet's Heart

In Micah 1:1-9, the prophet invites the whole earth to witness God's judgment against sinful people. The capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out because their leaders failed to be role models of what it means to follow God with undivided hearts. These two cities would be the first to suffer destruction.

The thought of destructive judgment produced a real tension in Micah's life. Because his prophetic call united him with God's purpose, he had no choice but to announce what was coming in the near future. But the prophet also loved the people to whom he belonged, and the idea of their captivity drove him to personal lament. Oftentimes bad news had the most devastating effect on the mind and the body of the prophet.

What do the follow texts teach about the hard lot of the prophets? Num. 11:10-15, 1 Kings 19:14, Jer. 8:21-9:2, Ezek. 24:15-18, 2 Cor. 11:23-27.

God's prophets were involved very much in the messages that they proclaimed. They did not enjoy speaking about the terrible things that would happen. They often used laments to express their reactions to the coming disasters. Their pain was real. To their listeners, the message was contained both in the prophetic words and also in the external signs, which often betrayed a deep pain stemming from within. Micah's reaction to divine judgment reminds one of Isaiah, who for three years walked half-naked and barefoot as a visible sign of the shame that captivity would bring. For those who have the resources, you can read about the great suffering that Ellen G. White endured in her ministry as well; this will help us to better understand what these servants of God had to go through.

Read 1 Peter 4:14-16 and then look at yourself and whatever trials you are going through. How much suffering has come to you because of your faithfulness to God? How much due to your unfaithfulness?

Those Who Devise Iniquity

Read Micah 2:1-11 and Micah 3. What are the sins that threaten to bring judgment upon these people?

"The accession of Ahaz to the throne brought Isaiah and his associates face to face with conditions more appalling than any that had hitherto existed in the realm of Judah. Many who had formerly withstood the seductive influence of idolatrous practices were now being

persuaded to take part in the worship of heathen deities. Princes in Israel were proving untrue to their trust; false prophets were arising with messages to lead astray; even some of the priests were teaching for hire. Yet the leaders in apostasy still kept up the forms of divine worship and claimed to be numbered among the people of God. “The prophet Micah, who bore his testimony during those troublous times, declared that sinners in Zion, while claiming to ‘lean upon the Lord,’ and blasphemously boasting, ‘Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us,’ continued to ‘build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity.’ Micah 3:10-11.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 322.

One of the constant problems that the Hebrew nation faced was the deception that their special status as God’s people—their knowledge of the true God, as opposed to the silliness of the pagan idolatry (see Ps. 115:4-9)—made them somehow immune to divine retribution. The terrible truth, however, was that it was precisely because they had special status before God that they would be deemed that much more guilty for their sins. Time and again, such as in the book of Deuteronomy, the Lord warned them that all the blessings, protection, and prosperity that would be theirs were conditioned upon obedience to His commands, such as seen in this caution: “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deut. 4:9).

However much we might try to fool ourselves, in what ways are we, as Seventh-day Adventists, with so much light, in danger of making this same error?

A New Ruler From Bethlehem

In Micah’s book the mood often drastically changes from gloom to sublime hope. This hope is seen in one of the most famous of all the Messianic prophecies.

Read Micah 5:2. Who is being spoken about here and what does this teach us about Him? See also John 1:1-3, 8:58, Col. 1:16-17.

Out of a little Judean town would come Someone from eternity to be a ruler in Israel. Micah 5:2 is one of the most precious biblical verses written in order to strengthen the hope of the people, who eagerly awaited the ideal Leader promised by the prophets. His rule would usher a time of strength, justice, and peace (Mic. 5:4-6).

David was a native of Bethlehem, a town also called Ephrath (Gen. 35:19). The mention of this town stresses the humble origin of both David and His future successor, who would be the True Shepherd of this people (Mic. 5:4). In the humble town of Bethlehem the prophet Samuel anointed Jesse’s youngest son, David, who was to be king over Israel (1 Sam. 16:1-13, 17:12). When the wise men came looking for the new-born “king of the Jews,” King Herod asked the Bible experts where to search (Matt. 2:4-6). They referred him to this passage, which foretold that the Messiah would come from the small town of Bethlehem.

As incomprehensible as it is to our finite and fallen minds, that baby born was the eternal God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. “From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19. However incredible the idea, it is one of the most foundational truths in Christianity: the Creator God took upon Himself humanity and in that humanity offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. If you take the time to dwell upon what this teaches us about both the value of our

lives and what we as individuals mean to God, you can have a life-changing experience. When so many people struggle to find purpose and meaning to their existence, we have the foundation of the Cross, which not only anchors us in what our lives mean, but also gives us the hope of something greater than that which this world ever could offer.

What Is Good

In the beginning of Micah 6, God dialogues with His people, listing all the things that He has done on their behalf. In response, the worshiper who comes into the temple asks what he might do to please God. What is it that constitutes an acceptable offering: year-old calves, a multitude of rams, rivers of oil, or even the worshiper's firstborn child? There is a steady progression of the size and value of the offerings listed in this text.

Read Micah 6:1-8. What crucial truth is being taught here? Why is this especially important for us, as Seventh-day Adventists? What does this tell us about how truth is more than just correct doctrine and detailed understanding of prophecy? See Matt. 23:23.

The prophet declares that God already has revealed what He wants. Through the teachings of Moses, the people knew what God had graciously done for them (Deut. 10:12-13). Micah's answer was not a new revelation that signaled a change in God's requirements. Sacrifices and priestly services were not God's first concern. God's supreme wish is to have a people who act in justice toward their neighbors, with consistent devotion and love toward the Lord. The most extravagant offering that people can give to God is obedience.

Micah 6:8 is the most succinct statement of God's will for His people. It summarizes all prophetic teachings on true religion: a life displaying justice, mercy, and a close walk with God. Justice is something that people do when prompted by God's Spirit. It has to do with fairness and equality for all, especially the weak and powerless who are exploited by others. Kindness means to freely and willingly show love, loyalty and faithfulness to others. Walking with God means to put God first and to live in conformity with His will.

Why is it easier to keep the Sabbath strictly than it is to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God?

Into the Depths of the Sea

Micah's book begins with a description of judgments, but it ends with words of hope. There are people who try to explain away or deny the reality of God's judgments. To do so is to fall into the trap that Micah's contemporaries did, those who believed that God never would send judgments on the chosen nation.

God's justice is the other side of His love and concern. The good news presented by Micah is that punishment is never God's last word. God's action in Scripture consistently moves from judgment to forgiveness, from punishment to grace, and from suffering to hope.

Read Micah 7:18-20. How is the gospel revealed in these verses? What hope is seen here for all of us? Why do we need it so desperately?

Micah's closing verses present his praise filled with hope. The question "Who is like God . . . ?" matches Micah's name, which means "Who is like the Lord?" It serves as a reminder of the uniqueness of God and affirms the truth that there is no one like Him. How could there be? After all, He alone is the Creator. Everything else is created. Even more importantly, our Creator is a God of grace, of forgiveness, a God who went to the most

unimaginable extremes possible in order to save us from the destruction that is, rightly, ours. He would do it for the Hebrew nation; and He will do it for us, as well.

It is possible that we today are surrounded by difficult circumstances and painful experiences that leave us to wonder why God allows all this to happen. Sometimes it is just so hard to make sense of things. In such times, our hope rests only with the Lord, who promises to hurl our sins into the depths of the sea. There is hope for the future in remembering what God has done in the past.

Take a good hard look at yourself. Why is your only hope found in the promise that God will cast your sins “into the depths of the sea”?

Further Study: “If Jerusalem had known what it was her privilege to know, and had heeded the light which Heaven had sent her, she might have stood forth in the pride of prosperity, the queen of kingdoms, free in the strength of her God-given power. There would have been no armed soldiers standing at her gates. . . . The glorious destiny that might have blessed Jerusalem had she accepted her Redeemer rose before the Son of God. He saw that she might through Him have been healed of her grievous malady, liberated from bondage, and established as the mighty metropolis of the earth. From her walls the dove of peace would have gone forth to all nations. She would have been the world’s diadem of glory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 577.