

**MICAH: Hope in the Face of Hardship**  
**Judgment and Deliverance**  
**Micah chapters 1 & 2**  
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We live in interesting times. If not for the hope I have in Jesus, I would call these scary times. The events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 brought terrorism—which has been a blight on our world for decades—into the forefront of all of our thinking and seemed to ratchet up terroristic acts across our world. Third world nations around the globe are plagued by hunger, H.I.V. and violence. Natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes and tornadoes may not occur more often than at other times in our history, but the prevalence of social media means that we're bombarded with news about them. And then there's our upcoming presidential election, which has been marked by division, hatred and negative campaigning at a level most of us have never seen in our lifetimes.

Against that backdrop you might be asking the question, ***"Pastor Layne, why are you preaching on an obscure Old Testament book called "Micah," that many of us barely ever heard of before?" Aren't there more relevant Bible passages that you could preach from?"***

That's a great question and I have a 3-part answer for it.

First, **I'm preaching on Micah, because it's part of God's Word.** The Bible is inspired by God, Himself—Scripture uses the phrase, *"God breathed."* God's Spirit inhabits the words of Scripture with power and insight as He speaks directly to us through his Word. Listen to what these verses say about the power of God's Word:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.  
Hebrews 4:12

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man [or woman] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.  
I Timothy 3:16 & 17

As we were watching the baptism videos last Sunday, our Worship Pastor, Dave Hershberger, leaned over to me and said something like, "It's amazing how many of these people were impacted by the Bible." And he was right. One woman noted that she couldn't

understand what the preacher was saying or what church was about, but she kept reading her Bible and eventually, it all made sense. Another young lady mentioned that while she was in rehab she kept feeling drawn to the Bible that was next to her bed. After several days she picked it up and began reading and it impacted her deeply. God's Word is powerful!

From time to time our staff preaches on topics like forgiveness, sexuality and prayer, or the "Living in Two Kingdoms" series, which focused on the sovereignty of God in the midst of all the election campaign rhetoric swirling around us. Topical preaching is needed at times, but I also enjoy preaching through books of the Bible that may not at first glance have much of a connection with our present context, but as we study them we're reminded that God's truth transcends time, culture and circumstances. The Word of God is God-breathed; it's living and active; it's inspired; and, through it the Living God speaks to us.

My second answer to the question, "*Why preach on Micah?*," is that **I enjoy preaching on the prophets as Advent approaches, because throughout the Old Testament the prophets make repeatedly point to the coming of the Messiah.** The New Testament contains hundreds of references to Old Testament prophecies that support Jesus' identity as the Messiah and these prophecies were written 400-700 before Jesus was born. In Micah alone there are five passages that point toward God's deliverance through Jesus the Messiah, including Micah chapter 5 verse 2, which the Jewish leaders quoted to the Wise Men when they asked where the Christ child was to be born. "*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.*" Micah and other prophets foretell the coming of the Messiah and their prophecies were fulfilled in the birth, life and death of Jesus.

And my third answer to the question, "*Why preach on Micah?*," is that while we're 2 & ½ millennia removed from the people the Prophet Micah was writing to, **Our lives have some parallels with the people of God in the Old Testament.** In his book, The Sin of Certainty, Peter Enns points out that we have more in common than we might think with God's people in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God's people had been waiting for centuries for the coming of the promised Messiah. Abraham, Jacob's sons—the patriarchs—and God's people under the leadership of the prophets, priests and kings had been anticipating the coming of the

Messiah for over 1,500 years. Throughout this season God spoke to his prophets and they brought words of judgment, warning, encouragement and hope to his people. Similarly, as God's people today we find ourselves waiting—waiting for Jesus' promised return for his church; waiting for Him to deliver us from the craziness we encounter in our world. And just like God's people in the Old Testament, we too need words of warning and judgment and of encouragement and hope. I've titled this study on Micah, "*Hope in the Midst of Hardship*," because I believe that as we explore God's Word to us through Micah over the next 3 weeks we'll encounter God's truth and insight and his hope for our lives.

Micah is the 6<sup>th</sup> of a group known as the "Minor Prophets." The designation "minor" isn't a statement about the importance of these books. It's used to distinguish them from prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel who wrote substantial books consisting of 40 or more chapters in our Old Testament. In some Jewish collections of the Old Testament these twelve books that we know as the Minor Prophets are grouped together as one book and referred to as "The Book of 12."

The name *Micah* literally means, "Who is like unto Jehovah?" Or, "Who is like our God?" Micah's ministry began during the reign of King Jotham. King Jotham and his successor King Hezekiah were good kings, but under their reign, idol worship continued in Judah. Micah's prophetic ministry lasted approximately twenty years—from 735-715 B.C.—and he was a contemporary of the well-known prophet, Isaiah. Micah came from the small Judean town of Morsheth, a **town 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem**, near the border of Judah and Philistia. Micah's prophecies display a heart for the poor and the oppressed. While other prophets spoke the political situation in and around Jerusalem, Micah dealt almost exclusively with personal faith and social morality.

To help give us an overview of this book, I'd like you to watch this short video. The video was shared with me by Cindy Lehman—who has been doing a great job planning Bible Studies for our Youth Sunday School over the past 2 months.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFEUEcylwLc> [1:59 of video]

Today we're going to focus on chapters 1 & 2 of Micah. Most of what Micah writes in these chapters is about God's coming judgment against his people, but chapter 2 concludes with words of hope. I'll begin by reading verses 1-7 of chapter 1.

The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

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. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and 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. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used." Micah 1:1-7

As we'll see throughout Micah's prophecy, God has a number of complaints to bring against his people...and toward the end of the book He frames it as if He is bringing legal charges against them. The primary issue God identifies in these verses is the worship of his people. He first mentions Samaria—an area that had become a high place for idol worship that drew God's people away from Jerusalem—the place where they were intended to worship. But God also speaks against the worship of his people in Jerusalem, because even in this holy city, corruption, false worship and mistreatment of the poor and oppressed were prevalent.

And in verses 15 & 16 of chapter 1 Micah proclaims that as a consequence for their sin, Jerusalem will be besieged. We know from history that the Assyrians attacked Samaria around 700 B.C. and later King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Micah was the first of the prophets to declare Jerusalem's upcoming fall, but many of Israel and Judah's prophets would echo his refrain over the next 125 years.

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 delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile. Micah 1:15 & 16

In chapter 2 Micah speaks to specific ways in which God's people are failing to live as the people of God, and here we begin to see Micah's heart for the poor and oppressed. I'll read verses 1-11 of chapter 2:

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance. Therefore, the LORD says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: 'We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors.'" Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot.

"Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us." Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright? Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy. If a liar and deceiver comes and says, 'I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people! Micah 2:1-11

These aren't nice, feel good words and phrases. You probably won't hear anyone in their baptism testimonies sharing Micah 2:3, "*Therefore, the Lord says: I am planning disaster against this people from which you cannot save yourselves.*" God is upset with his people's sinning. They are defaming his good name by plotting and carrying out evil; stealing from the poor; displaying pride and arrogance; and, displacing widows and orphans. And rather than listening to God's true prophets, they are listening to the words of false prophets. It's not a pretty picture.

But it doesn't end there, Micah speaks more words of warning, judgment and condemnation in the next five chapters, but he also communicates God's love for his people and he gives them hope and encouragement by pointing to a better day in the future. Chapter 2 concludes with these words of hope in the first of what are identified as five Messianic references in Micah.

"I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head." Micah 2:12 & 13

God promises his people that He will gather together the remnant—a remnant is a small group of people that stands firm even when the larger majority fall away—and they will multiply—He says, "*the place will throng with people.*" The imagery we read here is reminiscent

of Psalm 23. God says He will bring his people together in safety, like sheep in the confines of a protected pen or like a flock in its pasture with green grass, fresh water and a trusted shepherd. God foretells a leader who will open the way and go before them, breaking through any barriers and leading them to freedom.

In the midst of words of condemnation and judgment God assures his people that He will deliver them. In the face of hardship He gives them hope. And that is God's promise to his people today as well—there is hope in the face of hardship...hope for our world with all that is wrong in it; hope for our nation in the midst of all of the chaos swirling around this election; and, hope for us as families and as individuals, no matter what we might be walking through.

Since the words that close Micah chapter 2 seem to parallel parts of Psalm 23, I think that's a fitting place for us to end today. I'd like you to take a moment to identify an area of challenge that you're currently facing in your life—maybe it's a specific situation; maybe it's a relationship with a person; maybe it's fears you have about the future; or, dreams that seem shattered. Whatever is heavy on your heart today, I invite you to identify it and then to give it to Jesus. As I read these words from Psalm 23 remember that there is hope in the midst of hardship.

#### Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are  
with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of  
the LORD forever.