

A Prediction of the Fall of Samaria

Micah 1

Micah 1:1-5 – *“The word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.*

² *Hear, all you peoples! Listen, O earth, and all that is in it! Let the Lord God be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.*

³ *For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.* ⁴ *The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place.*

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 are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem.”*

Background Notes

Which Old Testament prophet predicted that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem? Micah! In fact, Micah is probably best known for his prophecy of the birthplace of the Messiah: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting”* (Micah 5:2).

Micah was from Moresheth, a town about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Micah ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. A long ministry - at least fifty years! King Hezekiah completed his reign in about 700BC, so Micah was a pre-exilic prophet – that is, he ministered before the Jews went into exile as captives in Babylon.

Micah ministered primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah, but his ministry did extend into the northern kingdom of Israel. In fact, in chapter 1 Micah predicted the fall of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, and the fall of Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom.

Verses 2-4 picture the Lord leaving His holy Temple in Heaven and coming to this earth in judgment. All nations were called on to be a witness of the Lord’s just judgment. The Lord was likened to a giant, treading on the mountains and high places: *“For behold, the Lord is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth”* (v3).

The high places, with their altars and shrines, were used for idolatrous worship - but they would be stomped out of existence by the Lord of righteousness. Nothing can stand in His way (v4)! God's righteous judgment would result in the destruction of Samaria and the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Doctrinal Points

1. The fall of Samaria was predicted.

Micah 1:6-7 - *"Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, places for planting a vineyard. I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations. ⁷ All her carved images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her pay as a harlot shall be burned with the fire. All her idols I will lay desolate, for she gathered it from the pay of a harlot, and they shall return to the pay of a harlot."*

In 931BC, the united kingdom of Israel (that had existed under the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon) was divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Because of their involvement in idolatry, immorality, and social injustice, both kingdoms came under the judgment of God. The Assyrian Empire conquered Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel in 722BC. Micah predicted this judgment, and the prophecy was fulfilled in Micah's lifetime.

If you visit the ruins of ancient Samaria today, you will see the fulfillment of this prophecy before your very eyes - a field of ruins with orchards and vineyards growing among the stones of the ancient buildings that are scattered in the surrounding valley. And that's exactly what verse 6 says: *"I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, places for planting a vineyard. I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations.* I'll never forget standing in the ruins of this ancient capital and being impressed by seeing fulfilled prophecy first-hand!

Israel's idolatry included the sexual prostitution associated with the fertility rites of pagan Baal worship (v7). That's how far Israel had sunk morally in departing from the Lord. Verse 7 is a little hard to understand but basically it's saying that when Assyria came in and conquered Samaria, all of the idols, silver, gold and money associated with this religious prostitution was taken to Assyria. All this idolatrous treasure was recycled in Assyria's pagan religion (that also included sexual prostitution).

All these predictions came true not too many years after Micah wrote this prophecy. Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel fell in 722BC. The fall of Samaria was predicted.

2. The fall of Jerusalem was predicted.

Micah 1:8-16 - *“Therefore I will wail and howl. I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches, ⁹ for her wounds are incurable. For it has come to Judah; it has come to the gate of My people— to Jerusalem.*

¹⁰ Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all; in Beth Aphrah roll yourself in the dust.

¹¹ Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitant of Shaphir. The inhabitant of Zaanan does not go out. Beth Ezel mourns; its place to stand is taken away from you. ¹² For the inhabitant of Maroth pined for good, but disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem.

¹³ O inhabitant of Lachish, harness the chariot to the swift steeds. (She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion), for the transgressions of Israel were found in you. ¹⁴ Therefore you shall give presents to Moresheth Gath. The houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel.

¹⁵ I will yet bring an heir to you, O inhabitant of Mareshah; the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.

¹⁶ Make yourself bald and cut off your hair, because of your precious children. Enlarge your baldness like an eagle, for they shall go from you into captivity.”

Not too many years after the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom, the Assyrians made their move against Jerusalem and the southern kingdom, Judah. This was the well-documented invasion of Sennacherib and the Assyrian armies in 701BC. They conquered the outlying cities that formed a ring around Jerusalem, including Lachish (v13) and Micah’s hometown of Moresheth (v14). They fought and conquered their way to the very gates of Jerusalem (v9, 12).

But they never conquered Jerusalem! Do you remember why? God answered the prayers of good King Hezekiah and delivered the city of Jerusalem through a miracle. In one night, God struck down 180,000 Assyrian troops! This event is mentioned three times in the Bible – in 2 Kings 19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 37. And, if you like archaeology, you can see the ancient record from the Assyrian viewpoint on Sennacherib’s prism, which is located in the museum of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Unfortunately, the kingdom of Judah didn’t turn back to the Lord as a result of this invasion and the Lord’s miraculous intervention. Judah continued to go downhill, both morally and spiritually. Thus the Lord permitted Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian armies to sweep in and conquer Jerusalem in 586BC. So the fall of Jerusalem took place, just as predicted in these verses.

What’s interesting to note in Micah 1:10-15 is that the Babylonians followed the same route of invasion that the Assyrians had followed over 100 years before. Furthermore, as Micah traced the route of invasion, he made puns or word plays with the various towns that were conquered. For example, Beth Aphrah (v10) literally means “house of dust,” so Micah said to those living in Beth Aphrah, *“roll yourself in the dust.”* The idea of “rolling in the dust” would be an expression of grief. In verse 11, Shaphir sounds like the word for “beauty” in Hebrew, but its inhabitants would go out *“in naked shame.”*

Micah's puns and wordplays in these verses would be similar to us pronouncing judgment on America by saying something like, "You unbelievers of Pleasantville will experience what is unpleasant," or "If you don't repent, you skeptics who live in Heavenly Valley will end up in hell!"

Verse 15 predicts that the "glory of Israel," meaning Judah's royalty and nobility, would have to leave Jerusalem and escape to the caves of the wilderness. The reference to shearing their hair and making themselves bald (v16) signifies signs of deepest mourning. There would be much death when Jerusalem was conquered. The fall of Jerusalem was predicted.

Practical Application

Are you willing to be embarrassed for the Lord?

In verse 8 Micah said, *"Therefore I will wail and howl. I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackal and a mourning like the ostriches..."*

In order to dramatically emphasize the terrible conditions of the coming invasions, Micah played a role of the future, in which he stripped down to a loincloth and made sounds of wailing and mourning. This drama emphasized the conditions that would be common when the enemy would invade the land, and the people would be taken out as captives.

This dramatization must have been an embarrassing display for Micah! Would you be willing to do something like this - for the Lord? Something embarrassing? Are you willing to be embarrassed for the Lord?

Maybe the Lord would never expect you to do something like Micah's role-play, but what about giving your testimony on a street corner, or on a plane? What about giving thanks for your food in a public restaurant? What about standing up for the veracity of the Bible in the classroom?

Would you be willing to be different because you're a Christian - even if it means being mocked? Are you willing to be embarrassed for the Lord?