

# Bible Study for Texas for 8\_10\_72803

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## Lesson for Aug. 10

*Micah 1:1-7; 2:1-9*

## Where coveting leads

**By Stephen Hatfield**

She is 81 years old. She lives alone, having lost her husband some years ago. She has adjusted well to life in the golden years. She has many friends and a wonderful church, and her family, though several hundred miles away, keeps in close touch.

The day she fell in the den, she did not tell anyone. But her secret was not hidden for long. Her network of friends insisted she go to the doctor and call her children. And she did. It seems her house is part of the problem. The two-story rambling home is roomy and family-friendly, but not very safe with its many step-ups and step-downs. Her son-in-law even remarked to her if he was to build a house to “do her in” he would build the house she lives in! So the rails were installed and message is now clear—you must hold on to the rails and be careful, or else.

The Old Testament prophet, Micah, lived during a time when all was not right with God's people. If one were to imagine a people ripe for destruction, then the nations of Israel and Judah fit the bill perfectly. Their

“house” was unsafe. How they lived invited disaster. God's message through Micah is clear—you must return to me, live responsibly or else.

Micah delivered a message to God's people, who had years before divided into two nations. He spoke to both nations during his life and ministry. Though names/titles can be difficult to remember, keep in mind the South Kingdom, commonly called Judah, had Jerusalem for its capital city. Samaria was the leading city of the North Kingdom, also known as Israel.

Micah's home was Moresheth-gath, located in the foothills between the Mediterranean Sea southwest of Jerusalem. He lived during the reigns of three South Kingdom rulers: Jotham (742-735 B.C.); Ahaz (735-716 B.C.); and Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.). His prophecies probably came a few years before the destruction of the North Kingdom (722 B.C.) and extended until the time of the Assyrian King Sennacherib's invasion of the South Kingdom in 701 B.C.

One should not take his brief introduction lightly (1:1). The prophet's words are for all God's people, not just the residents of the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah reveals God's message in three major themes: First, he indicts Israel and Judah for various sins (chapters 1-3). Second, he describes a future time of hope and restoration (chapters 4-5). And third, Micah predicts the coming judgment as a consequence of those sins (chapters 6-7). His message is clear and simple—your unfaithfulness to God will not go unpunished.

### **Order in the court**

Just as evidence is presented in a court case, the nations stand accused before God. From the high bench of heaven, God himself bears witness against his own people (1:2). Micah serves as the chief prosecutor,

speaking on behalf of the Lord.

### **The opening argument**

In his opening argument, Micah powerfully describes God's right to judge both nations. Who can ignore the one whose presence causes all of creation to take notice (1:3-4)? Some scholars think Micah portrays the mountains melting and the valleys splitting as a reference to the coming destruction of many pagan shrines, which dotted the Judean and Samarian landscape.

### **The accused**

Why this judgment? The heavenly court convenes because of the sins and rebellion of God's people (1:5). The name "Jacob" is another reference to the North Kingdom of Israel. The cities of Samaria and Jerusalem should have stood as examples of faithfulness. Yet, in both instances, these cities stand accused for leading the people astray.

The complete destruction of Samaria is foretold (1:6). The great city, built on a hill (1 Kings 16:24), will be crushed and thrown into its surrounding valley.

### **The key evidence**

Micah, the prosecuting attorney, introduces Exhibit I, the key piece of evidence against God's people-idolatry. The breaking of the first and second commandments-no other Gods and no idols (Exodus 20:3-4)-is the common thread of destruction running from Genesis to Revelation. The acceptance of pagan practices was "business as usual" for both nations. To ignore God's primary command was incredulous to Micah.

The people felt they were not guilty of idolatry, always claiming to be

faithful to God. Leaders would explain the presence of pagan shrines, which dotted the land, as simply accommodating and adapting to the surrounding culture. After all, the Lord was still in his temple.

This callous ignorance was the result of not knowing God's word. When the Lord said "no other gods," he did not intend to be No. 1. If there is a No. 1, then logically there will be a No. 2 and so on. The people were not to put God first in their lives—he was to be their only priority.

In today's world, one is often challenged to get right with God and put him first. Perhaps one of the reasons idolatry is alive and well on planet Earth today is due to this same misunderstanding of the first and second commandments.

### **Micah's misery**

The prosecutor does not find joy in his accusations. The remaining verses of this chapter depict the prophet as he mourns the coming consequences of choices made. He appears as a wandering mourner, wailing the lament of the nations. As he travels through the land, he makes several plays on words when mentioning some of the surrounding towns.

For example, when speaking to the residents of Beth-le-aphrah, a village in the foothills between the Judean mountains and the Mediterranean coast, Micah says “roll yourself in the dust” (1:10). The root meaning Beth-le-aphrah literally means “house of dust.”

### **Rich man, poor man**

This sorry state of affairs was not the result of a poor economy. Both Israel and Judah had experienced days of prosperity during Micah's lifetime. With the attention of Assyria turned toward other conquests, both nations had the opportunity to pursue growth in economic, political, social as well as

spiritual areas.

But such times are a two-edged sword. Over time, the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. The much-needed stabilizing factor that a middle class provided disappeared.

Working farmers had their lands seized by unscrupulous businessmen. Judges were bribed in the courts. An exile of sorts was already taking its toll on society as families were forced from their homes. This wreaked havoc in many of the towns surrounding the great leading cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. Disease and poverty spread like wildfire (2:1-5).

Micah presents another accusation against Israel and Judah—the breaking of the 10th commandment—no coveting (Exodus 20:17). If idolatry is the father of all sin, then coveting is the eldest child. The hunger for more and more can become so consuming that one's moral compass fails. At first, the coveted object is the idol. Then later, the desire itself to own and possess becomes the idol/god. Society in Israel/Judah had advanced to this later stage, and Micah's voice was not to be silenced.

In addition to breaking the commandments, Micah does not fail to point out God's law concerning the rightful ownership of land. Except for the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:10-17), land was to be the permanent inheritance passed down through the family.

Throughout his speech, Micah is interrupted by objections. Those accused demand his silence, attempting to stop the proceedings. In response, Micah adds more fuel to the fire. Adding insult to injury, these oppressors, desiring to have more things for themselves, took unsuspecting people to court and through a corrupt system of justice swindled even veterans who returned from war (2:8). The wealthy took advantage of even the most vulnerable in society—women and children (2:8-9).

The idea of “what goes around comes around” is seen in the ironic

punishment that awaits these greedy landowners. One day the tables will turn and those who have stolen will be powerless to protect their holdings. They will be cut off from the promises/blessings of God's people (2:4-5).

Micah's knowledge of the law is evident. The nations have not offended the prophet's sense of right and wrong. He is not defending his own opinions in these matters. He clearly outlines what God requires and allows the evidence itself to demand a guilty verdict. Micah's message stands against even false prophets who used their authority to oppress the disadvantaged.

Micah, as prophet/prosecutor, presents a chilling picture of a society crumbling from within. The Assyrian empire did its part to complete the destruction from without—Samaria would fall in 722 B.C.

### **Putting the house in order**

Hope remains. Although the nations will be taken into captivity, a “remnant” will remain safe and will eventually return (2:12-13). God appears as the Shepherd who gathers his people and as the King who leads them home.

Like concerned children who want their mother's house to be safe, so Micah longs for God's people to put their own house in order. A house ill equipped for safety can only bring disaster for those who live within. Likewise, a life based on wanting and getting more and more things, especially at the expense of others, will bring heartache and turmoil to all around.

Micah describes a society sick from within. He has spoken in generalities so far, but he is about to name names, single out specific groups, for evil always has a face. The opening argument continues in chapter 3.

How much better to obey willingly than by compulsion!

## Questions for discussion

- ◆ In what ways do people covet today?
- ◆ In light of Exodus 20:3-4, give several examples of idolatry as it is evidenced in today's world.
- ◆ Should Christians today be concerned with issues of social justice and welfare? Why or why not?
- ◆ How does God punish the sins of a nation today?
- ◆ In light of Leviticus 25:10ff., what is the purpose and significance of the year of Jubilee?
- ◆ How can we apply the meaning of the year of Jubilee in our world today?

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