

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for May 10: Rebellion: A path to ruin

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Consider yourself warned. Rebellion against God will bring about ruin, destruction and judgment. The carnal nature, with its appeal to pleasure, position, wealth and pride is a constant harbinger of personal and national disaster. Having the freedom to pursue a life that satisfies these natural passions for sin ultimately will turn happiness to despair and good times to disaster.

This lesson is built into the very nature of the universe. People can beat their heads against the wall of the moral nature of God, but one will always lose this confrontation.

According to Jeremiah 26:18, Micah of Moresheth “prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah” and warned the people of Judah of God’s judgment: “Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets” (see Micah 3:12). A contemporary of Isaiah, Micah spoke eloquently and poetically, much like Isaiah, of God’s judgment upon Judah during the latter part of the eighth century B.C.

Micah affirmed he was at his task “during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah” (v. 1) between the years of about 750 to 687 B.C. His ministry began shortly before the fall of Israel, the northern kingdom, 722 B.C., removing that nation as a buffer and increasing the danger of Assyrian invasion.

Living in the foothills of Judah near Philistine cities, 25 miles southwest of

Jerusalem, in the path of foreign military danger, Micah's preaching took on a broader perspective, transcending a local focus.

He grew up in this small village, close to the soil. Unlike aristocratic Isaiah, Micah was of common lineage and upbringing, but with the highest of ideals and ethics. The remoteness did not prevent Micah from being constantly aware of the of the cultural and political corruption taking places in his nation and in Jerusalem.

Compelled by his calling and the urgency of God's coming judgment, Micah plied his skills of communication with word and pen as a country preacher steeped in the common values of decency, integrity and justice. The country people, poor farmers and shepherds, were his heroes and the center of his compassion. Strong minded, passionate and determined to make a difference, Micah sought to turn his nation from destruction and to restore its righteous values.

His prophetic impact was powerfully significant (Jeremiah 26:19). Reformation was not enough. Restoration and transformation were imperatives, called for by this discerning and discontented prophet.

Revelation (Micah 1:1)

Micah declared his authority by announcing he had received a direct revelation from God. There are no details of how or when such a clear and acceptable visit from God occurred. God may have spoken out of a heavenly vision or out of the horrible situation in Samaria and Jerusalem. Either, or both, would spark a flame of concern and passion to inspire the heart of Micah to be God's spokesman, the herald of forceful warnings of judgment.

God's word was objectified enough that it was compelling. Micah would have had a vibrant connection to the spirit and heart of God to be given

such a timely and straight-forward message for Judah. When God has a task to be done, he calls someone to do it. Micah's sensitive spirit heard "the word of the Lord."

Rebuke (Micah 1:2-5)

Micah, direct and to the point, began his message with a rebuke of the transgressions and "sins of the House of Israel" (v. 5). The center of iniquity was identified as Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of the northern and southern kingdoms. (v. 5). Micah, the prophet from the country, saw the cities as the places where wickedness and degeneracy were concentrated.

His rebuke is backed up by the authority and judgment of God. The warning was not just for Israel, but universal in scope and invoked the power of God's eternal justice and holiness. A significant strength of the Christian message is its universal appeal and application to every individual who lives.

With resounding command that echoed throughout the hills and valleys, cities and streets of Israel and the universe, God demanded all people on earth, then and now, "Hear," and "listen," because the Sovereign Lord will hold forth as a witness against iniquity and rebellion.

God is presented as one who will leave his holy temple coming down to walk the earth with the power to change nature and man. When necessary, God will intervene when radical spiritual renewal is ignored for selfish ends that bring subtle destruction upon the world he created. Without spiritual transformation, judgment would be inevitable.

Results (Micah 1:6-9)

Wasting no words, Micah held Samaria (v. 13) accountable and responsible for the coming judgment of God: "Therefore, I will make Samaria a heap of

rubble, a place for planting vineyards" (v. 6). Samaria was the seed bed for all that troubled both the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) kingdoms. This verse was apparently written before the fall of Samaria, a hill fortress, that fell after three years of assault by the Assyrians. Micah could later observe the rubble and ruined city degenerating further with time and project that Jerusalem (v. 9) soon would experience the same. The sins of the cities came to affect the entire nation.

The nature of the core sin is highlighted as idol worship and temple prostitution (v. 7). The downward slide could be forecast from observing the nature of worship. The worship of false gods in Samaria and Jerusalem would bring total destruction of the cities, their idols and the nation as a whole. The idols would be pulverized and those who hired the prostitutes would be burned with fire. Micah understood God as willing to see his beloved Israel totally destroyed because of rebellion and unfaithfulness.

To get the attention of Judah, Micah, "barefoot and naked," went weeping and wailing as he preached, howling like a jackal, moaning like an owl. Micah considered their condition so deplorable as to be "incurable" (v. 9). Micah was the judge and jury, the spokesman for God against the sins of his nation.

Consider yourself warned. Refusing to take this warning seriously as applicable for today, the citizens of our nation refuse to acknowledge the downward spiral to judgment and the failure of civilization because of an arrogance of pride and a fatal blindness to the dark side of human nature. The cure is known but the patient is unwilling to take the pill of spiritual renewal in Christ. God speaks again, "Hear" and "Listen" with a universal challenge to repent.

Ruin (Micah 2:1-4)

History shows the second prophecy of Micah (1:10-16) was not accurate.

The Philistine area took the brunt of the attack by the Assyrians with parts of Judah left unscathed.

Humbled by this, Micah is quiet for a brief time and resumed his prophetic message in chapter 2 with messages directed toward the greed and avarice of the wealthy who engaged in corruption, exploitation, sleazy business deals, violence and crime.

The incorrigible nature of this wickedness was marked as premeditated, deliberate, open-handed, double-dealing, intentional, brazen and blatant. Ignoring the hurtful consequences to the victim, greed and lust prevailed at the expense of the poor and oppressed. The corrupt businessmen lay awake at night to scheme how, in broad, daylight acts of power, land-grabbing, fraud and grand-theft could be carried out in cahoots with the authorities.

This is wickedness at its worse. Because the opportunity was there, the situation of crime was seized upon and carried out in total disrespect of the other's property and security. One can imagine how distraught Micah became as he lived under the calling of God and in these circumstances. Filled with compassion and hurting for the victims, he preached this scathing message of judgment upon a culture that was out of control because of evil hearts, reckless abandon and rebellion against all things good and righteous.

Greed still brings destruction today. Greed, unchecked, is the outward expression of selfishness, the source of harm and ruin, the seed bed of the root of evil, the calamity of Wall Street and Main Street, the Bernie Madoff syndrome of exploiting others for one's own personal luxury.

Micah brings his accusations and indictment against these despicable, unprincipled people with the authority of God's power and justice, "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" (v. 3). Ruin was in the forecast for those who schemed and cheated in that their possessions would be taken from them and given to traitors (v. 4).

Conclusion

Once again, we are confronted with the basic carnal nature of man to sin, to choose evil rather than good, to look for gain at the expense of others, to scheme exploitive ways to have the advantage and control. One of the great contributions of Christianity to our world is the setting of the standards of righteousness written in the heart of God, on tablets of stone, and mirrored in the heart of man.

God's justice and righteousness is the highest of ideals and values in the universe and goals toward which everyone should strive. Thank God for people like Micah who stood up for the victims, poor and oppressed, of the wicked. Micah pressed on to preach that the filth and stench of sin is abhorrent to God and his holiness and ultimately will bring God's judgment.