

Good News and Bad News

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening everyone. Great to have you. It's a privilege to be able to be here and to be able to present Micah. So, do you want the good news or the bad news?

The good news. Anyone? We'll go good news first. I'll be under an hour. The bad news is it'll be over 20 minutes. Nah, I'm just having a laugh, but you know, that phrase is often given, isn't it? Corey came in the other week. Do you want the good news or the bad news? And you know, people give that, don't they? They do it for various reasons. Maybe there is genuinely good news and bad, but most often there's bad news and they're just trying to appease. But anyway, it's not always that straightforward. Sometimes the good news isn't that good and sometimes the bad news could actually be good. Now, this is not just trying to confuse you as we start, but you'll see that our theme for the series is hard news and hope.

Hard news and hope. And hopefully tonight and over the next three weeks, we'll see why that is the case. So, I want to give a general intro to Micah. It's one of the minor prophets. It's lesser known, lesser studied, so it's good to know where we are and what we're doing.

So, Micah, it's a minor prophet. There's one of 12, named so because of size rather than, you know, what is in it and whether it is useful for us. It is between Jonah and the man who doesn't smell, Nahum. If you don't get that, I'll explain it later, but it's the seventh last book in the Old Testament. That's where we are. And as I said, it's often less studied, but it's so valuable to study these books. If you were with us for Habakkuk and Archie took us through that, it was so valuable to see what we could learn there about the faith in the mess. So relevant. And I mentioned this morning, if you were here, that Micah also is so relevant to the world that we live in today.

So, I'm going to read verse one again, as it acts as a great intro for the whole book, as well as the two chapters tonight. Verse one, chapter one, verse one, 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.

[2 : 26] So, who? Micah. Micah is the man writing, but it's important to see here is the word of the Lord. God. All scripture is God inspired. So, this is the word of the Lord.

And Micah's name actually means, who is like Jehovah? And he plays on this in chapter seven, where he asks that very question, who is like Jehovah? Micah, he would have known Isaiah, would have been a contemporary, but he was from a much humbler social class. He grew up in Moresheth, as it says, which was an agricultural town, would have been a farming village. It was about 25 miles southwest from Jerusalem. That's quite small, but that is where we're at, and I'll explain that a wee bit more in a minute. The book here, so the kind of literary style, so it is full of puns.

It is full of puns, but they don't particularly translate well. That would be also something I would say. We're looking at this in three parts, and with each part, it repeats in a sort of judgment and salvation, this hard news and hope, and we'll see that as we go through.

So when are we at? Well, we are between these three kings. Now when you see a king, especially in the Old Testament, it's worth asking, were they good or were they bad? Now these were kings of Judah. It's worth noting that all the kings of the north in Israel were pretty terrible during this time, but Jotham, he was a good king. Ahaz, he was a bad king, and Hezekiah, he was a good king.

As I've said, there was this agricultural system. This is the time that he was at, and it's important to know this for the context of what we'll see. There was an agricultural system. There was a lot of farming, but you know this was giving way to a greedy materialistic society. These rich landowners, they were becoming richer, mainly through extortion, and it meant that these poor farmers who were renting this land became poorer and poorer. Somewhat familiar, isn't it? And there was an increased trade with other nations, and this increased trade, while it brought wealth, it also brought in false religion, it brought in cults, and it brought in lower morals. We're about 740 to 687 BC, so about over 2,500 years ago here. And where are we at? Well, we're in, it says, doesn't it, the vision concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. So Samaria, it's the capital of Israel in the north, which is the one in the pink, and the one in the south, orange is Judah. If you've got really good eyes, you can make out Moresheth, which is where Micah was from. Now, it's important that these cities are mentioned because these were the centers, these were the capitals. It was where power was, it was where political might was, but you know, it was also the centers of sin, and we will go on to see that. So some main themes throughout the book, but also through tonight, we have this hard news and hope. We see that God, he is judge, and yet he also gives promises that he will keep.

[5 : 48] The Lord scatters his people because of their sins, but he is also the one who gathers, he protects, and he forgives. Chapter 6, verse 8, it could be a sort of key for the whole thing. It says, he has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. It may be just worth noting that it's quoted in the New Testament five times most famously in Matthew 23, where it's the prophecy in chapter 5 of Micah that the ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem, and that he will shepherd his flock, and he will be their peace. So that is also found in Micah. So getting on to tonight specifically, we're going to look at judgment proclaimed in 2 to 7. Judgment proclaimed. We're going to look at Micah's response in verse 8 to 16. And going into chapter 2, we're going to look at the people and their prophets in verse 1 to 11. And finally, the last two verses, 12 and 13 of chapter 2, we're going to see hope.

So let's dive in. First of all, judgment proclaimed. And to start with, it's maybe worth noting that these are not chronological per se. And you'll kind of see that as we go out throughout. It's not chronological happenings here, but we'll hopefully make sense of it by the end. So judgment proclaimed in verses 2 to 7. Well, the very first word of verse 2 is here. And the first word of verse 3 is, look. We are called here to attention. Look. Listen. And what are we to listen for? Well, God is coming in judgment. God is coming down that he may bear witness against you. He's coming from his holy temple.

And this warning, it is for you peoples, all of you, listen, earth and all who live in it. This warning here is for everyone. It can't be missed.

We see in verse 4, we see this imagery used. The mountains melt beneath him. The valleys split apart like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. These images, they're frightening images.

I imagine sitting in the IMAX cinema, and when this scene comes on, it would be shaking in your seat. And it would be one of those where you're getting sprayed in the face with water. I don't know if you've ever been to one of those types of cinemas, but you know, it would be shaking, wouldn't it?

[8 : 47] And that is the image that we're given. God is coming in power and authority. We see why in verse 5. We see why God is coming in judgment. All of this is because of Jacob's transgression. It's sin, because of sin. God has to come in judgment because of sin.

We see that it is these cities that are the centers of the sin. They are the centers of idolatry. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria in verse 5? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?

This is God's people we're talking about. And yet they have totally lost sight of their God, this almighty God. And instead they are throwing themselves into sin. They are throwing themselves into the things of the world.

So in 6, we have judgment pronounced. Therefore, I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones out into the valley and lay bare her foundations.

So Samaria here, the capital of the northern kingdom, is the focus. But it's saying that it will be utterly destroyed. And we see in 7 that idolatry is picked out specifically as one of the major sins.

[10 : 18] All her idols will be broken to pieces. The people here, they turned away from this almighty God who comes in power and authority to things that they'd made in workshops.

Maybe it wasn't just physical idolatry. Maybe it was to things of the world. Whether it was money or power or fame. Things that they'd made, they're idols. But you know, it's the same today, isn't it?

What are we idolizing? What are we putting first? And we see that the judgment here in verse 7, it matches the sin, doesn't it? It's proportionate.

The idols are destroyed. The temple gifts are burned with fire. The images are destroyed. She gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes as the wages of prostitutes, they will again be used.

It leads us to ask, you know, who or what are we worshiping? What are we putting in place of this almighty God? You know, these images that we see in 4, they should strike fear.

[11 : 27] A healthy, reverent fear of the almighty God. God is judge. And we will all be held accountable for our actions.

This takes us to our second section, which is Micah's response in verses 8 to 16. So Micah has prophesied of this judgment and we see this response.

He has extreme mourning here, isn't he? He has extreme mourning of this judgment that faces the people. And you know, this is his people. These were his people, his fellow Israelites.

He really does care. You know, when I was thinking about this, it was the complete opposite of Jonah, isn't it? Santa was reading a book the other day of Jonah and, you know, we all know it.

It's famous, the fish and all that. But, you know, Jonah fled from wanting to go to Nineveh. Why? Well, he didn't want God to forgive them.

[12 : 33] And in the end, Jonah was angry that God forgave them. He was angry. He said they don't deserve it. He didn't want them. But, you know, in a sense, this is the opposite. Micah really cared for the people.

He did not want this judgment to come upon them. But, you know, he had righteous indignation at the injustice going on.

We'll see in chapter 2 that, you know, there was real oppression going on here. And he had sympathy with the common people. Seeing later on in the book that Micah feels alone in chapter 7.

But he also trusts in the Lord and his plan. In verses 10 to 15, we have this sort of strange section, it's safe to say.

There's all these cities talked about. And this is where the play on words come in. So I was wondering what they all mean.

[13 : 34] And you might not be able to read that. And I don't think it's hugely important to know what all these things mean. But it's basically all play on words. So tell it not in gath. Weep not at all.

Well, gath will mean to tell or things like that. So the second one, roll in the dust. Beth opera means house of dust. So that is basically what this big section in 10 to 15, it mentions 12 cities.

They are all in Judah. You might be able to see that there. They're all in Judah surrounding Jerusalem. So the shift here has kind of gone from Samaria and we've moved into Judah and surrounding Jerusalem.

But you know, what I took from this, I think what we need to see here is that the all-encompassing sin. Now, these are the people in the towns. They would have felt stronger together.

You know, why do people gather in cities and fortified cities? Well, it's to feel strong. It's to feel better as one. But you know, the sin was all-encompassing.

[14 : 36] And therefore, the judgment is all-encompassing as well. He's telling them all to mourn. And this is summarized in 16.

It says, He's telling them to mourn.

Telling them to mourn in an extreme way because of what was coming. The children taken away. You know, in the short term, this is really looking forward to when Assyria is going to come.

And then Babylon will follow on shortly behind in the near future to where he's writing. And you know, they come in. They totally destroy the north and kingdom. And then they ravage the south and they take them away into exile.

You know, if we're a Christian, then we know that there's a final judgment coming, don't we? There's a final judgment coming. And it's not just for some. It is for all. God is just.

[15 : 46] So therefore, all things will be made right. There will be no more injustice. And you know, in a sense, this is bad news.

Judgment is coming. But you know, it's also good because there will be no more injustice. There will be no more suffering. You know, if we are not right with God, then we can't escape the judgment coming.

No matter who we are or how important we think we are, whether we've gathered with those of like mind, whether we live in fortified cities, no matter our position on earth, no matter the power that we think that we have, it doesn't help.

Judgment is coming for everyone. And you know, if we are sitting here and we are Christians today, do we wail?

Do we wail for those that are facing judgment? Those that we know this is coming for? Do we wail and do we mourn for those that we know that face this judgment that have not done anything about it yet?

[16 : 53] Moving into chapter 2. Chapter 2, we have our third section, the people and their prophets.

We're looking at verse 1 to 11 of chapter 2. The people and their prophets. So we see in here, we see some of this reasons for judgment that has been pronounced.

In 1 and 2, we see that they plot evil on their beds. Why? Because it is in their power to do so. They have the power. They covet fields and they seize them and houses and take them.

They defraud people of their homes. They rob them of their inheritance. This here, well, this is oppression of the poor. This is injustice.

The leaders, the powerful, those that have, are taking from those that have not. The covetousness here, the greed that is shown. And once again, this was God's people.

[17 : 59] But it didn't matter. They had majorly lost their way. And this is what they were doing to one another. You know, Stuart prayed this morning and he prayed about, you know, you can turn on the news.

And you can see what happens, don't you? You see the terrible things and there is natural disasters, but often the most shocking is the things that man does to fellow man. You know, how do we respond to this?

There's so much injustice. There's so much oppression. And it's hard. I'm not going to stand up here and give you the answer. Because I'm still working that out myself, I'll happily admit.

But what do we do about this? But, you know, do we have that deep and passionate care for the oppressed? And on the flip side, is our greed, is that causing us to oppress the poor?

Are we allowing or causing injustice? You know, the natural reaction is to go, no, not me. I would never do that. You know, just the other week, Archie was talking about a similar vein.

[19 : 07] And he was saying, you know, even the clothes you buy. I'm not going to name names of shops, but if you can get a t-shirt for three pounds, you think the person that made it was paid fairly. I'll let you work that one out.

Do we have a heart for those that are oppressed? Do we have a heart for the poor? Those who do not have justice. We see once again in verse 3 to 5 that the judgment that is coming.

So this is the Lord speaking again. And I am planning disaster against this people from which you cannot save yourself. They have no power to stop the coming judgment.

And these people that had seized land, had seized fields, had taken away what wasn't theirs. Well, what happens to them? They'll no longer walk proudly. They will be ridiculed.

And their song that they sang in verse 4, For my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me. He assigns our fields to traitors. The land is taken from them and given to others.

[20 : 16] The judgment is just. And we see in verse 6 to 11 that these selfish prophets, these leaders, religious wise of the people, well, they are selfish, but it suits the evil people that they serve.

Micah is told in verse 6, basically, to stop. Do not prophesy. They don't want to hear it. They don't want to hear it. Disgrace will not overtake us.

They say, don't tell us this. We see in verse 8 that lately my people have risen up like an enemy. God's people are like an enemy to him.

And they commit evil. 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. They are robbing the peaceful and the vulnerable. Can you imagine somebody coming back from battle and stripping the robe that they're wearing off them?

[21 : 31] Terrible things. Terrible sins. But you know the prophets, these were people who were sent by God. They were those who should be correcting, challenging the people, keeping them on the straight and narrow.

And yet, what does it say about them? If a liar and a deceiver, so these are false prophets, these are not genuine prophets, it's worth saying. If a liar and deceiver comes and says, I'll prophesy for you, plenty of wine and beer, that would be just the profit for these people.

It's basically prophets for hire, false prophets for hire. They were appropriate prophets for the sinful and selfish people.

So that leads us to ask, well, do we surround ourselves with people who are just going to go along with the flow? Or do we spend time with those who aren't afraid to correct us? Who aren't afraid, even if we don't want to hear it, to tell us, to challenge us, to keep us walking the way that we should.

And finally, we have the last couple of verses which I've titled hope.

[22 : 48] Hope in verses 12 and 13. The Lord speaks again, we've got the quotation marks, and it says, that the remnant of Israel, so the remnant, a promise that is used throughout the Old Testament that Israel will continue to be brought, it will continue and that they will be brought back into the promised land.

So that is what is promised. I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I'll bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture. The place will throng with people. So it's good news.

Hope is given. A remnant is secure. But, and there's a but, it is not everyone. It is not everyone.

Elsewhere, it's talked about that it is the faithful remnant that will return. This is not universal salvation. It is not that all will be saved.

We've seen that all are sinful. We had all these 12 cities. Everyone was encompassed. All are sinful. We've seen that God is just and that justice will be done and that no one can escape.

[24 : 03] Judgment is coming for all. You know, the people here, they were resting on the fact that they were part of God's people. They were resting on the fact that they live in Judah, that they live in Israel, that they are in God's promised land.

they were resting on this. But, you know, it was only the faithful that will be saved and will be returned. For us, that means we need to trust in Jesus.

He is the only way. He is the only way. We can't rest on who we are in this world. We can't rest on the fact that we attend Brunsfield Evangelical.

We can't rest on who our folks are or anything like that. Jesus is the only way. We must be faithful to him. I know we've seen the depravity and the sinfulness of the people and if we're honest, we're not far away either.

Their leaders were terrible and their prophets were false and were just saying what they wanted to hear. But, you know, nothing is impossible with God.

[25 : 11] God saves. Now we see in 13, the 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. The Lord leads his people. Hope. It's something the world cries out for, isn't it?

Hope. Just last night, I was on street pastors and we were chatting with two guys at 3 a.m. at Cowgate and, you know, what did they want to speak about? They wanted to speak about what we believed and why?

Because they said in the words themselves, there's something missing. There's something missing and they wanted to know what it was. But they knew that. They knew that there was something missing in their lives.

They just wanted to know what it was. Everyone is searching. You know, we have an assured hope. Do we live in that hope? That hope, not of earthly success, not of wealth, of power, but of a future with the Lord.

[26 : 21] And if so, do we trust in God to lead us through life? You know, maybe you're here tonight and you're feeling that you've been put out into exile. Maybe you're feeling like you've been left alone.

You know, God doesn't leave us. We see here that he protects us and that he leads us. And you know, just a final thought, it talks about bringing them together like a sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture.

The place will throng with people. You know, what do sheep do? Well, they gather together, don't they? And that's just a wee lesson for us to stick together, to encourage one another, to challenge one another, but stick together.

So, just to summarize, we've seen the terrible sins of the people, the leaders, the prophets. We've seen the just judgment that was prophesied.

We've seen the Lord coming in almighty power and might, but we have also seen hope. Do we cling to that assured hope of Christ?

[27 : 29] Christ. So, the good news or the bad news? Maybe next time someone asks you that, you can have a wee thought of Micah and the good news that God is just.

The bad news that judgment is for all, but the good news that there is hope in Christ. Let me just pray for us and then Alistair's going to come and lead us through some questions to discuss.

God, Father, we thank you that you are almighty God. We thank you that you are just. We thank you that we look forward to a day when there will be no more oppression, there will be no more injustice, there will be no more suffering.

We pray that we will have a heart for the people that do not know the truth of the Lord Jesus that are heading towards that judgment and have not put their faith in the one who can save them.

So I ask that you will be with us as we discuss these things, help these things to sink into our minds and pray that you will continue to speak to us as we discuss these things together. I pray this in Jesus' name.

[28 : 42] Amen.