

# A Lamentation

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] I'd like you to open your Bibles to the book of Micah, chapter 1. Micah is in the Old Testament. It's found on page 816 in the Old Testament section of your Pure Bibles.
- Micah, chapter 1, page 816 in the Old Testament section of your Pure Bibles. I need to say to you that if my face looks a little bit stern this morning, because I slept the wrong way last night, and I have some pain here on my back, so I'm going to be very careful with my neck.
- But at least I'm not stiff-necked. Well, I also want to welcome visitors who are with us this morning for this service.
- It's a wonderful time to be together as God's family, giving praise to God, giving thanks to God for the wonderful gift of children that God has given to us, and presenting them before God as their own sacrifice of worship and praise and faith and obedience.
- that will be consummated in the future. We are beginning a series on the book of Micah, and I need to warn you again that the problem with Micah is that his prophecy, his preaching, did not have the polish and the politeness that people on the West Coast deserve.
- [ 1 : 4 6 ] He doesn't have the humor, he doesn't have the stories, or the exciting illustrations that we're all used to.
- And in a sense we can say that the book of Micah lacks entertainment value. And so he's not going to make you laugh, he's very dead serious.
- And of course Micah could not afford to be entertaining, because he was sent to Israel and Samaria and Judah at a period in time when the whole nation was experiencing moral and spiritual decay.
- Samaria, this was the last quarter of the 8th century BC. Samaria and Jerusalem and Judah, the whole of the northern and southern kingdom of Israel, even though they were experiencing economic revolution, their economic revolution and blessing turned out to be a mixed blessing.
- Rather than being grateful to God for God's blessings, rather than exalting the God of Israel and worshipping him from their heart, their economic blessing became an opportunity for economic oppression.
- [ 3 : 1 1 ] Self-interest ranked higher than the interests of God. And of course the popular approach to religion during this time in Israel was complacent and utilitarian.
- Religion was used as a means of achieving one's own personal goals. And the purpose of God, as far as many of them were concerned, was to further their own personal needs.
- The prophets, the priests, all the clergy perverted the religion of Israel. And of course for most of them, there was no difference between the word of God and the word of the culture.
- Basically all the clergy did was to echo the spirit of the age and the wishes of the people rather than to proclaim the word of God.

So tragic. And so it was into this terrible situation that God sent the prophet Micah with the word of the Lord.

[ 4 : 37 ] He was not sent to make religious commentary on the times. He was sent to proclaim with grace and authority and boldness the prophetic word of the almighty God of Israel.

The word that Micah proclaimed was a word of judgment it was a word of hope it was a word of grace it was a word of comfort it was a word inviting the people of God to come back to the Lord their Redeemer and Savior.

What is interesting here is that Micah does not begin with a message of hope. He does not begin with a message of love and mercy and grace.

Rather he begins his prophetic ministry with a message of judgment. And I think it's a very, very disturbing message.

Micah chapter 1 is not a happy chapter at all. It is dead serious. Like many of us today that is not the way we would like to begin.

[ 5 : 55 ] If you hired a rector or a preacher, a priest to this parish his first message is not going to be on judgment. That is not the way we do things.

At least on the West Coast. It would be different in the South. See, what we want to hear just like Israel was an unending message of God's love God's grace God's forgiveness no matter what we did.

But what they wanted to hear was not what they needed to hear. and certainly not what God wanted them to hear.

What they needed to hear was first and foremost a declaration of God's impending judgment on them. And that's where Micah began his ministry.

Now, let me pause here and say this. None of us in this sanctuary love the message of judgment.

[ 7 : 10 ] We don't. It's not natural. And they ought not to be natural. I mean, people should not revel in the idea of being judged. I don't.

And what therefore happens is that we resent the message of judgment. And for some of us the problem is a little bit deeper than that.

Some of us were raised in homes where you were constantly criticized. You never did anything right. Even when you tried to do things right you were still slammed and condemned and criticized.

And so when you hear the message of judgment what you hear is the old tapes playing again. You are bad you are bad you are bad there is nothing good that will come out of you nothing ever will come out of you that is good.

That's the message we hear. And it is very unfortunate. And I want to encourage you this morning that when God proclaims the message of judgment God is not saying that you are bad you are bad you are bad and I'm going to get you.

[ 8 : 22 ] That is not the message of judgment. God's message of judgment is a message of grace. It is a message of invitation to people that God has redeemed that God has created in his image he is inviting them to a life of repentance so that they can experience and receive the fullness of God's grace mercy and forgiveness.

If God really wanted to punish us the way we feel he would not warn any of us he would just wait. do you make the mistake? I don't know whether you've run into people like that in your life.

You don't know what is right until you do what is wrong and you're never given a chance to do what is right. That is not the nature of the God of Israel. The God of Israel is a God who is a God of love but a God who is also serious about sin and will not flinch from judgment when there is lack of repentance.

God is a God of love and so this morning I want to say to us that this message of judgment is indeed a message of God's love calling us back to himself and it is important that we listen.

And so Micah begins to proclaim God's judgment on God's people people. And there are two things about this judgment that I want to bring before us.

[ 9 : 59 ] The first thing is that God's judgment of his people was not private. It was a public judgment. In other words, the judgment that God was going to bring to the nation Israel was not going to be done in secret.

God was going to publicly put his people on display and put his judgment on display. In verse 2, God summons the whole earth.

He says, Hear, you peoples, all of you, hearken, O earth, and all that is in it, and let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

God is about to judge his people, and in the tradition of the law court, God comes as the complainant, the plaintiff, and invites the whole earth to be witnesses to what God was going to do to his people.

You see, Israel had been called to be God's witnesses to the world. Israel had been called to proclaim the faithfulness of God and to live the holiness of God to all the nations.

[ 11 : 17 ] But Israel has failed in its witness. And now God is about to judge them, and God is calling the whole world, the whole earth, to witness to what God is going to do to the nation Israel.

In other words, he is going to make Israel an example of God. Do you see what is going on here? See, when the Christian church that has been called to be witnesses to God in word and in deed fail to be witnesses of God, God will make the church a public example of divine judgment.

And I think it is happening right now in Canada. Some parts of the Christian church are proclaiming that it is good for us to bless some sex unions.

And the central secular government in Ottawa, and probably the most secular government in North America, does not want to bless some sex unions. Isn't that a shame on the church?

Isn't that making the church a public example? If that is not God's judgment, I don't know what it is. But I also think, the other reason why God is inviting the whole earth to witness what it's going to do to his people, is because nobody, no nation will be exempt from God's judgment if it continues in disobedience.

[ 12 : 58 ] If God will not spare his covenant people Israel because of their sin, God will not spare anybody, he will not spare any nation, and he will not spare any denomination, nor any church, if they continue in disobedience.

And so the whole earth is called to be witnesses, and to witness what God is going to do. And God himself is witness against his own people. God is to be I want to say to us this morning again, we need to pay attention to God's warnings.

Israel had been given a lot of chance to listen to God, and they would not. And the time is about for God's judgment to come.

Now the second thing about this judgment is that it is devastating. There is nothing trivial about the judgment of God. Look at verses 3 and 4.

For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth, and the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will be cleft like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

[ 14 : 18 ] As God steps out of his throne, the whole of nature threatens to come apart, and as he moves across the landscape, the mountains melt, and the valleys turn into chasms, as a result of God's wrath and anger.

And of course, we can say that symbolically, the mountains here represent the people in places of eminence, at least in Samaria and Jerusalem.

And when God comes to execute his judgment, nobody will be exempt. And so as God moves in his judgment on Samaria, God wrecks destruction to the idols, to their symbols of worship, and their symbols of wealth.

Nothing is spared in the path of God's destructive judgment. Samaria the beautiful became a heap of stones.

And what do you think will happen to Judah? Will Judah learn from God's proclamation of judgment on Samaria? God's God's God's God's God's love.

[ 15 : 38 ] And so the prophet continues in verses 10 to 15 to talk about what God's judgment would look like in the cities of Judah.

As we read verses 10 to 15, we're not going to read it now, you have a number of pounds and word plays and alliteration. each city has an omen of some tragic circumstance that is related to the name of the city.

Let me translate that to us today. If Micah were to proclaim judgment to the lower mainland, a picture of what he does in verses 10 to 15 will sound like this.

Vancouver will be vanquished. Burnaby will be burnt. The West End will be wasted. And Shaughnessy will be shunned of her beauty.

That's what's going on here. A commentator, Peter Craigie, illustrates how a Scottish preacher might have imitated Micah's style if he were speaking to a Scottish audience about towns in Scotland.

[ 17 : 05 ] Now, forgive my pronunciation at this point. It says, quote, grief will be no grief. Forfeir will forfeit.

Grail will be frail. Wick will be burned. Stone away will be blown away. Edinburgh will be no Eden.

For ten, there will only be pain. That's what Micah is doing in verses 10 to 15. the cities of Judah will experience mourning and defeat and trouble and confusion and shame as a result of not listening to God.

And why is God doing all of this? Verse 5, All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob?

Is it not Samaria? And what is the sin of the house of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? It is because of the sins of God's people, because of their idolatry in the places of prominence in Jerusalem and in Judea that God is bringing judgment on his people.

[ 18 : 24 ] And it is not fun at all. And so the prophet is devastated. Micah himself is devastated because of this.

As he sees the judgment of God coming upon God's people. Verse 8 and 9, For this I will lament and wail, I will go stripped and naked, I will make lamentation like the jackals and mourning like the ostriches.

No true preacher, no true pastor would I know rejoice in the idea of God's judgment.

And nobody should because it is not a joke. So the prophet laments, he cries out, he makes the sounds of desolation and fear and pain as he anticipates what God is about to do to Israel and to Judah.

And of course he calls upon Judah in verse 16, he says, Make yourself bald and cut off your hair for the children of your delight. Make yourselves as bald as the eagle for they shall go from you into exile.

[ 19 : 43 ] Here the prophet laments and cries out and he invites Judah to lament and cry out unto God. And of course, what did Judah do? Judah did not listen.

In fact, if you read chapter 2, the clergy in Jerusalem got together and said to Micah, keep quiet, stop talking to us about judgment. Talk to us about the comfort of the gospel.

Talk to us about the covenant of God. Don't talk to us about judgment, keep quiet and step out of the way. But of course, you know what happened later on.

Samaria, because it did not listen, was destroyed in 721 BC. And 20 years after that, in 701, Judea was captured.

And by 581 BC, Judea was carried into exile in Babylon. God's died in Babylon. And so, everything that the prophet proclaimed about God's judgment came to pass, because God's people will not listen.

[ 20 : 52 ] And I need to say to you that nations and people who continue to suffer, who continue to sin against God and refuse to repent, will experience the judgment of God.

because the wages of sin is disaster, the wages of sin is defeat, the wages of sin is death. And that never changes.

And so, my question to you this morning is this. Is it worth it to continue to engage in sin? Is it worth it?

In the light of God's clear threat of judgment, now and eternity, is it worth it to ignore God and continue in your life of sin? I don't think so.

It's not worth it. And of course, you may say to me, well, I don't think I'm going to get into trouble because I am not an idolater. I'm not committing adultery.

[ 22 : 01 ] You know, I'm just a nice person. I'm just a nice person. Well, let me say this to all of us. God is not only concerned about the big sins, God is also concerned about the small little sins.

Our bitterness and unforgiveness, our dismissal of one another, our convenient heresies, and our West Coast syncretism.

These are all sins that draw the judgment of God. After the nine o'clock service, a young woman met me at the door and was crying because her husband has just announced to her they are moving out and she doesn't know why.

And so, we are not exempt from sin, neither can we be exempt from judgment if we refuse to repent. And I am not at all convinced that evangelicals do not need the warning of God's judgment.

I am not convinced at all. From my readings and from my experience as a pastor, evangelicals, if not in many cases, are still working in disobedience as non-evangelicals.

[ 23 : 29 ] evangelicals. And I think I know too much to believe that evangelicals, if they continue in disobedience, will escape the judgment of God.

In fact, the people of Israel were evangelicals as well. They had a covenant relationship with God, they had been redeemed by God, they were experiencing the grace of God, and because they did not listen, God's judgment came upon them.

And if we do not listen, we will not escape God's judgment now and in the future. And so, I call you this morning to a life of repentance.

I ask you to examine your life. I ask you to look closely your life, do not excuse your sin, bring it before God.

And God's promise is that he will grant to you and to me the gift of forgiveness, the gift of mercy, the gift of restoration, the gift of renewal, because Jesus has died on the cross.

[ 24 : 49 ] that is my prayer for myself and for all of us here this morning. And may God grant us. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.