

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS - PART SIX - THE BOOK OF MICAH

This next minor prophet built on the message of the one before. Jonah described the call of a witness of Christ. Micah's theme is the authority of that witness, our right to speak.

His name means 'who is like God'. The answer is found in Micah 5:2, Jesus Christ, and those who serve under His authority.

The historical background is the same as the previously dated minor prophets, Hosea and Amos. The kings of Judah, described in II Chron.27-31, were in succession, Jotham who was a believer but ineffective as a witness of Christ, Ahaz who was totally idolatrous, and Hezekiah who was a faithful and most effective witness of Christ at first but later became proud and so undid most of what he had accomplished. No king of Israel is mentioned which may mean that Micah completed his book after the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722BC. This happened early in the reign of Hezekiah. Israel was now called Samaria, (1:1) made up of the remnant of the Israelites intermingled with Assyrian settlers. Judah had a final opportunity to learn from the fate of Israel, provided they would again submit to God's authority. Israel had lost their king. Judah needed God as their king.

The New Testament quotations are both in Matthew, the gospel which presents Christ as king.

1. Mic.5:2 is quoted in Matt.2:6 when Herod asked his theologians where it was prophesied that the Christ would be born. The answer was Bethlehem, but what worried Herod and provoked him to kill the babies in that area was Micah's promise that the Christ would be a ruler, and so a threat to Herod's throne. What he did not listen to was the prophecy that He would 'shepherd His flock', care lovingly for His people, instead of exploiting them ruthlessly for His own ends, as Herod had done.

2. Mic.7:6 is quoted in Matt.10:35,36 when the apostles were being sent out to preach the kingdom of heaven. Jesus warned them to expect opposition even from within the family where it would hurt the most, but where their witness must work above all, if they were to have any authority anywhere else.

Old Testament references were to kings and kingdoms from which the Israelites should have learned important lessons but obviously had not.

1. Zion,(3:10; 4:2,7,8) was the original city of Jerusalem, which symbolised God's kingship of Israel, and one day His kingship of all mankind. (Rev.21:2; Gal.4:26)

2. Balak,(6:5) was the king of Moab who tried to prevent the Israelites possessing the land God had given them, first by bribing Balaam to use his supposed influence with God against Israel, and then by tempting them to disobey the Lord in the compromise of inter-marriage.(Num.22-25) Their authority would be undermined in public by compromise at home.

3. Omri and Ahab,(6:16) were two of the worst kings Israel ever had, and the means of turning the whole nation, except for Elijah and a handful of others, away from God's rule in their lives.

4. Egypt,(7:15) was the place where they had been enslaved by a new king who did not know Joseph,(Exod.1:8) who tried to take God's place in their lives and from whose rule they had to be redeemed.

An outline of the book developing these ideas might be as follows:

1:1 Micah's authority to speak, his home town, his place in history, and his audience.

1:2-4 God, the Creator, is still sovereign.

1:5-7 Man's rebellion against God's rule, shown in his unfaithfulness, is his sin.

1:8-18 Repentance therefore means agreeing with God. We were wrong and He was right. The place names when translated illustrate how we try to disguise our rebellion and call it something else. Adullam was where King David demonstrated God's authority in his life by not hitting back when Saul made life so tough for him. He too was born at Bethlehem.

2:1-5 Our rebellion attacks the home and family first.

2:6-11 Rebellion involves a refusal to hear God speaking to us in His word.

2:12,13 He must become king among us again.

3:1-4 Politicians who exploit people for their own benefit are in rebellion against God.

3:5-7 Religious leaders who say what is popular because they are after our money are in for a shock.

3:8 Those who let God speak through them will dare to call rebellion sin.

3:9-12 Leaders motivated by money will bring disaster on themselves and those they lead.

4:1-8 When God is king, either at His future return or when He lives in us now, He teaches us from His word in such a way that our human relationships are restored to harmony and the needy are helped.

4:9-13 Why are you in confusion, conflict with others and in need? Because He is not your king and therefore you do not understand His word.

5:1 But our problems are enormous and urgent - like being besieged by Assyrians.

5:2-5 God's answer would be to be born as a baby at Bethlehem, and to rule like a shepherd with all the power of God. He will make peace between man and God, and man and man.

5:5-15 He is big enough to deal with an Assyrian army, or a rebellious human heart, the enemy within.

6:1-5 We have no excuse. The witnesses for the prosecution are the creation, the word of God, the record of God's redemption and our compromise.

6:6-8 Micah's personal response to his own preaching. He realised that the answer to his rebellion was not in religious observance but a humbling of his heart which would show in his attitude to others.

6:9-16 We have no excuse for social injustice. God will deal with this expression of rebellion as He had recently done in allowing the defeat of Israel by the Assyrians.

7:1-6 Faced with the facts of national immorality, political corruption, the breakdown of marriage and the family, our attempts to be witnesses of Christ seem hopeless.

7:7,8 Not if we face the situation in His time, His way and His power.

7:9-13 Though we have repented of our rebellion the consequences live on in personal and public suffering. Give God time and He will vindicate those who are under His authority.

7:14-20 What a tremendous thrill to serve and witness of a Lord of such power, compassion, forgiveness and understanding! Whatever are we afraid of?

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How does Micah explain the problem of sin in the lives of the people of his day? What illustrations does he use? What solution does he offer? How does his message about human problems fit into our modern world?(chapter 1)
2. How did their rebellion against God affect their families? How do we see the same consequences in our society today? What was the simple solution?(chapter 2)
3. On whom did God put responsibility for the condition of His people? What motivated leaders then which is still the case in modern times? How did Paul warn of the same temptation?(I Cor.8:15-19) What question should we ask ourselves if we are in any kind of leadership?(chapter 3)
4. When Christ is the King, either at His future return or in us now, how will life be different for us and those around us? Why then do even professing Christian people struggle so much?(chapter 4)
5. What does God promise about the coming of the King? How was this promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus? How can this event affect our lives in adversity?(chapter 5)
6. Why do looking at God's creation and reading His word leave us with no excuse for rebelling? How does real repentance show? How should it affect our attitude to the needy?(chapter 6)
7. How did Jesus see 7:6 as foreshadowing our society before He returns?(Matt.10:21) How should we respond when we encounter such treachery in leadership and even from neighbours and family? How can we be confident God will eventually deal with such a breakdown of traditional values in our world?(chapter 7)