

## **A Sickness in the land**

## **Micah 1:1-16**

### Introduction

Imagine a time of great affluence and material wealth. Prosperity and luxury. But also a time of godlessness and secularism. The rich getting richer, and the poor, not only getting poorer but at the expense of the rich. Affluence leading to increasing callousness, and, a blatant disregard for the laws of God that had been so fundamental to the nation. Instead of justice one could only expect conspiracy, bribery and corruption. The religious leaders even collude in all this. Services going on as normal but are hollow and pointless. Religion has its box but it does not affect daily life or business.

However there were those who publicly spoke out against this threat to society.

The time is around the 7th century. Israel was divided with one capital Jerusalem in the South and Samaria in the North. Amos and Hosea were prophets in the North, Micah and Isaiah in the South.

It was the time of the rising Assyrian empire. The most bloodthirsty, manipulative and arrogant empire of history. There was a succession of 4 kings, all increased their empire at the expense of Israel. The first took Galilee, the second attacked Samaria and the third took it. King Hezekiah in the South set about reforming the apostasy and idolatry of his time.

The 4th Assyrian king did all he could to take Jerusalem, and although took many cities he did not succeed. This relief during the reign of Hezekiah did not turn the nations leaders back to God and when the Babylonians took over the Assyrian empire, they moved in on Jerusalem, took it and sent the inhabitants into exile.

Micah (whose name means 'who is like the Lord') was the prophet from a thriving country town 21 miles south west of Jerusalem. He grew up in a quiet agricultural community, but went to the capital Jerusalem when called, by God to do so. His home was a far cry from the brutality of the market place, corruption of the temple and courts and godlessness of the palace.

His three messages are of doom and hope, judgement and deliverance by God, Gods hatred of idolatry, injustice, exploitation of the poor, rebellion and empty ritualism, but a God who delights in repentance. The Davidic kingdom will seem to come to an end, but will be greater than ever when the Messiah comes.

### Setting the scene

This is a message for all people, everywhere at any time. HEAR THIS. The image is one of a law court. God is the judge and God's own people. Divided Israel, Judah & Samaria are the defendants, formally named on the charge sheet in verse 5. Not only is

Israel under judgement but all the nations. Judgement is inevitable without repentance.

When a judge enters a courtroom, all rise out of respect for the judge and the law he upholds.

And the message is?

The Lord is coming, literally translated according to Wiersbe - "to come forth for battle". God opens the court and declares war! He is about to intervene in history. A judge does not normally take sides; he is there to see that justice is done. But God is the judge, jury and witness. He has all the evidence necessary. Rebellion and sin has its consequences.

This is the word of the Lord God, an oracle from heaven itself. And you're not going to like it. Like Godzilla he is going to tread on, flatten the high places, the pagan shrines on the mountains. Jerusalem and Samaria had become pagan centres of idolatry. And is it so different today with Canterbury and Westminster cathedrals used for multi-faith services and major rituals and services of Freemasonry. The wealth the city had accrued by idolatry and unfaithfulness to God (using the OT symbol of prostitution) will be taken away - by the Assyrians and used in their temples for idol worship.

Idolatry was popular because it invoked the blessing of nature gods, usually though intercourse with temple prostitutes. Cultic prostitution brings the forces of life in nature, especially in spring, to be revived. "Much

New Age belief and practice is nothing more or less than a replica of these ancient superstitions" Prior p116. A society that acknowledges Mother nature, the forces of Aphrodite, Gaia, or ying and yang is no different. The devil is very ecological -recycling the same old pagan beliefs with no moral obligations and a rejection of the one true God.

Micah spoke of the fall of the beautiful city of Samaria. This once mighty city would be reduced to a pile of rubble - and he was to live to see it. Even the worst of the blitz only destroyed parts of many cities. Imagine the whole of London, and all it stands for today via computers and the like, destroyed to a pile of rubble. To us it is the story line of science fiction (The last train). It must have seemed just as unbelievable to them. Micah spoke of the spread of Assyrian destruction reaching into the southern kingdom even to the gates of Jerusalem like a malignant disease.

Micah is no ostrich, he publicly mourns the sin of Israel. Knowing it will spread from the North, even to Jerusalem.

The spread of sin has been illustrated only this week with the copycat school shooting in Canada and England.

### vs 10-16

The nine towns mentioned by Micah comprise a circle of nine miles in a radius around Micah's home town and visible from there on a clear day.

The text is an intricate word play in Hebrew -but imagine Micah was in Scotland, he might write: Crieff will know grief, Forfar will forfeit. Wick will be burned, Stornaway will be blown away, Edinburgh will be no Eden, for Tain there will only be pain.

Bethlephrah - "the house characterised by dust" - the inhabitants will roll in the dust as they are humiliated by defeat.

Shaphir - "beauty town" - will be de populated forced into exile and paraded through the streets of Assyria in nakedness, shame and disgrace.

Zaanan - "go forth" but they did not go to support their neighbours.

and so on

The strongest and most fortified town of the region Lachish, was ordered to be evacuated at speed. They had the latest in military technology - horses and chariots, they were arrogant and felt invincible. The beginning of sin was to be found there – a dependence on modern weapons, not the Lord.

Like dominoes, the cites were to fall to the might of Assyria.

But the first and last names in the list are more than just coincidence. Israel was proud of their ancestor

David, but Gath and Adullam illustrate not victorious David but defeated and humiliated David.

"Tell it not in Gath" is a direct quotation from David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan when the Philistines were victorious. Gath being their stronghold. David did not want news to reach home; he did not want then to gloat over the defeat of Israel. Equally Micah does not want Assyria to gloat over their similar victories.

"The glory of Israel will come to Adullam" referred to the time David hid from Saul and was joined by a band of no-hopers which did nothing at all for his street credibility. Similarly Israel would be hounded by Assyria.

The warning was there. But not heeded, "mourn for the children in whom you delight" Rebellion, idolatry, self worship - was to leave behind a legacy of war, devastation, and exile.

What will God bring on us - a sinful arrogant, rich and apparently powerful nation ?

Micah was clearly distressed by the plight of his people, even though he knew that God's judgement upon them was fully deserved. Blessed are those who mourn says Jesus in the Beatitudes, over their own sin and the sin of the nation. How much does sin bother us ? How much do we respond to human suffering, deserved or otherwise -in Kosovo, in Kilgetty?

As we look at Kosovo, where is our confidence -in the might of our weapons? Or in upholding righteousness? Who is gaining from this war?

Let us beware of complacency. Israel were warned to repent of sin, but the Assyrians and later Babylonians were to be used by God in judgement on His nation - maybe as NATO is being used against Molosovich. But also remember, Assyria and Babylon were overthrown, and unlike chastised Israel are no more today. Oh that Britain may heed the word of the Lord, may heed the warnings of Micah, just as relevant today as then, 2700 years ago. When God speaks - it pays to listen.

(And if we feel small and insignificant as a church or individuals - remember the individual droplets of water that caused the airliner to crash into the Potomac river, Washington)

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been saved by just 10 righteous people. Imagine your town or village destroyed – because you were having an off day.

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