

## **Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 20, Micah 1-3, The Message of Micah**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 20, Micah 1-3, The message of Micah

In our second lesson here on the book of Micah, we are going to work our way more carefully through the book chapter by chapter, but let me just remind us of what the structure, message, and ultimate contribution of Micah's ministry was.

Micah preaches in Judah in the eighth century during the Assyrian crisis. He has a book that warns of judgment in very severe terms that Jerusalem is going to be plowed like a field and the Assyrian army is going to come to Judah, but there's also the promise of salvation, the promise of ultimate restoration. Even the structure of the book of Micah itself reflects that.

We have three major sections in the book that are all introduced by the word to hear. There's a message to hear in chapters one and two that involves military invasion and exile, but then God brings a remnant back of his people and turns them into a nation and a people once again. There is a message to hear in the middle section of the book, where the promise of salvation becomes more prominent.

After God has inflicted this judgment on Judah in Jerusalem, there's going to be a renewal and a restoration of Israel and Zion is going to become the center of God's kingdom as it's restored. There's going to be peace and there's going to be a Davidic Messiah that will rule over Israel. Then in chapters six and seven, there is a call to hear.

There is a final reminder of Judah's failure to be the covenant people that God has wanted them to be. There's a wailing and a mourning as this judgment falls upon Judah in chapter seven verses one to seven. We see the personal pain of Micah himself as a godly man living in the midst of this crisis.

But there's also the hope in chapter seven, verses eight to 20, at the end of the book that the mourning and the wailing and the grief over what has happened in the Assyrian exile is going to turn into a time of joy and restoration. So, as we look at this, we see a powerful message of judgment and salvation. Remember that we learn from Jeremiah chapters 26, verses 17 to 19, that Micah's message played a significant role in helping Hezekiah to turn to God and in bringing about the sparing of Judah from the judgment that fell on the northern kingdom.

So, how does Micah communicate this message? What are the things that he says to the people of his day? And then we'll also think about and reflect upon what is the application of that message for us. In chapter one, we have a message of judgment that the focus of this message is going to be on Judah and Jerusalem. But in the same way that we saw the prophet, Micah, as he was called to minister to the northern kingdom and to preach a very unpopular message of judgment, Amos uses great rhetorical skill in making that message heard.

He begins by talking about the judgment of the nations. Then he turns to the judgment of Judah. And then finally he drops the hammer on the people that he's actually preaching to and talks about the judgment of the northern kingdom.

Micah is going to do something in chapter one that I think reflects that same type of rhetorical skill. We're reminded as pastors and teachers, we have an important message to preach. Make sure that we think about how we communicate that message as well.

Our rhetorical skill is not where our power comes from, but it is something that God is able to use as we communicate the gospel. And so, Micah is going to do something that is very similar to what Amos does. He begins by talking about God's judgment falling on the nations and on the world.

Then, he is going to focus on God's judgment falling on Samaria. And then, finally, he's going to conclude with the message that this judgment is going to fall on Judah and Jerusalem. In the book of the 12, I think that one of the significant things that we see in the book of Micah is the judgment that is talked about in Hosea and in the book of Amos, and in these preceding books that are focused on the Northern Kingdom, now that judgment is falling on the Southern Kingdom of Judah as well.

And so, in the beginning of this, we see God coming down as a warrior. We have that motif, that image, and that metaphor prominent in this chapter. And as God comes down upon the earth, we refer to this as a theophany.

This is an appearance of God and God is going to appear as a warrior and the earth shakes and trembles and actually melts in his presence because of the greatness and the power and the awesomeness of God. Pay attention, O earth, and all that is in it is how the book begins. For the Lord is coming out of his place, out of his holy temple.

He will come down, and he will tread upon the high places of the earth, and the mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will split open like wax before the fire. And so, we have the white water of God's wrath and God's judgment here. And when the Lord shows up as a warrior, even the earth is not able to stand in his presence.

All right. God is not just coming down, however, to judge the earth. The reason that God is coming down as a warrior in this particular instance is that God is coming down, verse 5, because of the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.

And so, then Micah will speak about the judgment of Samaria and it says, what is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? So again, in the same way with Amos, when the people in the northern kingdom heard Amos talking about the judgment of the southern kingdom of Judah and how God was a judge of the earth, they would have applauded that message. He would have gotten a pretty good love offering as the people were responding to this. But remember that the final punchline of that message is that judgment is going to fall on Israel.

Well, Micah does this in reverse and then he's going to say, what is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? But here's the second half of that verse. What is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem? And so now, the people in the southern kingdom would have said, yeah, we understand why God's judgment is going to fall on the northern kingdom. They do not have the leadership of the house of David that God sanctioned and proved to be the leaders of the true people of Israel.

They do not have the Jerusalem temple, which is the place where God had chosen his name to dwell. They have the apostate sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel and Gilgal and all of these other places. But Micah's message is that the infidelity of the northern kingdom has reached the southern kingdom.

And as a result of this, the same thing that happened to Samaria is now going to happen to Judah. And so, the Lord is going to, in verse 6, I will make Samaria a heap in the open country and a place for planting vineyards, and I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations. Samaria is going to be devastated and ruined.

However, Micah also says later in the chapter, in verse 9, I will make lamentation like the jackals and mourning like the ostriches, for her wound is incurable, talking about the wound and the injury of God's people, and it has come to Judah. And it has reached the gate of my people to Jerusalem. And so, the rhetoric of Micah is to join together the judgment and the devastation of Samaria now that it has reached Judah and Jerusalem.

The southern kingdom was impacted by the Assyrian onslaught and invasion in the same way that the northern kingdom was. And just as that was not simply something that had happened as a political accident or due to the military circumstances and situations in the 8th century, this is direct judgment from God. So very effectively at the opening of this book, we move from the judgment of the world, God treading

down as a warrior on the nations, but now specifically coming as a warrior against his own people.

First, Samaria. The people of Judah would have agreed with that, but now that judgment is also going to fall on Judah. So, he is very effective in the way that he presents this, but I still have to believe it was hard for the people of Judah to accept this.

And so, we're going to see Micah as he makes this message even more vivid in the second half of chapter 1. Again, he's going to do something that is rhetorically brilliant. And what happens in this section is that Micah is going to give us, through the eyes of prophetic imagination and prophetic revelation, he's going to give us the picture and the image of the Assyrian army marching through the nation of Judah, capturing the cities of Jerusalem. And what he's going to do here is that he's going to specifically name certain communities and remind the people or impress upon the people who live in these different communities that these places are going to be caught up in the judgment of God.

Remember that the Assyrian inscriptions talk about fact, and the Assyrian annals talk about the fact that the Assyrians captured 46 cities in Judah. Well, Micah is going to make this very real and vivid by mentioning specific cities. And what you should see as we move from chapter 1, verse 10 down to Verse 16 is that you can progress along with the Assyrian army as they sweep through the land of Judah.

Isaiah does something very similar to this for us in Isaiah chapter 10, verses 28 to 34. He pictures for us through both prophetic imagination and revelation what it will be like as the armies of Assyria go through these various villages and communities in Judah. What Micah does with this is that he makes a series of puns and word plays on the names of these various communities.

He either references their name or their historical significance and uses that as a way of communicating the message. What it does is that it makes the message more impressionable. Remember, before Micah writes these messages down or before they were recorded as the words of Micah, they were preached orally.

He's preaching on the streets in Judah and Jerusalem, trying to convince the people of the judgment that is coming and to impress the people that have heard it all before. Again, they've heard recurring and repeated warnings from the prophets throughout their history of judgment. To make that real and vivid, Micah talks about the actual communities and cities that are in Judah.

He makes puns and word plays on these cities that impresses the seriousness of the message on the people. If I was listening to Micah as a member of his audience in the 8th century and I was hearing this message, it would cause me to think about if I

lived in one of those villages, wow, this judgment is coming upon us. This is strikingly close to home.

If I had family or relatives or part of a clan or family that belonged to these different communities, it would wake me up and impress upon me the seriousness of this message. All of this ultimately contributes to the shock value of Micah's message. The people of Jerusalem would have said in all of this, we're not as bad as the people of Sumerian Israel.

We don't have the long history of apostasy that characterized their worship places and their sanctuaries. We don't have golden calves in the temple at Jerusalem, but they have had the apostate altars and things that Ahaz has brought into the temple. We're not Baal worshipers the way that people were in the northern kingdom under Ahab, but Micah's point is God is going to judge the southern kingdom in the same way that he's going to judge Samaria.

So, he begins with these series of allusions and word plays. If a prophet were going to do this today and talk about God's judgment on America or those kinds of things, he might say things like this: Washington would be washed away. Or Watertown is going to have its Waterloo.

There's a historical allusion there, and you know what that's about. Los Angeles, the city of angels, has become the haunt of demons. I live in the city of Lynchburg, and in the history of the south, we've had a history of lynchings and injustices and horrible things that have happened there.

So, if a prophet were to say there's going to be a lynching in Lynchburg, that would raise all kinds of connotations that would impress upon us both the shock value and the seriousness of the message. St. Louis and St. Paul have become unholy cities. So those are the kinds of word plays.

As you walk through this, it kind of makes us smile, but that's not the purpose of this. The purpose of this was to impress the seriousness of the message. So, the prophet begins by saying, tell it not in Gath and weep not at all.

So, tell it not in Gath. Here instead of a word play we have more of a historical allusion. This is the words that are used after the death of Saul.

Tell it not in Gath, this Philistine city. We don't want our enemies to know about this national disaster that has happened. By alluding back to that time when Israel lost their first king, it's reminding us that a time of national disaster is coming.

The parallel line says, weep not at all in Beth-le-aphrah. So, they are not to weep, and they are not to mourn. Beth-le-aphrah is related to the Hebrew word for Afar.

So, the house of dust here, it says in Beth-le-aphrah, in the house of dust, they are to roll themselves in the dust. Dust and ashes and sackcloth and all of those things are associated with mourning. So, tell it not in Gath, weep not at all.

We don't want them to know about this disaster. But in the cities of Judah, they will be weeping, they will be mourning because of the disaster that is going to come upon them. The house of dust is going to roll in the dust.

Pass on your way, inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame. The word Shaphir means something that is lovely and beautiful. But what we get instead is the contrast that the people who live there are going to become exiles.

There is going to be the ugliness of nakedness and shame as they are led away as prisoners. So pleasant town is going to go through a very unpleasant experience.

The inhabitants of Zaanan do not come out. So this place Zaanan sounds like the Hebrew verb yatsah, to go out. It shares two consonants there. So the people of Zaanan will not be able to yatsah, they will not be able to go out.

They will not be able to escape the onslaught that is coming because they will be besieged and surrounded by the Assyrian army. One of the things that happened in siege is that the inhabitants of that city were not able to leave. They were not able to escape and get away, and ultimately, they would be held there until they starved to death or ran out of food and water.

So Zaanan will not be able to go out. There is irony in that. The lamentation of Beth Etzel, the house next door, the Lord will take away from you its standing place and Beth Etzel, this house next door, they will not be able to help their neighboring cities because they are going to be affected by this judgment as well.

They will not be able to provide protection for their neighbors because it will be too busy mourning over its own destruction. In verse 12, the inhabitants of Maroth, the word marah, bitterness, in the book of Ruth, Naomi says, Do not call me Naomi, pleasant. Call me Marah because the Lord has acted very bitterly against me.

So, the inhabitants of Maroth, Bittertown, ironically, are waiting for something good, but it is not going to happen. Instead, ra'ah, disaster, and calamity have come down from the Lord. So Bittertown is going to experience disaster and calamity.

They are not going to experience good and blessing. Again, it is talking about what happens as the Assyrian army sweeps through. Then the first stanza of this is going to close by saying, Because disaster has come down from the Lord to the very gate of Jerusalem.

We've worked through these series of towns, and we've talked about the different places that are going to come under judgment. But the first stanza of the poem closes by focusing on the city of Jerusalem. The target, the ultimate goal of the Assyrian army, will be to reach the city of Jerusalem.

Remember that in 701 after they had captured the cities of Judah, what are they going to do? They are going to surround, and they are going to besiege the city of Jerusalem as the capital and as the religious and political center until the time that God delivers the city. So, in the second stanza we return to these word plays. The word Lachish resembles the word for team or for horses, *rakish*.

Remember the goal of Lachish was as a military garrison and a fortress to provide protection for the city of Jerusalem. So, if they are harnessing the teams and the steeds to the chariots, the inhabitants of Lachish, it looks like they are going to provide that protection. But really Lachish is going to be wiped out by the Assyrians.

It is going to be conquered by them. They can harness the chariots all they want, but they are not going to be able to withstand the onslaught of this enemy army. They will have to harness the chariots instead of protecting Jerusalem.

They will have to harness the team in order to get out of town as quickly as possible so that they can flee away from the enemy. The protection that Lachish was designed to protect that is not going to be there. And that is what this wordplay is trying to convey.

This verse also says that Lachish was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. So, what are we talking about here? I think Lachish has become the beginning of sin. It has been a source of sin for the people of Judah and Jerusalem because it has been one of the reasons that they have trusted in their military strength rather than putting their trust in the Lord.

They have thought that they were militarily secure enough to survive this onslaught. They are not going to be able to do that. This false pride has caused them to not repent and to not come back to the Lord the way that they needed to.

In verse 14, the word plays continue; therefore, you shall give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. Before we think about the word play, I want to remind you that Moresheth was the hometown of Micah. Micah, as a prophet, has the unwelcome duty of actually proclaiming judgment on his own hometown.

The pain of this and the word plays and these puns are a way of mocking the people for the judgment that is coming. The pain of this is very real for him. This is going to touch his own life and his own family and his own friends as it comes upon them. So,

the purpose of the word plays, and the things that are going on here is to cause these people to realize the seriousness of their sin in the hope that they will take this message seriously and repent and turn back to God.

So, the wordplay that is there with Moresheth Gath is that the word Moresheth sounds like the word mo'orasha, the word for betrothed. So, we are talking about someone that is engaged. Well, Moresheth Gath, this city that sounds like betrothed, is actually going to be given as a parting gift or as a dowry to the Assyrian army.

In a sense, they are going to be the plunder that the Assyrian army takes away. So, this word that seems to be connected with something positive—mo'orasha, the word for betrothed in marriage and the happiness of being in a family—becomes an ominous message that they are going to be given away the way that the father of a bride would give the dowry to the family of the groom. This city is going to be given away to the Assyrians.

The next city that is mentioned is the houses of Achzib, which sounds very similar to the word akzab, the word for deception or falsehood. The houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel. The kings of Israel thought that the various towns and villages and fortresses and all the things that they had there, the numbers of their city would provide protection.

The walls around a city would protect the people that lived inside of them. But the houses of Achzib are going to be a deceitful thing. They will not hinder in any way.

They will not impede the progress of the Assyrian army because the Assyrians are going to systematically make their way to Jerusalem. Achzib will be one of the towns that falls in the midst of all of this.

The Lord says in verse 15, I will bring a conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah. The word Mareshah seems to be related to the word yarash, to conquer, to possess. It's a word of strength. It talks about the fact that Israel possesses this land.

However, the possessing city, the conquering city, is ultimately going to be conquered and it's going to become the possession of the Assyrian army. There's irony in the way that the name of this town is used here. The glory of Israel, as this closes, the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam.

Just as we had at the beginning of this long message about the different cities, now instead of a word play, what we have here is a historical allusion. In 1 Samuel 22 verse 1, Adullam is one of the places that David is going to flee to as he flees away from Saul. In the same way that David had to run and had to be on his horse getting away from his enemy, the same thing is now going to happen to the king of Judah.

This is a very ominous message about what God is planning to do to the kingdom of Judah. Again, the focus of this sermon is what a prophet or a preacher focuses on at the beginning, middle, and end of the message; that's what he's trying to focus on. The city of Shalom, Jerusalem, is going to be caught up in all of this.

The wound is incurable, verse 9. It has come to Judah. It has reached the gate of my people, to Jerusalem, verse 12, because disaster has come from the Lord to the house of Jerusalem at the end of the first stanza. At the beginning of the second stanza, harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish.

It was the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion. Then, at the end of this, in chapter 1, verse 16, make yourself bald and cut off your hair for the children of your delight. Make yourselves as bald as the eagle, for they shall go from you into exile.

Throughout the sermon, he's focused on the judgment of Jerusalem. Then at the end of this, there is a warning of exile for the entire nation. When Jerusalem falls, the rest of the nation will go with it.

The same thing that has happened to the northern kingdom of Israel is going to happen to the southern kingdom. As we hear this message and as we see the severity of it, as we see the rhetorical skill with which Micah presents this message, we have to say, wow, the people had to listen to this. It is so skillfully, effectively, and passionately conveyed to them.

This message had to make an impression on them. But until the time that Hezekiah repents, it seems that largely these warnings of judgment are ignored. That's why the judgment falls in the first place.

In chapter 2, as we continue in the first section, what this section is going to do is, as it complements chapter 1, we have the picture of the judgment. We have the invasion. We have the announcement of the judgment coming first.

In chapter 2, we have more the explanation of why this judgment comes. The primary thing that Micah is going to focus on is that Micah is going to focus on the sins of the leaders in Judah. Going back to the common theme in the 8th century prophets, the problem of justice and the failure of the civil leaders in Judah to practice the kind of justice that had been laid out and prescribed in the Mosaic law.

But also in this section, there is going to be a focus on the prophets who, as the spiritual leaders of Israel, have led the people astray. Ironically, one of the groups that are going to stand most opposed to Micah, who is preaching the word of the Lord, are going to be these other prophets who are not preaching God's message. As Micah is preaching God's judgment and telling the people what they need to hear,

these other prophets are preaching God's blessing, and they are preaching what the people want to hear.

So, one of the reasons that it's hard for the people, in spite of the pathos and the passion and the effectiveness and the truthfulness of Micah's message as he's talking about the invasion in chapter 1, one of the things that keeps them from hearing this is the counter-message that is being given to them by the majority of the other prophets. So in chapter 2 verses 1 to 5, this issue of social justice and how the leaders of Judah have failed to practice that and have led the people astray, that's the emphasis here. And there is a threefold repetition of the word ra'ah, the evil that these people have done.

That's God's estimation of this. They are not simply manipulating the law. They are not simply using the law.

They are doing what is, in the eyes of God, absolute moral evil, and as a result of that, judgment is going to come. So, the prophet says, Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds. When the morning dawns, they perform it because it is in the power of their hand.

They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them away. They oppress a man in his house and a man in his inheritance. So, we see the same thing going on in Judah that happened in the northern kingdom.

There is oppression. Isaiah talks about this. Chapter 5, verses 8 to 10, Woe to those who add field to field and seize them and they lust after their neighbor's properties and they oppress them and they mistreat them and abuse them and do all kinds of dishonest things because of their greed and their desire to have more and more.

Micah is going to preach about those social sins as well. Verse 4 says this: Therefore thus says the Lord, Behold, against this family I am devising disaster. So in verse 1, they devise and they practice evil on their beds, ra'ah.

The Lord is going to bring disaster, ra'ah, against them because of what they are doing. You will not be able to remove this evil from your necks and you shall not walk haughtily as you have in the past, for it will be a time of disaster, ra'ah. So, the Lord is going to bring ra'ah against the ra'ah that the people have committed, and a major reason for the judgment is going to be the social injustice that's taking place.

However, in chapter 2, verse 6, as we've already talked about, Micah also focuses on the sins of the false prophets who are proclaiming this message that is their message; it's not the word of the Lord. They are promising the people something that they cannot provide because they are simply telling the people, hey, you're

God's people; things are going to go well, and notice their reaction when Micah preaches to them. They are going to say, do not preach, thus they preach.

One should not preach of such things. Disgrace will not overtake us. So, Micah not only has the challenge of trying to convince these people of the truthfulness of the message, he has these prophets opposing him that are preaching a counter-message, and they're saying, Micah, you shouldn't be preaching these things.

We heard your message where you made all those word plays and puns on the cities of Judah. You shouldn't be talking about this because disgrace, disaster, and calamity is not going to overtake us. What are you talking about? We are the people of God.

Now, the interesting thing as they make this comment is do not preach; the word that is used here is the Hebrew word nataph. It is not the normal word for prophesy, the root word nava, it's the word nataph. In other places, this has the idea or the meaning, kind of a root meaning of to drip or something that is dripping.

It means to drip in Judges chapter 5 verse 4. It has this meaning in Amos chapter 9. The mountains and the hills are going to drip with wine. In Proverbs chapter 5, it's the word that is used for the seductive speech of the adulteress. Her words drip like honey.

They don't simply say to Micah, don't prophesy, do not preach nataph, do not preach this dripping message. They are either dismissing it as something that should not be paid attention to, that Micah is somehow trying to deceive the people, or what they might be saying is, Micah, stop foaming at the mouth. Stop preaching this kind of message.

What Micah does to turn this around is when they say, do not preach nataph, he turns around and says, thus they preach nataph, and he categorizes their words in the same way. One should not preach this foaming at the mouth message that disaster is going to overtake us. However, you are the one who is really preaching the worthless message here, and ultimately disaster is going to overtake us.

It's not hard for us to imagine as we have these two groups of prophets, we have people like Micah and Isaiah who are warning the people of the judgment that was going to come, that they need to take this seriously, that the Assyrian crisis is real and God is behind this, versus the prophets who were saying, yeah, we're going through a tough time or we're going through a difficult time, but we're the chosen people of God and this disaster will not ultimately swallow us up. Which message do you think the people were inclined to hear? Obviously, the same today. When people talk about God's love and divorce that from his justice and his holiness, that's something that's attractive to people.

It's a message they want to hear, but it's not necessarily the message that they need to hear. Micah is going to go on and say, in kind of a sarcastic way in verse 11, as he's engaged in this conflict with the false prophets, he said, you know what, if a man were to prophesy in this if they were to go about and utter wind and lies, they're going to categorize my preaching as nataph, foaming at the mouth. I'm going to talk about them just uttering the wind and lies.

Their words are worthless. He says that if there were a prophet that was to go about uttering lies and was to say, I am going to preach to you of wine and strong drink, that would be just the prophet for this people. If there was a prophet that would show up on the street and say, hey guys, there's going to be plenty of beer and wine in your future because God's going to bless us, and we're going to be prosperous and everything's going to be okay, that would be exactly the message that these people would want to hear.

So, we get the reality of prophetic conflict that often these true prophets of God had to face and experience. Micah and Isaiah faced this in the eighth century. It's a real part of Micah's ministry.

As he's preaching on the streets, there are probably other prophets that are preaching a different message just down the street or maybe who are trying to interrupt him and intervene in the message that he's preaching. Wait a minute, Micah. We have an objection to race.

We're the people of God. Why would disaster ever overtake us? The prophet Jeremiah in the seventh century is going to deal with the same thing. Jeremiah is often going to talk about these prophets who announce, shalom, shalom.

But Jeremiah says, the problem is there is no shalom. Disaster is coming. Jeremiah chapter 23, the people want to hear this message and it's the message that's popular then and that appeals to them because it promises the people that God is going to ultimately rescue and deliver them out of trouble.

But the problem is it's not God's word. It's simply the imaginations of these prophets. The true prophets like Micah and Jeremiah, who are warning the people of judgment, are the ones who have stood in the counsel of God.

They know God's plans. They know God's intentions. They are coming to announce those intentions to the people, but the people instead want to listen to the prophets that are simply giving the empty, vain, delusional dreams of their own mind.

That's the difference here. Now, we understand if we were in the audience here, we understand the inclination to want to listen to these positive prophets. We understand why the people would want to do that.

We also understand probably the struggle that these people often had. How do I know the difference between a true prophet or a false prophet? Maybe at times in a home around the city of Jerusalem during this time, there may have been discussions by families as they were talking about this message at night. Hey, we've heard this prophet say this, and we've heard this prophet say that.

Which one do we believe? Most of the false prophets that were around in the days of Micah and in the days of Jeremiah did not wear t-shirts that identified them. I am an official false prophet. Many times, they did not advertise themselves as false prophets who spoke in the name of Baal.

They would have presented themselves as prophets of Yahweh. And so, how do we know? And so I understand the struggle and how difficult it must have been. How do we sort through who is a true prophet and a false prophet? But in light of the circumstances that were going on in the land at this time, it seems like it was rather obvious to realize that God was bringing his judgment on his people.

The covenant curses were coming into effect and the people needed to take that seriously. In light of the way that the nation had lived, in light of the prominence of the social sins that were there, in light of the idolatry and the religious sins that often were the reason for that in the first place, it should have been obvious to the people if they had a true understanding of the nature of the covenant between God and Israel and a true understanding of what that relationship was supposed to be like, it should have been obvious to them that judgment was what they should expect. Part of what is underlying this struggle, however, is not just a conflict between two different messages.

There is an entirely different ideology behind all of this. And ultimately, trying to think about the theological foundation of all of this, there is ultimately a fundamentally different understanding of the covenant being reflected in the message of prophets like Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah and these false prophets who were saying peace, peace, when there is no peace. What that fundamentally different understanding of the covenant is all about is that prophets like Micah and Jeremiah are going to emphasize the idea that the covenant that God has with Israel includes both blessing and responsibility.

It includes both promises and commandments. If we have not kept the commandments, then we have no right to expect the blessings. If one actually would just open their eyes and take an honest look at what was going on in the society of that day, the social and the religious sins that were there, it should have been obvious to the people we have not been faithful covenant partners, therefore we do not have the right to presume on God's blessing and God's protection and that God is our good luck charm who is always going to be there to protect us.

I think there is a reminder to us today that our relationship with God, those two aspects of God's relationship with the church today are still there. There is both blessing and responsibility. We cannot presume upon the grace of God.

If our lifestyle does not reflect the confession that we have made and does not reflect a godliness that shows what God is like to other people, we do not have the right to expect that God is going to bless us. We as a nation do not have the right to simply say, God bless America if we are not the kind of people that God really can bless. God's blessing always carries with it covenant responsibility and covenant obligation.

The people of Israel and Judah have wanted to focus on the blessing; God will always be there for us, and God will always protect us. They have forgotten about their covenant responsibilities. If the people of Israel and the people of Judah had had a correct understanding of the covenant, it should have been fairly obvious to them that we needed to take the message of Micah seriously.

Ultimately when the Assyrian army has surrounded the city of Jerusalem, the king, Hezekiah, does take that message seriously. The repentance and the faith of the king is ultimately going to bring blessing to the entire nation. Now as Micah was facing these false prophets and as Micah was dealing with these issues, it made it difficult for people to hear his message.

These problems are going to be intensified I think in the century that follows for a prophet like Jeremiah. After God delivered the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC in this miraculous way and God took care of the Assyrian army, that simply added to the presumption that the city of Jerusalem was always inviolable to enemy attack. That was God's protection and God's deliverance of the city of Jerusalem.

That was part of the worship and that was part of the theological traditions that were celebrated in the city of Jerusalem. In the Psalter we have passages like Psalm 46 and Psalm 48 and Psalm 76 that celebrate the fact that when the enemies of the Lord and the enemies of Israel, when they attacked the city of Jerusalem, God defends his city and God fights for them. God protects his hometown.

Psalm 132 verses 13 and 14, the Lord has elected and the Lord has chosen Jerusalem as his dwelling place. And so, when a prophet like Micah was saying Jerusalem was going to be reduced to rubble, he was directly challenging that ideology. For Jeremiah, dealing with that ideology after the city had already been delivered in 701 was an even more difficult task.

And so that's why Jeremiah, as he preaches his famous temple sermon and says in chapter 7, do not trust in deceptive words. Do not trust in this idea, the temple of

the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. The fact that the temple is there is going to protect us.

You have made God's dwelling place a den of robbers because you've divorced covenant blessing from covenant responsibility. So, when Jeremiah is going to preach this same message a hundred years later, they're going to say this guy is a false prophet. He needs to die. But Micah and Jeremiah, what I want us to understand is they are both confronting a false understanding of God's promises to Israel.

Even in the Psalms, as there is this focus on the fact that the Lord is going to protect Jerusalem, the Lord is going to defend Jerusalem, the Lord is going to intervene and save the city from its enemies, there was an underlying theology behind all of that, that if the people wanted to enjoy God's blessing, they would have to be the kind of people that were worthy of that blessing. If God was going to defend and protect the city of Jerusalem as his dwelling place, it needed to be a city that reflected the glory and purity and holiness of the Lord. Part of the tradition in the Psalms is not just that God fights for Zion but in Psalm 15 and Psalm 24, who has the right to dwell on God's holy hill? Those that have clean hands and a pure heart.

And so they had highlighted the promises of Psalm 46 or Psalm 48 or Psalm 76, and Jeremiah's day, they had pointed to 701 and said, God's going to deliver us now the same way that he had delivered, the same way that he delivered us then. The prophets have to confront that false ideology. If the people wanted the city of Jerusalem to be protected by God, they would also have to renounce their confidence and their trust in their own arms and in their own weapons, and military resources, and they would have to trust in God.

That was part of the tradition of the Psalms as well. Some trust in horses, and some trust in chariots. We put our trust in the Lord our God.

So, Micah, in the time before Jeremiah, Isaiah is going to do the same thing. They are going to confront a false understanding of the Zion tradition. God is not going to protect Jerusalem, no matter what.

Remember what he did to Shiloh. God will judge Jerusalem if it is not the kind of city that God desires and designs it to be, and that's the conflict that is going on as Micah is preaching this message. That is one of the reasons why this message is so hard for the people to hear.

So, we end this first section with there's the judgment that is going to fall in chapter one. The Assyrian army marches through. In chapter two, there's an explanation.

Here's why that judgment is going to occur. As we open the second section of the book, Micah is again going to begin this section by establishing the sins that form the

basis of God's judgment. It's again the practice of injustice and the false message of the prophets who have led the people astray.

But notice how he does this in chapter three. One of the things that I think as you read and study the prophets that you grow to love and appreciate is that you begin to love and appreciate the richness of the metaphors and the images that they use, both in negative and positive ways. There is a powerful metaphor at the beginning of chapter three portraying what the wickedness and the injustice of the nations of Israel and Judah were like.

The prophet says this, and I said, here you heads of Jacob and you rulers of the house of Israel, is it not for you to know justice? Okay, we're right back at the issue of social justice again. You who hate the good and love the, ah, love evil. Now, here's where the metaphor begins.

You tear the skin off from my people and their flesh from off of their bones. You eat the flesh of my people. You flay their skin from off of them, and you break their bones into pieces.

You chop them up like meat in a pot and like flesh in a cauldron. And to get the attention of these leaders and to help them see the horrific nature of the crimes that they have committed, the prophet here figuratively compares them to cannibals. You are taking these poor people, you are flaying them and doing things that would have been true of the Assyrian army, and you're cutting them up, you're chopping them up, and you're putting them in a pot, and you're cooking them like stew.

And again, I think this would have been a message that would have been very difficult for these people to swallow. Pardon the pun here. Wow, does God really see us like cannibals? We're simply trying to execute justice.

And they often, I think, would have used the Mosaic Law and things like the provisions about debt slavery, they would have used the law legally to break the law. And they don't see themselves in this way. God wants them to understand what he really thinks of their sins and their crimes.

In God's eyes, what you are doing, you're no different than cannibals. The punishment is going to fit the crime because these people who have abused and mistreated and taken advantage of others, these people who have engaged in this horrifically inhumane treatment of others, verse four, when they cry out to the Lord, will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because they have made their deeds ra'ah.

And in a sense, in all the ways that the book of Micah emphasizes the practice of ra'ah in Israel and Judah coming after the book of Jonah, in a sense, what we get as

we compare these two books in their alignment in the book of the 12, Samaria and Jerusalem are no different than Nineveh. And the leaders of Judah need to realize the seriousness of their crimes. They're just like cannibals.

When the prophet Isaiah, and again, in many ways, the messages of Isaiah and Micah, we see how they complement each other. Isaiah is going to compare the leaders of Israel and Judah, particularly the leaders in Jerusalem. He's going to talk to them as if they were the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah.

And wow, the leaders of God's hometown are equated with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He's going to say, when you lift your hands up to me in prayer, I'm not going to listen to those prayers. I'm not going to hear your cries.

Micah says the same thing here. And the reason is, as you lift up your hands to God, I see the bloodshed that's there in the way that you've oppressed and taken advantage of your neighbors. Isaiah compared them to murderers.

Micah compares them to cannibals. And I'm sure again, they would have protested and said, hey, we're not guilty of this kind of violence. But in the system that God had established in ancient Israel, and in the way that God had given the law and told them that they were to be just and fair and open-handed in the way that they treated their neighbors, in the way that God had provided for every Israelite to have his own inheritance of land and every family to have their own inheritance of land, when these leaders were using unjust means to take those things away, even if it seemed legal in the way that they were doing this, in God's eyes, by depriving others of their ability to earn a living or to provide for their family and their basic needs, they were no different than murderers and cannibals.

And so the prophet Micah is going to remind us of the seriousness of the covenant responsibilities that God has placed upon Israel. And then that's why at the end of this message in chapter 3, verse 12, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. Without repentance, without a change of heart, a change of direction, and a change of behavior, this is what is going to happen to the kingdom of Judah.

But the thing that could always happen when a prophet preached this kind of message is that there was always the opportunity that if there was the right kind of response, God would relent, and God would change his mind. We saw that in the city of Nineveh, they repent of the evil that they have done, and God relents and does not send judgment. Now, when they return to that evil later on, 150 years later, Nahum will talk about the judgment of God that is going to come on Nineveh, and the city will ultimately be destroyed.

The same thing happened here: Micah announced the absolute unconditional destruction of Jerusalem. And if things had not changed, this is what would have taken place in the eighth century. But because of Micah's message and because of Hezekiah's repentant response to this, God delays the judgment.

God relents from destroying Jerusalem, and God changes his mind. Now, later on, as we move forward and we go to the time of the Babylonian crisis, we go to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and we go to the message of people like Zephaniah and Habakkuk that Jerusalem has returned to their sinful ways. As a result of that, the message of judgment that Micah originally proclaimed goes back into effect.

Just like with Nahum and Nineveh, God ultimately carries out the judgment that is delayed here. But what we are reminded of in all of this is the wonderful give-and-take that takes place, where God legitimately gives his people the opportunity to repent and to change their ways so that this judgment can be averted. God bases the final decisions and whether he will bring judgment or salvation on the responses that people have to him.

Our responses really matter. They are a matter of life and death. And so throughout the Old Testament prophets and throughout the Old Testament itself, when God announces judgment, and people intercede and pray, God relents, and God changes his mind.

When prophets announce that God is going to bring judgment and a king like Hezekiah takes that seriously or the king of Nineveh takes that seriously and he proclaims a fast and his people repent, God honors those decisions. Response to the word of God is a matter of life and death and real change can happen when people respond to God in the right way. Again, we have in Micah's ministry another example of the principle of Jeremiah 18, 7-10.

If God announces judgment and the people repent, God will relent, God will change his mind. And also, the reverse of that is true as well. God has stepped out of eternity in a sense here.

He has engaged in these give-and-take relationships with people, and as they respond to him and as they honor his word, and as they have a repentant and obedient response to that, God is willing to take away the judgment that he has decreed against them. Now, in recent years, the idea of God changing his mind has become a major theological controversy. And I do not think that this imagery in the Old Testament of God changing his mind has in any way the idea or the inference that God has limited knowledge of the future.

In some sense, like all language of God, this is metaphorical. God knows the beginning from the end. But what we have going on here again is that God has

stepped into time and into these real relationships and God does engage in these relationships so that the people and their responses ultimately do matter.

The prayers of a prophet like an Amos or the prayers of a prophet like a Moses when he intervenes for the people and judgment has been announced, they matter. The repentance of a Hezekiah when Micah warns him that judgment is coming; it matters. And so God does not capriciously change his mind because of a whim.

You know, I capriciously change my mind all the time. I'm going to eat a salad today, and I'm going to eat, and then I pass by Papa John's, and I capriciously change my mind. The Old Testament is not talking about that when it talks about God changing his mind, but it is talking about something that is a very real attribute or characteristic of God.

This is a metaphor about God, but it's not just a metaphor. God truly, ultimately, changes his final decisions and the final outcomes of events based on the way that people respond to him. There's also the dilemma of certain passages like in the book of Numbers, in Numbers chapter 23 or in 1 Samuel 15, there are Old Testament passages that tell us God does not change his mind.

And then we bump up against passages like this that we've just looked at: Jeremiah 26, Jonah chapter 3, Jeremiah chapter 18, Exodus chapter 32, and Amos chapter 7. God does change his mind. How do we deal with that? Well, part of the way that we deal with that is not simply saying, well, the places where God doesn't change his mind, that's what he's really like, and these other places are just metaphors. They are both attributes of the God of the Old Testament.

But what we realize is that there are certain situations and there are certain circumstances where God responds and says, I will not change my mind. When God has made a covenant promise to the people of Israel, even though a prophet like Balaam in Numbers 22 to 24 tries to stand up and put a curse on them, God is not a man that he should lie nor the son of man that he should change his mind. God will not turn away from those anchoring covenant promises that he has made and that he has sworn to carry out.

And my friend, Mike Grisanti, as he deals with this issue, will talk about the covenant promises that God has made to Israel as being anchors. These are things that they know God will not relent from and God will not change his mind about. There are also circumstances, like in the case of where God has rejected King Saul in 1 Samuel 15, when the Lord has said, I am going to do this, I will not alter my course of action, I am not going to change, even though Samuel prays all night and realizes that there are circumstances where God is open and responsive to prayers, when God has sworn an oath or when a person has crossed a line and God has said, I'm not going to change, God in those cases does not change his mind.

But in these other cases and in the majority of times when the prophets are preaching, and again, even when they make absolute statements of judgment, there is always the possibility that if there is a right response to God's message, that God will relent and not send the judgment that he has threatened. The prophet Micah had a serious message to preach to the people of Judah. He is reminding them that our relationship with God involves both blessing and responsibility.

And because of Hezekiah's positive response to that, Judah was ultimately spared from the judgment of destruction at the hands of Assyria. Micah reminds us that our relationship with God also includes blessing and responsibility and that we have a responsibility as God has made these wonderful promises to us to respond with the kind of obedience and repentance and a willingness to live the life that God has called us to live in response to what God has done for us. Micah, as a prophet, reminds us of the proper understanding of what a relationship with God is really all about.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 20, Micah 1-3, The message of Micah