

## **The Certain and Sorrowful Outcome of Idolatry Micah 1:1-16**

Pastor Kelly R. Randolph  
April 11, 2021

Listen to this assessment of a culture: *Unfortunately, the influx of material prosperity had spawned selfish materialism, a complacent approach to religion as a means of achieving human desires, and the disintegration of personal and social values* (Leslie Allen, NICOT, Micah, 240).

Which culture is being described here? Materialism. Religion used as a means of personal indulgence. Disintegration of personal and social values. Surely this is describing the culture in which we live today. Well, yes, it is accurate. But this statement was written to describe the culture of ancient Israel and Judah around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. This was the period in which the prophet Micah ministered.

Notice Micah 1:1. The book of Micah contains the word of the Lord given through him during the reigns of three kings of Judah (Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah) during the period of the divided monarchy. These words are addressed primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah. However, he also speaks to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Micah was from a small town called Moresheth. It was a small country village located SW of Jerusalem about halfway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean coast. The small-town prophet comes to the capital of Jerusalem with a big time message about the looming judgment of God.

Micah speaks to the people of God. He is not addressing pagan nations. He is addressing those who presumably have a covenant relationship with God. His message of judgment isn't directed at "those people out there" but "God's people right here." Though we will encounter words of hope in Micah, his message begins with an ominous warning of God's judgment.

In our passage today we are going to focus on two elements of the relationship between idolatry and God's judgment.

### **I. Idolatry incurs the judgment of God.**

A. God's judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel (vv. 1-7).

1. A poetic description of God coming to judge (vv. 2-4).
  - a. The Holy King comes from his temple to judge the earth.
  - b. He will come and tread on the high places of the earth.
  - c. The mountains melt and the valleys split open before his awesome presence. Like wax melting before a fire or water poured from a high place, the grandest fixtures of nature melt before God.
2. A statement of the reason he comes to judge (vv. 5). Come back to this.
3. A description of the judgment on Samaria (vv. 6-7).
  - a. Samaria will be razed to the ground. Her stones will be cast down to expose the foundation. Total destruction.
  - b. The carved images (idols) will be smashed to pieces. Her wages refers to gifts given to temple prostitutes. These will be used by the Assyrians for their own temple prostitutes.

- B. God's judgment against the southern kingdom of Judah (vv. 8-16).
1. The incurable wound of Samaria/Israel has come to Jerusalem/Judah.
  2. The names of the towns signify the ironic nature of the judgment.
    - a. Beth-le-aprah = house of dust. They are going to roll themselves in the dust as an act of grief over the coming judgment.
    - b. Shaphir = beauty town. But they will be shamed and naked.
    - c. Zaanan = go out. Instead, its inhabitants stay inside the city in fear.
    - d. Beth-ezel = house of taking away. The enemy will take away its place of standing.
    - e. Maroth = bitter. They will wait anxiously for good.
    - f. Lachish = similar sound to Heb. term for "to the steeds". The steeds of Lachish will be used not for battle but for retreat.
    - g. Moresheth = to be betrothed. They will receive parting gifts like a girl going to live with her husband except they will be going into exile.
    - h. Achzib = deception. They will be deceitful to the kings of Israel and be unable to offer any help in stopping the conqueror.
    - i. Mareshah = dispossess. It will be dispossessed by the enemy.
    - j. Adullam = cave where David fled from Saul. The people will want to flee for refuge from the enemy.
  3. The people should shave their heads in grief. They are going into exile. The Assyrian Sennacherib deported 200,000 people. Later, the majority of the people of Judah would go into exile under Babylon.
- C. In both cases, the reason for God's judgment is idolatry.
1. The language of idolatry in the text.
    - a. Carved images (v. 7). Idols (v. 7).
    - b. Transgressions of Israel (v. 13).
  2. This idolatry is labeled as transgression (rebellion), sin (missing mark). See the terms in v. 5.
  3. In the kingdom of Israel, it was mixing the worship of idols with the worship of Yahweh. It was mixing Baalism in the name of worshipping Yahweh.

We might be tempted to think that God is being excessively harsh with his people. These descriptions of mountains melting, cities being destroyed until no stone is left standing, enemies overrunning the cities of Judah – isn't it over the top?

If we think this way, we have not understood who God is and the nature of his relationship with his people. I think two concepts help us understand why idolatry is so evil.

- **God's absolute uniqueness (holiness).** The Lord is the only true God. He is the most glorious person in the universe. All other gods/idols are imposters. They are fakes. To worship someone or something other than God is a great evil. It is to give to someone or something other than God what only God deserves. To mix worship of something else with worship of God is to fashion God according to our tastes rather than worship him in the beauty of holiness. God's uniqueness makes idolatry sin.
- **God's absolute love for his people.** Since idolatry is evil and harmful to the people of God, God is very jealous over the relationship he has with his people. This is why idolatry is often characterized as adultery in the Bible. Would you think it is OK for your

husband or wife to have an “open” relationship in which others would be invited? Can you imagine your spouse saying, “I really do love you. But I love this person too. Why can’t I love you both at the same time? That would make me really happy.” Idolatry is like us saying to God, “God I really love you but I also love (money, my job, education, approval, my hobbies, my car, my family, etc). I want to be free to worship you plus these other things because that makes me happy.”

No! In fact if your spouse invited such a thing, you would be angry and rightfully so. Why? Because you hate them? No. Because you love them. That love is an exclusive love. So it is with God and his people. He loves them in an exclusive relationship. He knows that for them to love another is adulterous and harmful. So, he judges them when they practice idolatry.

Someone might say, “well, that’s Old Testament stuff. God doesn’t act like that in the New Testament.” Oh really? I’m not sure you’ve read the New Testament closely enough. In Acts 5 God struck two people dead for trying to love money and approval along with him. They were named Ananias and Sapphira. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul said that some of the Corinthians had become sick and some had died because they wanted to worship Christ by taking the Lord’s Supper but they also loved their pride and despised certain people in their congregation.

God’s judgment is not always eternal judgment. Sometimes it is disciplinary judgment intended to expose our idols and move us back into alignment with him.

## **II. A proper response to judgment is sorrowful repentance.**

A. The warnings of God’s judgment are designed to prompt repentance.

1. Micah does not have an explicit call to repentance. He doesn’t say “repent” or “return.” Like Amos or Hosea.
2. But messages of judgment seem to have an implicit call of repentance in the prophets.

<sup>15</sup> The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. <sup>16</sup> But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy. (2 Chron. 36:15-16)

3. Micah does have implicit messages of repentance. See 3:8; 6:6-8.

B. Micah models the sorrow that God’s judgment should generate (v.8).

1. He laments, wail, mourns.
2. He exhibits the visible actions of sorrow (stripped, naked).
3. He is deeply grieved over the sin of his people.

Friends, we do not shy away from the biblical message of God’s judgment. God is just and his judgment is just and right and holy. We do not apologize for God’s reaction to human sin unrepentant evil. We affirm what Scripture says about God’s just judgment.

At the same time, shouldn't there be a part of us that laments this reality? Wasn't this Jonah's problem? He did not want to preach to the city of Nineveh precisely because he knew that God would forgive them if they repented. It would be much better for us to be like Micah who laments and grieves over the sin of his people. It would be much better for us to be like Paul who loved his fellow Jews so much he said he could wish himself accursed for them to find salvation in Christ.

Of course, we do not want to be blind to sin. But once seeing sin, are we willing to have sorrow over it? How easy it is for us to see the sins of the church or the sins of a brother or sister in Christ and to point them out. But how many of us sorrow over those sins?

The proper response to judgment is to be sorrowful over the sin that evokes judgment and to turn from it back to God. Repentance is the right response to a message of judgment.

### **Conclusion**

The good news of the gospel is that when we repent, God forgives.

- Repent because of the message of eternal judgment. Turn from your sin. Turn to Jesus Christ who died and rose again so you could have eternal life.
- Repent because of the message of disciplinary judgment. Turn from your sin. Be restored to fellowship with God.