

What's the Message – Lesson 67

We continue our study of the Prophets with the books of Micah and Joel.

Our prayer today is that we would always recognize it is to God's glory that He has mercy on us. It is because of His mercy and the gift of His Son we can boldly pray that He will be gracious to all who have gone astray from His ways, and will bring us back into His family with repentant hearts and steadfast faith. Amen.

In our two previous lessons we saw a common thread in the teaching of Amos and Hosea: judgment and reconciliation, or, in New Testament terms, Law and Gospel. It is one of the major themes of the Bible, and is seen in both the Old and New Testaments. It is because of the importance of this theme that so many prophets spoke about it. In today's lesson we will see two more prophets and their expression of this truth of God.

The first of these that we will look at is Micah. He tells us that he came from Moresheth, probably the town by that name in Southern Judah. He preached during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, which also tells us that he was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah. Although his message was primarily focused on the people of Judah and warned of the inevitable desolation of Judah, he also predicted the fall of Samaria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Other than what we can learn from the book itself, little is known about the person, Micah.

According to the Concordia Self-Study Bible notes, Micah's message alternates between oracles of doom and oracles of hope. The theme is judgment and deliverance by God (again, Law and Gospel). Micah also stresses that God hates idolatry, injustice, rebellion and empty ritualism, but He delights in pardoning the penitent.

The second prophet we will learn about is Joel. We know even less about this man than we do of Micah. We don't know where he lived, or have a firm date on when he spoke, but assume that since his emphasis is on Judah and Jerusalem, he probably came from that area. Luther writes this: "Joel does not specify the time at which he lived and preached, but the ancients say it was in the time of Hosea and Amos. We are satisfied with that and have no better suggestions."

Luther also wrote “Joel was a kindly and gentle man. He does not denounce and rebuke as do the other prophets, but pleads and laments; he tried with kind and friendly words to make the people righteous and to protect them from harm and misfortune. But it happened to him as to the other prophets; the people did not believe his words and held him to be a fool.”

And that, Teacher, except to repeat that these prophets spoke during the chaos of the demise of the Northern Kingdom and the decline of Judah, is about all the background I can lay out here. So what is their message, and how does it apply to us?

We need to remember two things that sparked these prophets into speaking out. First, there was an international struggle involving Assyria, Syria, Israel, and Judah. Assyria was reaching the height of its power and domination, and in spite of joint efforts by the other three countries soon overran them, first capturing Damascus, and a few years later Samaria, which brought the end to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah was spared total destruction, but became a tribute-paying vassal under King Ahaz. To put things on a timeline, this sequence of events took place prior to the reforms of good King Hezekiah.

While the words of Joel are known in the Christian church, and are cited by Peter in Acts (2:17-18, and 21) and by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 10:13), Joel paints an alarming picture of a plague of locusts and severe drought devastating Judah. He sees the locusts as the Lord’s army to reap vengeance on “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (2:31). And contrary to popular opinion in Judah that this day would be one of judgment on other nations but blessings for Judah, Joel describes that “great day” as one of punishment for Judah as well. Restoration and blessing will come only after judgment and repentance.

About Micah, Luther also has this to say: “Micah is one of the fine prophets who rebukes the people severely for their idolatry and constantly refers to the coming Christ and to His kingdom. In one respect he is unique among the prophets, in that he points with

certainty to Bethlehem, naming it (in chapter 5 verse 2) as the town where the Christ was to be born.”

Once again, we have this insight from Professor John Bright, in Section II of the chapter “A Remnant Shall Repent.”

He says that Micah *lashed at social unrighteousness with all the fury of an Amos. It seemed to him that the blow that had slain Israel must surely strike Judah down as well – and does she not deserve it! Un-brotherly greed dispossess the poor (2:1-2); the judges are venal and have made their courts instruments of injustice (3:1-1). The prophets are shams who counterfeit the divine Word and trim their oracles to the size of the fee (3:5); and the priests are no better (3:11). Yet these people sit in the midst of the wreckage they are making of their little world with the smuggest complacency: for they are Yahweh’s people, and Yahweh is their God, and the temple – Yahweh’s earthly habitation- is in their midst in Zion.*

Micah cries out against this false sense of security, saying: *On the contrary, because of their doings Jerusalem with its temple will become a ruin heap in the forest (3:12).* Is this relevant to our society and time? What do you see here that is different from what we are experiencing in our lives? Weren’t we founded as a Christian nation, and so blessed with God’s gifts that we are the international power-house and bright light of freedom and opportunity of our day? Surely God would not punish us for our behavior. Or would He?

Next time we shall look at the first 39 chapters of Isaiah.