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CHAPTER V

SUPERSCRPTION . . . Micah 1:1

RV . . . The word of Jehovah that came to Micah the Morashite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

LXX . . . And the word of the Lord came to Michaeas the son of Moraschi, in the days of Joatham, and Achaz, and Ezechias, kings of Juda, concerning what he saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem.

COMMENTS

The record of Micah's prophecy begins with a claim to inspiration. There is no description of his call, as in Isaiah and others, but the simple statement that "the word of Jehovah came to Micah the Morashite." It is echoed by *Hebrews 1:1* and *II Peter 1:19-21*.

Micah is also recognized as a prophet by Jeremiah, (*Jer. 26:18*), who says he speaks to all people of Judah in the day of Hezekiah.

Pusey makes the significant observation that the title and date are an important part of a prophetic book, since they indicate to people who come after that what the prophet wrote was not written after the event. To say it simply, there is evidence in the prophet's identifying both himself and his time of writing, that what he says is *going* to happen was not in fact written *after* it happened. It is not written *ex post facto*.

It is impossible to overstate this truth or the importance of it, since fulfilled prophecy represents some of the best possible evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures. As we have seen, the foretelling of the future was not the *primary* concern of the prophets. Nevertheless, when they *did* deal with the future, they did so with infallible accuracy.

In view of the fact that no mere human can foretell what is going to happen two minutes from now, the accuracy with which the prophets write of the future bespeaks divine guidance. They often dealt with events which were not minutes but years, even centuries into the future, and they did so without equivocation. If they "missed" it would prove they were delivering their own conjectures rather than a divine message . . . but they did not "miss." They preached and wrote what only God could know.

Micah not only claims that what came to him was the "word of Jehovah," he also claims to have seen in a vision those things which he foretold concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. *Hosea 1:1* employs the phrase "the word of Jehovah," while *Nabum 1:1* speaks of his writing as the record of a "vision." Micah employs both terms.

Had a later editor compiled these works they would probably have begun each book with identical headings. The variation with which each of the writers claims divine origin for his message lends weight of evidence to the conviction that what they wrote was *from* God *through* the prophets. One thinks at once of the Hebrew writer's assertion that *God* spoke to the fathers in the prophets in varying degrees and in varying ways. (*Hebrews 1:1*)

The significant thing is that in each of these three cases (Micah, Nahum, Hosea), there is a direct claim to divine inspiration. Micah makes a double claim indicating not only that what he is about to write is the "word of Jehovah" but indicating also the method by which it came to him, *ie.* in a vision. As Matthew Henry has aptly put it, "what is written . . . must be heard and received, not as the word of dying men . . . but as the word of the living God."

Micah's phrase, "in a vision," merits special attention. He claims to have *seen* vividly that which he writes. His record is an eyewitness account of history *in advance!*

This accounts for the unhesitating certainty with which he describes events that at the time of writing lay in the future. History has long since vindicated his confidence in what he wrote by confirming its accuracy.

It is well to note, before attempting a study of this book, that Micah's message is not arranged *chronologically* but *logically*. The emphasis is upon the message rather than upon the calendar of events.

The time of Micah's call is set by his reference to three kings of the southern kingdom. They are Jotham, who reigned from 750 to 735 B.C., Ahaz, who reigned from 735 to 715, and Hezekiah, who reigned from 715 to 687. Because of the nature of the persons and

reigns of these kings, Micah saw the leadership of Judah swing from holiness, peace, and prosperity, to crass idolatry and immorality, and then, almost desperately, back again toward righteousness and national respectability.

Jotham, the first of the kings mentioned by Micah, was the eleventh king of the southern kingdom. His contemporaries in the north were Shallum, who reigned one month, Menahem, who reigned two years, and Pekahiah, who reigned two years.

Jotham's reign totaled forty years, the first twenty-five of which were spent as co-regent with his father, Uzziah (also called Azariah). He reigned alone for sixteen years. The record of his rule is found in *II Kings 15:30, 32, 33*.

Jotham is best described as holy, his reign as peaceful and prosperous. (*Cf. II Chronicles 27:2-6*) He was succeeded on the throne of Judah by his son, Ahaz, whose person and administration were the exact opposite of his own.

The twelfth king of Judah, Ahaz, became king at the age of twenty. He was idolatrous in the extreme, to the point of sacrificing his own children to Baal. It was his reign that brought about the conditions which led to the destruction of Judah. Despite the efforts of his successor-son at reform, the seeds of God's wrath were deeply planted.

It was to Ahaz that Isaiah gave the prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah. (*Cf. Isaiah 7:14*) The efforts of modern translators (eg. the Revised Standard Version) to deny Isaiah's intent to foretell a birth without benefit of natural father is based solely upon the ambiguous literal meaning of the word *alma*, translated *virgin* in *Isaiah 7:14*. Literally, *alma* may mean, also, young maiden. This overlooks the historic context of the writing, which is set against the backdrop of Baal worship. It also ignores the intended impact of Isaiah's prophecy upon King Ahaz, a devotee of Baal.

The worship of the sun god, in his many guises from Babylon to Rome, always included the *alma mater* or *virgin mother*. Isaiah's use of the term *alma* to describe the birth of the Savior is part of the prophet's attempt to call the king back from idolatry to the worship of the *true* God, Whose Son would *indeed* one day be born of a virgin. (See above section on Baal worship.)

Fearing the northern alliance of Syria and Israel, the idolatrous Ahaz entered into a compact with Tiglath Pileser III, the wily ruler of Assyria. The results were disastrous for Judah. The southern kingdom became a mere satellite nation, a vassal state, tributary to Tiglath Pileser's Assyrian Empire.

The third king mentioned by Micah is regarded as a reformer. Hezekiah, the thirteenth king of Judah, and the son of the Baal-worshipping Ahaz, became king at the age of twenty-five. Most of his energies were given to attempting to undo what his father had done in the corrupting of God's people with idolatry.

What motivated Hezekiah's commitment to Jehovah and the restoration of temple worship, we can only guess. Some interesting fiction could be written describing him as a child, horrified at the sacrifice of his brothers and sisters to his father's pagan god.

Hezekiah's contemporaries in Israel were Pekah, who reigned for twenty years and Hoshea, who ruled for nine years. It was early following Hezekiah's ascension to the throne of Judah that Israel was overrun by Assyria.

Although the fall of Israel left Judah exposed on the north to the Assyrian armies of Sennacherib, the dedicated Hezekiah refused to pay tribute to the invader. As a result, in the fourteenth year of his reign, he found his own kingdom invaded by Sennacherib and his capital city, Jerusalem, threatened.

Because of the king's dedication to God, Jehovah intervened in behalf of Judah and Sennacherib was stopped just short of the city and turned back. (*Cf. II Kings 28 and Isaiah 36:1-22*)

Just following the deliverance of his kingdom from Assyrian invasion, Hezekiah fell desperately ill. It has been suggested that his illness was of divine origin to prevent him falling prey to his own pride. In any event, God intervened a second time on his behalf, when in answer to prayer, the king's illness was prevented from being fatal, and he was given the promise of fifteen more years of life and prosperity.

For this second deliverance, Hezekiah's gratitude was eloquent, (*Cf. Isaiah 38:10-20*) but short-lived. He shortly made a vain show of pride and possessions before Merodach-baladar of Babylon and as punishment received a message from God that, at a future time, his wealth would be taken to Babylon.

Concerning Micah himself little is known, but that little is enough to give a picture of a God-fearing man from the country, shocked and enraged at the luxurious degeneracy which he found in the capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem.

He is best described as "a younger contemporary of Isaiah," a country man whose home was in Moresheth, some thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem.

In the Septuagint Moresheth is referred to as Moresheth-Gath, meaning a possession of Gath. There are those who believe that Moresheth and Gath are one and the same. If this is true, Micah's home is to be identified with Gath southwest of Jerusalem rather than Gath-Gittain which lies about the same distance to the northwest. Jerome places it just east of Eleutheropolis.

Moresheth is mentioned explicitly by name only once in the Bible in *Micah 1:14*. There is one other allusion to it in *Jeremiah 26:18*.

The village lay in the Judean piedmont bordered on the north and east by the hill country and on the south and west by the plain which marks the way from Jerusalem to Gaza just on the border of the land of the Philistines.

Micah mentions the towns and villages in this area in such a way as to leave no doubt that he was personally familiar with them. The area is grazing country, with fields of grain and olive groves.

Micah, the prophet, is concerned with the plights of the poor in a land of affluence and plenty. The contrast between the much of the "haves" and the little of the "have nots" is reminiscent of our own unbalanced distribution of wealth.

Micah's answer was not political pressure. He led no "poor people's marches," he burned no businesses, he headed no political pressure group. To him, as he spoke the "Word of Jehovah," social injustice was a symptom of spiritual decay for which repentance of the oppressor was the only solution. The problem was, to him, ethical. The advantage taken of the poor by the rich, of the powerless by the powerful was, in the eyes of this country-bred preacher, an affront to God. He does not preach man's duty to man as a separate ideal from man's duty to God. *Rather the former is the outworking of the latter.*

In keeping with this, Micah's understanding of the work of a prophet was not primarily concerned for the future. His understanding of this mission is best expressed in his own words, "But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgement, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." (*Micah 3:8*) Whatever he said about what lay in the future, he said it first to move his contemporaries to immediate repentance, and secondly to reassure them that God would not forget His covenants.

As a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah's surroundings were those common also to them. It is not strange, then, that his message is also similar to theirs. As background, a reading of *II Kings 15:32-20:21* and *II Chronicles 27:1-32:33* will prove invaluable.

Fifty years of peace and prosperity had ended with the death of Jeroboam II. In 745 B.C. the Assyrians, led by Tiglath Pileser III, began their westward march and expansion. By 738 Damascus had fallen. In 721 the same fate would engulf the northern kingdom and its capital city, Samaria.

Although Judah, the southern kingdom, did not fall at that time, Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian policies later turned Sennacherib and the armies of Assyria on Judah. In 711, as previously stated, the southern kingdom became a tributary, a mere satellite of the Assyrian empire. When Sennacherib marched westward to put down a revolt in the philistine states, he humbled Judah with the same effort.

Thus Micah spoke in a time of social unrest, national insecurity, and religious turmoil not unlike those of the United States in mid-twentieth century. He viewed evil as a failure to grasp the nature of true religion, and believed that the only remedy was to strike at the source by denouncing the wickedness and demanding repentance upon pain of national annihilation. He would have agreed with *James 1:27* completely.

He makes no hesitation in insisting that the demands of God are binding upon the rich and powerful as well as the poor and powerless. He does not preach a "middle class morality" but eternal ethical right determined by Jehovah.

Chapter V—Questions

1. Micah's prophecy begins with a claim to _____.
2. Why is the date of a prophetic statement an important part of the book?
3. Micah's "double claim" to inspiration indicates both _____ and _____.
4. Account for the unhesitating certainty with which Micah describes the events of the future.
5. Micah's message is not chronological but _____.
6. The time of Micah's call is set by his reference to three kings:
Jotham, who reigned from _____ to _____.
Ahaz, who reigned from _____ to _____
and _____ who reigned from 715 to 687 B.C.
7. The first 25 years of Jotham's reign were as co-regent with _____.
8. Describe Jotham's reign.
9. Ahaz's reign was characterized by _____.

10. _____ is also called _____.
11. Ahaz entered into an alliance with _____ of Assyria.
12. This resulted in the southern kingdom becoming a _____.
13. Hezekiah, the third king mentioned by Micah, was the _____ king of Judah. He was the son of Ahaz, but he did not worship _____.
14. Hezekiah's contemporaries in Israel were _____ and _____.
15. Due to Hezekiah's dedication to Jehovah, _____ was stopped just short of Jerusalem and turned back.
16. Micah is described as a younger _____ of Isaiah.
17. To Micah, social injustice was a symptom of _____.
18. How did Micah understand his mission? (*Micah 3:8*)
19. Micah does not preach a "middle class morality" but _____.
20. The overthrow of the northern kingdom was accomplished by the _____ empire while Judah was conquered later by _____ who were in turn defeated by _____ who released the captive remnant.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST CYCLE

A CALL TO HARKEN . . . Micah 1:2-4

RV . . . Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord Jehovah be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be melted under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters that are poured down a steep place.

LXX . . . Hear these words, ye people; and let the earth give heed, and all that are in it: and the Lord God shall be among you for a testimony, the Lord out of his holy habitation. For, behold, the Lord comes forth out of his place, and will come down, and will go upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be shaken under him, and the valleys shall melt like wax before the fire, and as water rushing down a declivity.