

Kings and Prophets 15-04-10a

This is Friday, the 10th of April 2015. We're continuing our study of kings and prophets. We're currently looking at the prophet Micah.

We left off after introducing it in the second session last week in the middle of chapter one. We'll take a moment as is our custom to go to the Lord in prayer and ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study. Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together to try to gain a better understanding of your plan and purpose for us as we look at this so interesting portion of the Old Testament.

We ask your blessing on us as we do so. May each one receive a blessing and find encouragement and motivation in the divine truths that you impart to us through the ministry of your Spirit as we share this time together. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. In the history of Israel, looking at the divided kingdom coming down into the 700s, we have Jeroboam II reigning in the north, and we have Ahaz reigning in the south. You'll forgive me for a moment of mental midgetry here while I get my ducks lined back up.

There is the prophecy of Micah to Judah looking at the incursion of the Assyrians into the northern kingdom. You know that the northern kingdom is going to go completely out in 721. We're a decade or two previous to that.

So there is a warning issued here just as we saw in the other prophets. Each of these prophets has given the warning of God's judgment and given the encouragement to return from a slightly different perspective. We reviewed that in the first session last time, looking at the emphasis in Jonah, at the emphasis in Hosea, at the emphasis in Amos.

They all are God's effort to communicate with His people and bring them back from impending judgment by appealing to different points of view in terms of what has happened and what is going to happen, whether it is relationship, whether it is fruitfulness, whether it is destiny and opportunity, whatever it may be, these different emphases, and that's why the different prophets were sent. Now we have come to Micah, and we said last time that this is pretty much full-on, straight judgment is on the way. And it's pretty much looking at the headlight of the giant steam locomotive heading directly at you.

As they say in the Navy, constant bearing, decreasing range. This is a bad thing. Think about it.

If you're on the water, constant bearing, decreasing range, what does that tell you? You are either going to collide with another ship or you're going to hit the lighthouse, if you remember that story. But we saw the introduction and the presentation, as we saw in Amos particularly, of God in His creatorship, in His God of the universe role. He is the one who treads the high places of the earth and so on.

And then we came to this second section beginning in verse 8. And I want to pick up there and read this so that we can look at it. Now, if you have some sort of digital technology available to you, in other words, you're either listening to this later or you're in a remote location and you've got another window you can open on your computer, there's something I'll point you to here in a moment related to this. And it's on the MICA page on the website, audio archives.

Here's all of the previous lessons that we've had in Kings and Prophets, going back startlingly so to late 2012. We did all of 2013 and all of 2014 and we're a good ways into 2015 in our series. But in my defense, we have covered several hundred years of history as well.

So I'd say condensing 300 years into three years is not too bad. At any rate, at the bottom of that list, you will see a new graphic that is available to pull up and feel free to do that. In verse 8, MICA says, I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked.

I didn't mention this last time, but that word stripped is probably better translated barefoot. Stripped and naked is kind of two ways of saying the same thing. But that's barefoot, barefoot and naked.

I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches, for her wounds are incurable. It has come to Judah. It has come to the gate of my people to Jerusalem.

It has come to Judah. It has come to the Capitol. Tell it not in gath, weep not at all in Beth-Aphra.

Roll yourself in the dust. Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitant of Shaphir. The inhabitant of Zanan does not go out.

Beth-Azel mourns. Its place to stand is taken away from you. For the inhabitants of Meiroth pined for good, but disaster came down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem.

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." This is the transgressions of the Northern Kingdom were found in you.

Therefore you shall give presence to Moresheth, Gath, Micah's hometown. The houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel. I will yet bring an heir to you, O inhabitant of Moreshah.

The glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. 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.

Well, that's several mouthfuls and it doesn't really make a mark on my mind when I read it. Nothing particularly stands out. There's towns and he says kind of seemingly random things about them.

Here's what's going on. For those of you that have pulled up that graphic, it is a map of a portion of Judah. And some of you may have a similar map in the back of your Bible that you can look at.

This is Judah. Look for the map in the times of the divided kingdom perhaps. And what you'll see as I turn to the one in the back of my own Bible is that there is an area between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea.

That area pretty much directly west. You may see Gibeon, you may see Timnah, you may see Beth Shemesh as a few of the towns there that sort of swath to the west. That area to the west and a little south of Jerusalem is called the Shephelah.

In modern Hebrew, they call it Shephelah. But it's S-H-E-P-H-E-L-A-H. Shephelah, Shephelah, just depends on who you talk to, where they put the accent.

But this is a region. It's a sort of a district. It's an area of Judah.

All of the towns that Micah mentions are in that area. So I tried to find a map that was a little larger. And if you don't see it now, we might have it either for the second session or you can look it up later.

The map I put online, just so you don't get totally dazed and confused, is turned sideways. North is to the left and east is up, which of course is the way ancient Near Eastern people thought anyway. They oriented themselves to the rising sun.

So it's more accurate in that way. But here's the point. These towns, and on the copy that I gave you, I have tried to circle the towns that we can identify in the modern day.

There's a couple of them that archaeologists just have never figured out where they were. So we know the area where they were, even though we don't know their specific location. But let's begin with where Micah begins.

Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all in Beth-Aphra. Well, on almost any biblical map, you can find Gath. What kind of a town was Gath when it's first introduced to us? Who does it belong to? This is Goliath's hometown, right? It's a Philistine, one of the five cities of the Philistines.

And does that statement of Micah sound familiar at all? Tell it not in Gath. Keep your finger in Micah and turn back to 2 Samuel. You already know when we go to 2 Samuel that these are the days of what king? King David.

And 2 Samuel pretty much begins with the transition into his reign. So you know that at the end of 1 Samuel, there has been the battle of Mount Gilboa following the Witch of Endor episode and so on. And Saul and Jonathan and Saul's other sons have all been slain and their remains have been desecrated.

So in 2 Samuel chapter 1, David presents the song of the bow. And we talked about that bow

and what it means. David lamented, verse 17, with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan, his son, and he told them to teach the children of Judah the bow.

Indeed, it is written in the book of Yasher. The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places, how the mighty have fallen. And look at verse 20.

Tell it not in Gath. Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon and so on. There is cause for celebration among the Philistine enemies of Israel because Saul and Jonathan and Jonathan's brothers have been slain.

And he says, don't give them that occasion for celebration. Don't tell the news in Gath. It's going to get there eventually, but he's just lamenting the fact that this is going to be news to the Philistines.

It's the same idea because it begins in the same area. Gath is in that Shephelah region. And thanks, Dan, for getting these maps for us.

As you look at the map there, you can see where Gath is. I've tried to circle. I don't know if you can see those little red circles.

Do they show up? Okay. So sort of lower center, slightly to the right, you can see Gath. This is the Shephelah.

That's what I'm going to call it. Other people pronounce it the way they see fit. I'm going to call it the Shephelah.

And you can see Gath just down the road from Ekron. And this is where the song begins. Tell it not in Gath.

Weep not at all in Bet-Aphra. Bet-Aphra. We're not real sure where Bet-Aphra was, but it's probably somewhere between Gath and your two other red circles kind of to the right there, Moreshah and Lachish.

It's a little hard to read there, but the one on the far right next to the word Negiv is Lachish or Lachish. So somewhere in that little triangle made by those three circles is probably where this Bet-Aphra was to be found in those days. Not necessarily a prominent village, since we can't even figure out where it was.

But here's what's going on. As you look at that map, these 12 cities that are going to be mentioned here, ranging from Gath to Jerusalem, each of the statements that is made is a wordplay on the name. The only one that doesn't seem to have a wordplay associated with it is the first one, Gath.

And there, the figure, the device that is being used is not wordplay. It is historical reference. To the extent that David succeeded in teaching the people of Israel the bow, and with it the song of the bow, these words would resonate.

They would hark back. It was a time of defeat, despair, and seeming catastrophe for Israel. And yet God was able to take the death of Saul and turn that to good because who knew that David would become the greatest king that Israel ever had in the wake of that catastrophe.

And that death on Gilboa was the judgment of God on disobedient King Saul and all of those who shared his attitude. So this harks back. It is significant in that sense.

Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all in Beth or Beit Afra. The Septuagint translates this as Akko, A-C-C-O. But Akko isn't in the Shephela.

It's way over to the left someplace. It's not in this area. So you have, Afra has an idea that is related to the shedding of tears or crying.

And so he says, in the town of crying, don't cry. Then weep not at all actually it actually doesn't connect to anything. And then you have Beth Afra.

Afra here is a reference to dust. That's what the root word means in Hebrew. And so the thing that follows it is roll yourself in the dust.

In the house of dust, roll yourself in the dust. So what Micah is doing here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is another attention getting device. People in Judah, it's a small place.

It's just double digit miles to almost anything in Judah. And so everybody knows the geography and they know the names of these towns. They know people from these towns.

They have business there. They've been through them. Maybe they have seen them.

And the names are well-known, particularly in that day. And they've got a mental map of the area. They know where Gath is.

They know where Beth Afra is. They know where Likish and these other towns are. So when Micah says, and they've, it's kind of like if you talk about Fort Worth, you just say Fort Worth and you think of the town and you don't think of the origin of the name.

When you say Dallas, you don't remember that there was, you know, George Dallas that the place is named for. We tend to use the name and we forget its meaning. Well, Micah is saying, think back on the meaning of these words.

It's a double entendre. And so he says in Beth Afra, roll in the dust. And in Hebrew, these things alliterate.

They resonate with each other. Dust and Afra resonate. Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitant of Shafir.

Well, Shafir in Hebrew means beautiful. So her inhabitants are going to be without clothing and ashamed, the farthest thing from beauty to be stripped bare and in the grip of a catastrophe

that results in that. Pass by in naked shame, you inhabitants of beauty town, in other words.

So those who thought that they had risen up out of the dust and become great roll in the dust. You know, they talk about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. And, uh, if you saw the gravity movie where, uh, what's her name comes crawling out of the muck to stand on the beach.

Uh, what's that girl's name? Sandra Bullock. Uh, you know, shameless plug for evolution. Oh, look, we're crawling out of the sea and now we're standing on our feet.

She's standing, they show her toes digging into the sand there. We've arisen from the dust and from the muck of the earth. And look at us now we're in space watching our little spacecraft get shredded by bad planning and so on.

But anyway, this, these things are, are resonant. They're poetic. You that claim to have risen up above the dust and built all of this roll in the dust.

You who are paragons of beauty parade by this is a parade. This isn't the, this isn't the runway. This isn't the parade of the beautiful models.

This isn't the Miss America contestants coming down in a row. They're parading in stripped shame. They're parading like prisoners sent to the slave market.

You inhabitants of beauty town, the inhabitants of Zo Anon, the inhabitant of Zo Anon does not go out. Uh, uh, Zo Anon is, is a, is a town name only found here, but the word means the one who goes out. And so he says to the inhabitant of the one who goes out town, don't go out.

You see the reversal now on your map. I just want to point out because I think there is a possibility that the reason they can't, uh, uh, find this town is there's been a slight corruption of the name. If you see the circle directly above Gath, uh, past Yarmouth, it says Zanoa with a very slight change.

That's Zo Anon. And I would guess I'm no archeologist, but I would guess that that's Zo Anon. It's, it's in the right place.

It's got the right name, very slight orthographic change. And, uh, it becomes Zo Anon. Uh, so you who are so proud of your going out, what does it mean to go out in Israel? Remember, uh, when it was the time when Kings go out, David stayed in and that was his, that was his problem.

That's how he ended up doing the Bathsheba Uriah complex of sins, murder and adultery. Um, but those who ought to be going out mighty to battle can't go out. Don't go out.

Don't try it. Your, your cause is lost is the, I think the idea here Beth Azel mourns, Beth Azel. And, uh, again, we can't always, uh, find, uh, these towns, but, um, Beth Azel, which is the fifth city here, again, is only found in this text, but it means house next to a house.

You recognize the bait part there, right? Well, Azel means next to, so this is the house of houses that are next to each other. This is, uh, neighborhoods that have grown up because of prosperity house by house in the early portion of Isaiah. He talks about woe to you who, who have built house next to house next to house and have a field to field to field.

Your prosperity is such that you're just taking over the land. Well, so he says, uh, Bait Azel mourns its place to stand is taken away. So, uh, this, this place that has lots of buildings and might be a refuge, a place of shelter, a place of safety, because it's built up, it's, it's a metropolis.

Uh, is not so, uh, that place to stand, that place to, to rest and abide in safety is, is taken away. It's going to be destroyed. And, uh, the King of Assyria is on the march.

He's coming through this area, as I mentioned, and he's going to roll up everything in his path. And he has come down, uh, south between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean sea. He's rolled through the Western part of the Northern kingdom, and he's going to do a hook.

He's going to curve in and head toward Jerusalem from this, from this angle. So that's why these towns are mentioned. And so Micah is using their names as zingers to get the attention of people.

Some of the most prominent towns are not mentioned as the ones you can see on that map. There's no mention of Bethlehem. For example, there's no mention of, uh, Rabaa or Yarmouth is a well-known town.

Uh, Beth Shemesh is one of the larger and very famous towns. It doesn't mention those because it's the names that have the significance and carry the freight of the message. How many different ways have we seen God use? Here's the point.

Here's the point. How many different ways is God appealing to trying to crack the dense, uh, scar tissue, the thick skulls of his people and get the message through? He has used sign wonders by the hands of his prophets and the men of God. He has used allegory.

He has used, uh, all of these different techniques in the writing prophets using the analogy of Hosea and his wife, using Amos with the agricultural motifs. And he's not a professional. He can slip under the guard of people who refuse to listen to any preacher.

Every, look at the extraordinary lengths that our merciful God goes to, to prevent having to wreak judgment upon us. There is not a case of judgment without this kind of warning for God's people in scripture. God always makes the appeal.

He always warns, turn you at my reproof. Why will you die? Oh, Israel, turn, listen, wake up, pay attention. And if we have any sensitivity at all to God and to his Holy spirit, we will wake up when these appeals are made.

This is yet another, this is a, this is a wordplay appeal. This is a geography quiz. And it, it sparks interest for that reason.

People say, well, if Assyria is in the North and somewhat to the East, why is he naming these towns to the West? He is predicting in advance the, the path of onslaught for this invading Assyrian army. And it's a wake up call. Wow.

They're going to hit us where we didn't think they were coming. I figured they would just come straight down the same road that Mary and Joseph are going to travel with the Lord Jesus and the same one that Jesus is going to travel going back to Galilee. He must needs go through some area.

Why don't they just come straight down? This is military strategy. This is knowledge of terrain. This is knowing how to get around the defenses that everybody thought would be so certain and would be so sure.

Well, he's going to flank it. This, this is a classic flanking movement. And so he says, you who think you're standing tall above the ground, you're going to be rolling in it.

You think you're dwelling safely. You're going to have no place to stand. And it is going to continue for all 12 of these cities.

If you look at, uh, the next, uh, Maroth, the sixth city, another one that is only known here in this text. Uh, you remember, um, the story of Ruth who was her mother-in-law Naomi, but Naomi said, don't call me Naomi anymore. Call me what Mara, which means what bitter.

And this is the plural Maroth. This is bitternesses bitternesses Maroth for the inhabitants of Maroth pined for good, but disaster came down from the Lord. They're already named bitternesses and they were hoping, you know, ready for the times to get better.

Well, it's, it's a disappointed hope it's not going to happen. Disaster comes down from the Lord to the gate of Jerusalem. And this is going to be the gate facing west.

Apparently what is the good gate in Israel? It's the Eastern gate. They've got all kinds of gospel songs about the Eastern gate. What does the Eastern gate face? The Mount of Olives, the place where the Lord Jesus ascended and where he is going to descend at the second coming.

And that mountain is going to split. He's going to come in and deliver Jerusalem. The sunrise is on the East.

Good things come from the East. This is bad stuff. And it's all coming from the West.

Those of us from California kind of don't like to look at this particular truth, but it seems like East is good. West is bad in, in, in the cosmography of ancient near East. So this is Maroth bitterness and evil coming from the Lord.

Go, harks back to verse three. The Lord is coming forth from his place. He will come down and tread the high places of the earth.

And the gate of Jerusalem reminds us of verse nine. It has come to Judah. It has reached the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.

The next town that's mentioned here is Lakish, Lakish. And the inhabitant of Lakish harness the chariot to the swift steeds. The word play here, when you look at this in Hebrew, a team of horses in Hebrew is Larkish, L R K S H. And so Lakish, Larkish, they're real close.

And so the prophecy here, or the, the call, the word play on that name basically says the horses in Lakish are going to be harnessed to chariots because the day of battle has come. Then he says this sort of cryptic thing. She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion for the transgressions of Israel were found in her.

Some people think, well, this is the trust in horses and chariots. You know we put our faith in military might. There could have been some unknown heresy that maybe came from Egypt and was practiced in Lakish and had infiltrated into Judah.

It's a little difficult to know. There is a pagan temple that has been discovered archeologically from this time in Lakish. It dates to the time of the divided kingdom.

And it's, it's got all kinds of Egyptian paraphernalia in it. And, and for Judah, that's somewhat unusual that in Judah, there would be this overt idolatrous pagan worship with Egyptian overtones. So there's been some thought that, that some knowledge we don't any longer have in terms of an Egyptian based religious heresy kind of infiltrating via Lakish.

So that's what's going on here. Now we're at verse 14 and we're going to pause here and take our break. But think about this.

There is a case that God makes. We saw that this is sort of constructed like a court case beginning in the earlier part of chapter one. God brings a charge and he is declaring what the sentence is going to be.

And he is using this very clever and sophisticated wordplay and, and it's, it's almost punning in Hebrew to predict what is going to happen when the Assyrians are allowed by God to attack across the Shephelah, across this Western fertile plain and destroy everything in their path and come to the very gate of Jerusalem. And it's a wake up call. Turn you at my reproof.

Well, this covers the first eight towns. We have nine, 10, 11, and 12 to go. And that's going to conclude chapter one.

And it is the introduction to the prophecy that Micah delivers. It is aimed primarily at Judah. You can see here how, what is the problem in Judah? He tells us here in this section that the sins, the transgressions of Israel were found in you.

Don't be saying, well, they deserved it up there in the North. This is kind of a Romans one Romans two kind of thing. You're busy saying they got their just desserts up in the North.

You are doing the very same things and the things that are points of pride and points of confidence and points of hope for you by their very names are going to be rolled up and destroyed. Well, it's sobering, but sometimes God has to do this. Sometimes it takes this type of warning of impending judgment to turn us.

Hopefully you and I never reached this point, but if we ever do, hopefully as a result of the study, we'll recognize it and turn as is going to be the case in Judah before the judgment actually falls and we're out of the picture. Let's pause here and take our break.