



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Ministering in an Evil Age

Two of the prominent Judean prophets of the 8th century BC were Isaiah (who wrote the longest book of all the Old Testament prophets [66 chapters) and Micah who wrote one of the shorter books (7 chapters)! Both served at the same time for roughly the same amount of time, but in distinctly different realms. Isaiah had the ear of the kings who sat on the throne of Judah. In fact, based on his easy access to the king (Isaiah 7:3) and his knowledge of the priesthood (Isaiah 8:2), it is believed that he was of royal blood. In contrast, Micah was from the farming community of Moresheth-gath. As such his ministry was directed more toward the common man.

Of two prophecies, Isaiah is quoted no less than sixty-six times in the New Testament;<sup>1</sup> Micah is quoted only twice.<sup>2</sup>

From this we would conclude that if either prophet was going to be remembered for the impact that his ministry had on the king it would be Isaiah! And yet if that was your guess, you'd be wrong. It is only of Micah that we read in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 26:18-19, “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, ‘Thus the Lord of hosts has said, “Zion will be plowed *as* a field, and Jerusalem will become ruins, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.””

Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and entreat the favor of the Lord, and the Lord changed His mind about the misfortune which He had pronounced against them?...” From this it is tempting to conclude that Micah had an easy go of it! He was respected by the king which means he would have been respected by the people. Truly at the end of his life, he must have rode away into the sunset with a look of satisfaction on his face, faintly hearing the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” Yet that clearly was NOT the case. God used this man in a great and mighty way. Today the body of Christ is still benefiting from his ministry!

The words of Dr. John Piper are also true of Micah.

You can mark it down that if you are a preacher God will hide from you much of the fruit he causes in your ministry. You will see enough to be assured of his blessing, but not so much as to think you could live without it. For God aims to exalt himself, not the preacher. (Piper, 2005, p. 19)

This clearly was the case for many an Old Testament servant of Christ including Micah! In fact, far from encouraged, as we’ll see, many times Micah was discouraged! And yet he kept going! He didn’t shrink back when it came to his calling!

As ministers of Christ we should ask: “How did this man of God, who was called to serve the lord in such a difficult time, stay in the fight? What is it that enabled him to keep going when it seemed that his ministry was for nothing?!” Micah 7 points us to the answer. To see it clearly, we need to appreciate the context of Micah’s ministry, specifically the environment in which he served.

At the outset of this prophecy, God declared His will regarding the northern Kingdom of Israel.

Micah 1:6-7, “For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country, planting places for a vineyard. I will pour her stones down into the valley, and will lay bare her foundations. All of her idols will be smashed, all of her earnings will be burned with fire, and all of her images I will make desolate, for she collected *them* from a harlot’s earnings, and to the earnings of a harlot they will return.”

With this, Micah proclaimed the horrible news that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was soon going into exile (cf. also Micah 1:16) because of

- (1) Israel’s “idols,”
- (2) The “loot”/“earnings” she acquired through her sinning, and
- (3) Her “images”!

Family of God, sin is a horrible thing. When it is left unchecked it will destroy the work and worship of any people. Because of the rebellion of Israel, God was going to hand the nation over to the Assyrians! Now

Micah's message to his people in Judah was that they must take heed! For the sin of Israel had infected Judah.

Speaking of the sin of the northern Kingdom of Israel, Micah said this:

Micah 1:9, "For her wound is incurable, for it has come to Judah; it has reached the gate of my people, *even to Jerusalem.*"

Family of God, what Israel did in moderation, Judah did in excess! Micah directed this message towards Judah.

"Micah 6:16: The statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab are observed [in Judah] [recall Ahab not only married Jezebel but he also introduced Baalism to the northern Kingdom through her]; and in their devices you walk..."

It is hard to imagine, but Judah out-sinned her sister, Israel! In fact years later, Jeremiah would write...

Jeremiah 3:11, "And the Lord said to me, 'Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.'"

Truly, Judah not only emulated the sins of her sister to the north, but the nation surpassed the sins of Israel! In fact, Micah contains description after description, rebuke after rebuke directed toward Judah on account of her rebellion, many of which we've already seen!<sup>3</sup> Yet consider with me one more.

Micah 7:3-4, "Concerning evil, both hands do it well [IOW, Judah was good at sinning! What Israel had done with one hand in the darkness, Judah did with "both hands" in the light!]. The prince asks, also the judge, for a bribe, and a great man [a reference to the wealthy and those in authority] speaks the desire of his soul [the idea is "openly," without shame]; so they weave it together [this is carrying on with the hunting metaphor of v. 2! Micah here is talking about open collusion, without shame! The result was devastating...]. The best of them is like a briar, the most upright like a thorn hedge [sin was so rampant that the "best of the best" was shamefully lacking! Rather than upholding the covenant will of Christ, these leaders served as a thorn hedge which kept "justice, mercy, godliness" (Mic. 6:8) from the land!]. The day when you post a watchman, your punishment will come [lit., "the day of your watchmen has come" which is an eschatological reference to the Day of the Lord predicted by prophets]. Then their confusion will occur."

I hope you get the picture. Micah served the Lord at a treacherous time. Everyone, everywhere was out for themselves! And few cared about the consequences before God! Accordingly, Micah counseled any and all who would listen.

Micah 7:5-6, "Do not trust in a neighbor; do not have confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom guard your lips [notice the progression in intimacy and so treachery from "neighbor," "friend," to "wife."]. For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household."

What a sad and shocking day. Yet that was the time in which Micah lived! How long did Micah minister in

this environment; 30, 40, 50 years? How much fruit arose from his ministry? More importantly, how much fruit did Micah see? I dare say none! Yet it did not matter, for if the nation did not turn from their rebellion, God's judgment was going to come just as it did on the Northern Kingdom and it was this message which God gave Micah to preach.

Micah 4:10a, "Writhe and labor to give birth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in childbirth, for now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon..."

That was what was going to happen if Judah did not repent! That was the message of Micah! Now you must see that this judgment would have impacted Micah as well! He wouldn't have been immune from the dreadful consequences that his generation reaped on account of their sin! And yet, that is not all. The difficulty of Micah's service was compounded on account of the rebellious prophets which no doubt came in the thousands!

Micah 3:6-7, "Therefore *it will be* night for you- without vision, and darkness for you- without divination. The sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will become dark over them. The seers will be ashamed and the diviners will be embarrassed. Indeed, they will all cover *their* mouths because there is no answer from God."

Imagine serving the Lord as a genuine prophet in a day when the "sun had set on the prophets"! You truly would be a lone and contrary voice indeed! Recall the promise that God gave His people a good thirty years before.

Amos 8:11, "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord God, 'When I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord.'"

It was Micah's calling to serve at a time when this promise was realized! What consequence did this have on Micah personally?

Micah 2:7, "Is it being said, O house of Jacob: 'Is the Spirit of the Lord impatient? Are these His doings?' [recall this was Micah's message when a birth-pang of God's judgment was felt in the land. How did the other prophets respond?] Do not My words do good to the one walking uprightly?"

In essence the false prophets of Micah's day were saying *this isn't of God! God would only will good for His people! When Micah says that "this is an evil day," (Micah 2:3) he's wrong!*

It is bad enough that Micah was sent to rebellious people with a message of judgment! He also was contradicted and opposed by almost every other prophet in the Kingdom! In fact, Micah was called to minister at a time when the Lord removed His word from the mouth of the prophets! They couldn't have spoken the word of the Lord had they wanted to (and truly, none wanted to).

Do you understand how difficult this calling would have been? It is easy to read this prophecy and forget that Micah was no different from you and me. We want affirmation in our service of the Lord. How much opposition would it take before you consider withdrawing from a ministry?

It is my experience that the average servant of the Lord today is good for one rebuke! Perhaps is

somehow like this:

- Let his good be “evil spoken of” one time...
- Let someone criticize him for serving...
- Let a person get offended by something they’ve done in the name of Christ...

...and the resignation letter will be on the way!

Micah served at a time and in an age where almost EVERYONE opposed the Lord! From the monarchs, judges, officials, priests, and prophets to the common man in the street... the love of Christ had grown cold! Furthermore, not only had the nation grown cold toward God and the things of the Lord, they demanded preachers who gave messages which would tickle their ears (cf. Micah 2:11)!

And unlike Jonah who was called to preach to an evil city and then leave, Micah’s calling kept him in Jerusalem for well over forty years! And yet you must see that Micah is NOT the exception to the rule! You don’t send Navy Seals into peaceful environments, and neither does the Lord send His servants! Think of these servants of Christ:

- Lot, who lived out his life of service to the Lord, “oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men” (2 Peter 2:7)!
- Isaiah, who from the start was told that he would not reap any fruit in his ministry except that of condemnation and judgment (Isaiah 6:9-13)!
- Jeremiah was commissioned into a similar environment such that at times he lost his passion saying; “O Lord, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived; Thou hast overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me” (Jeremiah 20:7). In fact, at times it was so bad that Jeremiah thought in his heart, “I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name” (Jeremiah 20:9a)!

One must see that ministry at times will bring you here! It did Micah! Notice Micah’s lament.

Micah 7:1-2, “Woe is me! For I am like the fruit pickers and the grape gatherers. There is not a cluster of grapes to eat, *or* a first-ripe fig *which* I crave [the idea is that of a farmer who painstakingly labors in a grove all winter and spring only to come in early June to discover that the first fruits of the crop have already been taken! When Micah thought of his forty year ministry, this was the analogy that came to mind! What specifically is Micah talking about here?...]. The godly person [the one who keeps covenant in love] has perished from the land, and there is no upright *person* among men [one driven out of concern for God’s honor and will. Instead, the land was filled with *hunters*...]. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; each of them hunts the other with a net.”

The picture is one of treachery! The hearts of those in a position to help others had grown cold! No longer caring about God, His Kingdom, His community, and so His people, AND with the cunning of a skillful hunter, they caught and consumed the weak and hurting! If you looked around Judah at this time that is what you would see! And this is what Micah beheld as the fruit of his life! This is what resulted from forty years of service!

Now, were there truly no godly people living in Judah? No! Isaiah ministered in the land with Micah.

Hezekiah sat on the throne. There were godly people. But when compared to the hundreds of thousands of spiritual and social “consumers” that constituted the people of God at the time, the lament is understandable! Micah’s era truly was a time, in the words of Paul, where “...they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:21).

Can you identify with this burden? Where the work you are doing for the Lord is unappreciated because those in your “Jerusalem” seem to love something other than Christ?! Has ministry brought you to this point? If it hasn’t, be patient; it will! A close look at the men and women of God that we memorialize (Hebrews 11) reveals that their service of God was far from easy! Notice where ministry brought Elijah:

1 Kings 19:10, “And he said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and THEY seek my life, to take it away.’”

Who are the “they” of this passage? They are the people of God! Do you remember the words of Stephen?

Acts 7:52, “Which one of the prophets did your fathers [the spiritual leaders of Israel] not persecute?”

If it wasn’t bad enough that God sends His servants into difficult situations and circumstances, we observe from Scripture that the majority of the persecution that God’s servants receive is from the very ones they’ve been called to serve! Speaking of these elders of the Old Testament, God said this:

Hebrews 11:36-38, “...experienced mockings and scourgings [again, from the hands of God’s people], yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

This is the nature of Kingdom ministry in a fallen world! In fact, Christ gave this ominous prediction:

John 16:2, “They [God’s people] will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.”

Will this have an impact upon us? You better believe it! Listen, if the perfect Man, Jesus Christ, sweat drops of blood on account of the stress that persecution brought upon Him (Luke 22:44), you can be sure that you too will be effected by opposition! Leslie Allen wrote these words concerning Micah 7:1-7:

This next oracle falls into the category of a lament in the sense not of a funeral dirge but of a type of composition of which so many examples are to be found in the Psalms. In fact nearly a third of all the Psalms may be assigned to this class... [Do you understand the significance of this statement? The Psalter contains God inspired words which the servant is to use in His worship of the Lord... and 1/3 of it is lamentation! Clearly, God expects that life in this state is going to bring His children there!] Micah uses this form to express how heavy upon his shoulders he feels the burden of the state of contemporary society. (Allen, 1994, p. 384)

The point we must see is that at times ministry will bring us to this place in our service of Christ; whether that be in the context of fellowship, helping others in the body, parenting, marriage, and the like! None of us are going to heaven unscathed! Look at where ministry brought Micah and expect that in time you too will feel much as he did!

So what is the consolation? How is it that Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Paul, Stephen, and the army of the anonymous (referenced in Hebrews) did not shrink back? How is it that they didn't climb into a hole and give up? What is it that kept them going? What is it specifically that kept Micah going?

Micah 7:7 is the climax of Micah's lamentation.

Micah 7:7, "But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me."

This is water to a thirsty soul! The difficulty of ministry did not lead Micah to pen his resignation. Rather, it revealed to him that his only love, support, consolation, and joy was the Lord! I love how Leslie Allen put this:

[Micah's] pessimism did not drive him to despair, but into the arms of the God to whom he was personally related. (Allen, 1994, p. 390)

So how it is that Micah didn't give up? Notice two things relating to God carried him along. The first is the hope of eternity.

Micah 7:7, "but as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation."

Micah uses a pun revolving around the word "watch." In Micah 7:4, his contemporaries are said to place a "watchman" (same word as in Micah 7:7) on the city walls, obviously to watch for an approaching threat. In contrast, the more difficulty Micah experienced in ministry the more he "watched" and longed for the consummation of God's Redemptive plan!

Micah 7:18-20, "Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt give truth to Jacob *and* unchanging love to Abraham, which Thou didst swear to our forefathers from the days of old."

This was Micah's hope and consolation! It wasn't that the people of God respond to him or that he received an award. It was that God someday would bring him into THE Promised Land of eternity- where righteousness, peace, and joy reign (Romans 14:17) and where Micah's love no longer would be tainted by sin! The more he served God in this state of sin and misery, the more he watched/waited/longed for the coming of the Lord!

In fact notice, it was based on this certainty that Micah closed this prophecy with a hymn containing four stanzas (Micah 7:8-20). It is placed into the mouth of the nation and so was to be read on the part of the

people of God as a whole. Notice the first stanza, spoken by the corporate servant of God which includes you:

Micah 7:8-9, “Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, *and* I will see His righteousness.”

Do you understand that as bleak and dark as this world at times is, in the end God is going to overcome it all! He is going to OVERCOME

- (1) The evil of Satan, his followers, and his schemes,
- (2) The wicked who refuse to bow the knee in this age, and
- (3) Our sinful and rebellious heart!

Micah overcame the burden of ministry by keeping before Him ever and always that for which He was created: Emmanuel’s Land! Secondly, Micah overcame the weight of ministry on account of the knowledge of the provision of God.

Micah 7:10, “my God will hear me.”

We use the word “hear” quite differently than in the Bible. In English, the word has at least two connotations:

- (1) “Hearing” references the ability to perceive sound, and
- (2) Hearing can also denote “understanding” and so “affirmation/agreement,” as in the expression, “I hear you!” Of the two, the former is the emphasis in our culture- that is, perceiving a sound!

In the Bible, the word “hear” is used in both senses (Ex: Acts 9:7; 22:9), yet the emphasis is on the latter, that is, understanding/affirmation. Accordingly, to say that God “hears” prayer is to say that (1) He answers it, (2) He is intimately involved in your life, and (3) He will most certainly provide that which is needful in the moment!

With that, consider Micah’s second consolation: HIS God (laying emphasis on the fact that God had claimed Him for Himself and so owned the prophet) would hear him; that is, God would affirm, answer, uphold, protect, guide, care, and whatever else Micah genuinely needed in the course of ministry! God was not a far off/removed deity watching the prophet from a distance. Rather, Micah served the Lord knowing that God had his back and so would uphold the prophet in and through all things!

And so, by faith Micah lived as Elisha did before him. Elisha when he was trapped in a city by an army that sought his life prayed on behalf of his servant.

2 Kings 6:15-17, “Now when the attendant of [Elisha] had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’ So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ And the Lord



opened the servant's eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."

Micah served the Lord with the knowledge that this God was both with him and would bear him in and through all things! "Do you?" If you do not, pray that God would open your eyes to this glorious reality (you will not see angels, but you will see the truth of God's "ever-present help in trouble," Psalm 46:1)!!

Let us close with the words Christ used to close His ministry on earth:

Matthew 28:20b, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This is the servant of God's second consolation!

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 1:23 (Isaiah 7:14); Matthew 3:3 (Isaiah 40:3); Matthew 4:15 (Isaiah 9:1); Matthew 8:17 (Isaiah 53:4); Matthew 12:18 (Isaiah 42:1); Matthew 12:21 (Isaiah 42:4); Matthew 13:14 (Isaiah 6:9); Matthew 15:7 (Isaiah 29:13); Matthew 21:13 (Isaiah 56:7); Mark 1:2 (Isaiah 40:3); Mark 4:12 (Isaiah 6:9); Mark 7:6 (Isaiah 29:13); Mark 9:48 (Isaiah 66:24); Mark 11:17 (Isaiah 56:7); Mark 15:28 (Isaiah 53:12); Luke 2:32 (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6); Luke 3:4 (Isaiah 40:3); Luke 4:17 (Isaiah 61:1); Luke 8:10 (Isaiah 6:9); Luke 19:46 (Isaiah 56:7); Luke 22:37 (Isaiah 53:12); Jn. 1:23 (Isaiah 40:3); Jn. 6:45 (Isaiah 54:13); Jn. 12:38 (Isaiah 53:1); Jn. 12:39 (Isaiah 6:10); Acts 7:48 (Isaiah 66:1); Acts 8:32 (Isaiah 53:7); Acts 13:34 (Isaiah 55:3); Acts 13:47 (Isaiah 49:6); Acts 28:25 (Isaiah 6:9); Romans 2:24 (Isaiah 52:5); Romans 3:15-17 (Isaiah 59:7-8); Romans 9:19-21 (Isaiah 29:16); Romans 9:27 (Isaiah 10:22); Romans 9:29 (Isaiah 1:9); Romans 9:33 (Isaiah 8:14); Romans 9:33, 10:11 (Isaiah 28:16); Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7); Romans 10:16 (Isaiah 53:1); Romans 10:20 (Isaiah 65:1); Romans 10:21 (Isaiah 65:2); Romans 11:8 (Isaiah 29:10); Romans 11:26 (Isaiah 59:20); Romans 11:26 (Isaiah 27:9); Romans 11:34 (Isaiah 40:13); Romans 14:11 (Isaiah 45:23); Romans 15:12 (Isaiah 42:4); Romans 15:12 (Isaiah 11:10); Romans 15:21 (Isaiah 52:15); 1 Corinthians 1:19 (Isaiah 29:14); 1 Corinthians 2:9 (Isaiah 64:4); 1 Corinthians 14:21 (Isaiah 28:11); 1 Corinthians 15:32 (Isaiah 22:13); 1 Corinthians 15:54 (Isaiah 25:8); 2 Corinthians 6:2 (Isaiah 49:8); 2 Corinthians 6:17 (Isaiah 52:11); 1 Peter 1:25 (Isaiah 40:6); 1 Peter 2:6 (Isaiah 28:16); 1 Peter 2:8 (Isaiah 8:14); 1 Peter 2:22 (Isaiah 53:9); 1 Peter 2:24 (Isaiah 53:5); 1 Peter 3:14 (Isaiah 8:12); Galatians 4:27 (Isaiah 54:1); Ephesians 6:14-17 (Isaiah 11:5, 59:17); Hebrews 2:13 (Isaiah 8:17-18); Revelation 3:7 (Isaiah 22:22).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 2:5-6 (Micah 5:2) and Matthew 10:35-36 (Micah 7:6).

<sup>3</sup> Recall Micah 2:1-2, 8-9; 3:2-3, 9-11; 5:14; 6:11-12.

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