

Kings and Prophets 15-04-10b

Let's pick up our study now in the book of Micah. We're in the closing section of chapter one, and we've been looking at this list of twelve towns. Twelve, of course, is a significant number, and Micah marshals the names of these towns that have two things in common.

One, they are on the line of march for the Assyrian conquering army that is in the process of devastating the northern kingdom and is headed toward Jerusalem in prospect now. Remember, we're in the days somewhat before that, the days of Jeroboam in the north, and I think Ahaz in the south. I don't know why I've got a mental block about that.

I'm going to have to... Yeah, Ahaz, previous to Hezekiah. And so we've looked at the first eight of these towns. The ninth town is Moresheth Gath.

This ought to be familiar to us because this is Micah's hometown. But it's not mentioned here because it is his hometown. It's included because its name is similar to, sort of a homonym for, Moresheth, which is a Hebrew word that means a gift that you give on a special occasion, a wedding gift, the dowry associated with a bride.

And so this is something that is bestowed. It is something that is offered by way of celebration and by way of free, no charge. And so when he says, you shall give presents to Moresheth Gath, the idea here is that these people are going to be departing.

This is like a going away present. So he says in the town of receiving gifts, you're going to be giving gifts. Does it make sense? And the reason you're giving gifts is you're leaving.

Many times people, when they were going to travel, didn't want to carry all their stuff, and so they would give it away. And so why would they be giving away stuff? Because they're leaving for captivity. They're leaving for parts unknown in the north, like the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom.

So all of you people in the town of getting gifts on celebratory occasions, get ready to start handing out gifts, because you're going to be leaving on a very non-celebratory occasion. That's what seems to be at work here. You can look, for example, in 1 Kings 9-16, where Pharaoh, king of Egypt, came up and captured the town of Gazar and burned it with fire and killed the Canaanites who lived in the city and gave it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife.

1 Kings 9-16. So Pharaoh took the city, conquered it, and then gave it as a gift to his daughter. We're talking about one of Solomon's many fathers-in-law here.

So that's kind of the notion. The tenth city is mentioned here when he says, the houses of Achzib shall be a lie to the kings of Israel. And Achzib, as you would expect by now, is very similar to the Hebrew word for deception, for a lie, for a fabrication, a falsehood.

And Jeremiah uses this word, for example, in Jeremiah 15-18. He says, Why has my pain been

perpetual, and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you indeed be to me like a lying stream, a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable? If you know the story of the Jamestown settlement in Virginia, when they landed, and the only land they could find to occupy that wasn't already being dwelt on by the Native Americans was along that river, James River. And the part that they picked, they said, well, here's a spot nobody's using.

Well, they found out why. The water was awful. The water, there was salt leaching from the ocean that far up into the river, and it had minerals and it had salt in it, and they got sick.

Stuff wouldn't grow in the ground, and there was a reason why nobody was living there. And this was a big part of their woes, and they had enormous trouble because the water was deceptive. It looked like it was wonderful river water, and they had a great situation.

By the time they got to town, they realized the water had fooled them, and it was terrible. Not only that, but it was swampy there, and the mosquitoes bred, and the mosquito-borne diseases to which the Europeans had been exposed in some cases in the ports before they ever left Europe. And these mosquito-borne diseases are what they brought and wiped out the Red Man with, saving him a lot of trouble in terms of warfare.

Anyway, that was deceptive water. That's the idea here for Aq Zib. And so he says, the houses of Aq Zib will be a lie to the kings of Israel.

And what does it mean by houses here? The city has failed the kings of Israel. They thought each of these towns is going to put up resistance. It's going to slow the advance.

These are our fortress cities. These are our garrisons and our militia. And these guys that are going to help us contain the threat and resist the onslaught, well, Aq Zib is a lie.

What they were counting on for the perimeter security is completely deceitful. The last one here, the last word play at least, is the next city. I will yet bring an heir to you, O inhabitant of Moresheh.

And I think I've got that one circled on your map as well. If you look, the largest blob that I circled on the map there, which is southwest of Gath, you see Moresheh Gath in the left part of that circle and you see Moresheh to the right. And it's between Moresheh Gath and Lachish.

Moresheh. This, you might think, would be similar in meaning to Moresheh Gath and it is related. Do you remember what Moresheh Gath had to do with? Gift.

A gift for a celebratory occasion and that. Well, that Moresh nucleus is in this one as well. But this has the idea of, Moreshah has the idea of someone who is a possessor or someone who has received an inheritance.

You can see the link between inheritance and gift, between possessing a thing, being a possessor, or even taking possession of something. And it came to imply that you had

conquered something and the spoils belong to you. It's not exactly a gift, but it is something that has come to you that you didn't have before.

Inheritance, possession, spoils. And the idea here in this 11th town is those who are labeled as possessors are going to be a possession of someone else. It's that same reversal we've seen in these others.

So in the town of possession, you will be taken. You will be held. You will become captives.

You will be conquered. And it goes on to say, the glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. Well, we've sort of come full circle here at this 11th town, this 11th hour.

How did we start? What was the first thing in this section? Tell it not in Gath, harking back to the days of King Saul and his demise. But in the days when King Saul was regnant, was rampant, was on the throne and all powerful, who had to go hide in the cave of Adullam? The same David that says the words, tell it not in Gath. And again, this is reminding the people in Judah of how quickly things can reverse.

In the days when Saul was on top and David was in the cave of Adullam, then you think later on, David is the one singing the song of the bow and Saul is the one with his head cut off, hanging on a pike outside a city wall and his body is separate and his sons are all dead. All the promises that God potentially made to him are off. Remember, God made many of the same promises to Saul.

If you are faithful, if you are obedient, I will build you a dynasty that will last. He had that potential and he just fumbled it. He just dropped it.

Well, so we're seeing a circle back to that idea and it's all aimed at the people of Judah and their status before God, their level of faithfulness and obedience, as we'll soon see. The glory of Israel shall come to Adullam. And it's interesting that he says the glory of Israel, not the glory of Judah, because once again, this is something that David referred to back in the funeral ode that he did for Saul and Jonathan about how the glory of Israel has fallen, has fallen, and here's the glory of Israel getting shoved back into the dark caves in the Shephelah.

And this ought to wake people up. It ought to sober them. This is a prophet of God predicting what is going to happen if they do not turn.

And he presents these, of course, as having happened. These are the prophetic perfects, which is a commonplace in the prophets where God will say this has happened. You're invited to picture it.

This is a potential future that you're looking at as having happened. Make yourself bald and cut off your hair because of your precious children. This is something that the law of Moses proscribes.

Remember in Leviticus 21, it says, Leviticus 21.5, the people of Israel shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh. This was a common practice for mourning among the Canaanites, among the Amorites. And God said you are to be distinguished by not doing that.

Here, if you're going to act like the Canaanites, then you might as well mourn like the Canaanites. So shave your heads. The same thing, Deuteronomy 14.1. And this draws the point a little closer.

You are the sons of God. This is Deuteronomy 14.1. You are the sons of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead.

But with this impending judgment, when it takes place and their children are slain, they are going to do what the nations do. Because for them, it is as though they have the same lack of hope, same lack of opportunity for reunion, and the same desolation at the loss that comes with this judgment. So God Himself tells them, make yourself bald, cut off your hair, because of your precious children.

This implied is the death of your precious children and the enslavement of your children. Enlarge your baldness like an eagle, for they shall go from you into captivity. And all of this is the death and enslavement associated with that invasion.

Now, we get it. That's what's going on with the towns. But now, when you read through that, it's not nearly so opaque, is it? When you realize that each town name hooks into the action that's associated with it, this is like a bell that rings 12 times.

This is like the stroke of midnight on your old mantel clock, right? It bongs 12 times. And these are the strokes of judgment. Do they still have that clock? You know, it says, well, we're five minutes to the destruction of the planet.

Depending on how close they think we are to mutual assured destruction, the minute hand moves. But it's always been like 1155 or 1157. Well, you know, if it ever reaches 12, it's all over, we've destroyed ourselves, unless we send our embryos to Mars or something.

Why, that's the end of the human race, which personally I think would be a great thing. But, you know, for it all to end, why pollute the rest of the universe? You know, we trashed this planet, maybe we want to go spread the cancer elsewhere. All of these galactic exploration movies, I just saw another one this past week, I just think, you know, it's like a metastasizing cancer.

It's not enough that we blight this, we're going to go do it other places. Let's send ourselves through the wormhole and really mess up other galaxies, other solar systems. Yeah, they'll be real happy we showed up, because we're such a blessing.

Anyway, we come to chapter 2, and look at this. Woe to those who devise iniquity and work out evil on their beds. And the rest of this chapter is going to be detailing that motif.

Now, let's just stop right here. Suppose I told you, woe to Mesquite, because muskets are going to be firing there. Woe to Plano, because there's going to be Plano destruction all over the town.

Woe to Garland, because they're going to be laying garlands on the grave. Woe to, and I just kept that up for 12 towns all around the Metroplex. And I have got your attention that somebody is going to march down here and sack the Metroplex and burn it to the ground, take the population they don't kill and enslave them.

What would you want to be grabbing a hold of in terms of a solution to that potential problem? If the southern North Americans decided to come up here from the Gulf and from Mexico City and all the rest of it and just take us over, we're sick of Mexico, we need more land, you took this Texas from us in the first place, we're going to get it back. And so they come up here, and I give you this warning, well, what are we going to do? What would you be thinking? Where are the guns? Where's the ammo? How can we defend ourselves? What is the military answer to this? What is the diplomatic answer to this? How can we pacify and appease these people? How can we stop this impending incursion of the Assyrians? What do we have to say to the king, do for the king, send to the king, pay the king? Or can we marshal it, do we get some allies and try to fend them off? What are we going to do, right? Wouldn't that be your reaction if you became convinced that this was going to happen? What are we going to do? What does Micah offer by way of description of how to solve this problem? The problem is not the Assyrians, the problem is your personal lives. The reason this is coming is not that you've got a political problem, not that you've got a military problem, not that you have economic woes, not that you need a better government or a different set of people in the Pentagon, in Jerusalem, so to speak.

What's the problem? Woe to those who devise iniquity. The woe is coming because of your personal iniquity. People that say, I'm on a new tear now, I probably said this before, I'm going to say it again.

I'm now actively opposing everybody who says, let's take back the country. As conservatives or as Christians or whatever, we've got to take back the country. You're never going to take back anything, and all you're going to do is alienate and incite hostility when you tell people who do not share Christian moral values, who care not two figs in an empty Fig Newton wrapper for God, Christ, the Bible, or anything else, to say, well, we're going to take the country back and we're going to foist those values on you.

You just make them mad. Think about this. How would you feel if a bunch of Muslims came in and said, we're going to take back your country for Allah, and I say over my dead body and all of my empty shell casings.

You incite hostility. And God, in His grace and wisdom, says, look, the answer to this isn't taking back the government. It's not fixing the economy.

It's not passing legislation that will force people to be more moral. We'll outlaw idolatry. We'll

burn down the temple in Laikish that the Egyptian priests are functioning at.

That's not the answer. He says, look, and this is the answer for us today. This is a personal righteousness issue.

Do you not remember anything that those teachers taught that Jehoshaphat sent out when the word of God was ubiquitous in Judah that your grandfathers and your fathers learned? Have you forgotten all of that? The only reason God is taking down the invisible wall of defense and is Himself sending this judgment. Do you seriously think any human solution is going to stop a judgment of God? This is like the sailor saying, well, you know, I think if we just take in a little sail, this storm will be nothing. And we won't have to throw Jonah or any of the freight overboard.

It's an act of God. There's no opposing or stopping this. This nation is coming under judgment from God because we know better.

We've had Jehoshaphat send teachers throughout our land. We have had ubiquitous Christianity in this country. And our recent generations have overthrown it and have rejected it and have pushed it aside in favor of materialism, self-gratification, and other forms of subjectivity.

And you're not going to fend off the judgment with an economic, a military, or a civic governmental solution. You're not. It's coming from God.

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. And cursed is the nation whose God is not the Lord. Especially when it's God used to be the Lord.

We're responsible for what we know. And we know better than this. And there is an active, there is a portion.

And that's what chapter 2 is all about. Look at this. Woe to those who devise iniquity and work out evil on their beds.

At morning light they practice it. They hatch it at night. They get it all lined up.

I know what I'm going to do. And then they carry it out the next day. This is, you know, you get extra punishment under our law for malice of forethought, for, you know, it's murder not homicide because you thought it out in advance.

You had premeditation. These are premeditated crimes. This is not passion.

This is not in the moment. These guys are up at night designing these schemes. They're on the web with the glow of their monitor on their faces figuring this stuff out so that they can perpetrate it the next day.

And he says, the woe is coming because of these guys. Because of those who do this. They

covet fields and take them by violence, it says here.

What is the equivalent in the modern day? They cheat. They big deal. They subvert.

They spread rumors. They get people to sell cheap and they get it and make a huge premium. It is illicit.

It is unethical means. They get fields, houses, which they seize. They oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

This goes back to the idea of tribal allocation and clan allocation. These guys are so greedy. They're not interested in God's heritage and the seven year Sabbath and all the rest of the things that are supposed to still be in effect.

Culminating in Jubilee. And even if a man, these inheritances are supposed to stay with those clans and those tribes. These guys say, to heck with that.

I'm going to get this stuff. It's greed. It's avarice.

It is empire building. Therefore, thus says the Lord, behold, against this family, I am devising disaster from which you cannot remove your necks. You want to turn that neck toward me and walk away? Well, I got a disaster coming and your neck is going to be stuck in it.

And you're not going to be able to get your neck out of it. You'll be up to your neck in it. Nor shall you walk haughtily.

These things are done with hubris. They're done with a kind of arrogance that says, if I can do it, why not? Why should I have scruples? Everybody else is doing it. They justify it.

They vindicate themselves. And there is an arrogance. There's a haughtiness to it.

You will not walk haughtily, for this is an evil time. You want to perpetrate evil? I'll show you what evil is. And this is the disaster type of evil.

You want to perpetrate moral evil? I will give you circumstantial evil. In that day, one shall take up a proverb against you and lament with a bitter lamentation, saying, we are utterly destroyed. He has changed the heritage of my people, how he has removed it from me.

And you hear the petulance and the arrogance of those who have stolen the heritage of others by illicit means, and now they're crying because God's taking it away from them as though it was theirs to begin with? This is the inability to even recognize what is right and what is wrong, and to acknowledge guilt. They took a heritage that was not theirs to themselves, God comes in in judgment and removes it, and they're crying, claiming that they lost their heritage. You see this attitude all over the place in our culture and our society today.

People who are caught red-handed, those of you that have seen Bategar, you know this

attitude. Red-handed, on tape, dead to rights, no question, it's your fault. I didn't do anything wrong.

Why are you hassling me? I was just moving this car for a friend. Dude, we have you on tape, it's our car. You're still telling that story? Seriously? And they do.

And they seem to be convinced of it themselves. These are the people, this is the attitude. Now look, when this attitude prevails, the hammer of God's judgment falls.

How prevalent is that attitude, and how increasingly prevalent is it in our nation today? Well, stand by, because God isn't any more interested in putting up with it now, from people who know better, like our nation does, than He was then. And thank the Lord, we also have great promises about the preservation of the remnant, because the judgment is going to fall on this country, and it is going to fall hard. We have the same materialism, we have the same self-centeredness, we have the same refusal to acknowledge culpability, responsibility, guilt, because people associate guilt and shame, and they say, well, shame is a bad thing, therefore nobody should ever make me ashamed, therefore nobody should ever tell me I'm guilty of anything, therefore I'm not guilty of anything, and that's why I feel so good, no matter what I do, because what's right is right for me.

Well, you cannot superimpose anything on these people. All you do is, it's the pearls and the swine. So what we have to do is look for the promises and the provisions that God makes for those who are not caught up in this in a time such as this.

That's why Micah is such a fascinating book for us, because this is us, this is now, and just as judgment has not yet happened in Judah and there is the potential for at least a delay, we're in that very same situation today nationally. Now, God doesn't deal with us as a nation the way He did with Israel and Judah, we know that. However, the principles apply, and individually as well as nationally, He's the same God.

He's got the same standards, and if we let ourselves get fooled into materialism, if we are fooled into self-centered self-sufficiency, if we are fooled into thinking that it's all about what I can get and how soon I can get it, we as individuals will come under this same condemnation. And this warning that God sends to Judah is a warning He is sending to us. And if the shoe fits, we need to put that shoe on, like the gospel of peace, and be sure that it has its efficacious, beneficial effect on us.

And we want to ensure, without any shadow of doubt, I am not chaff, I am wheat. I am not headed like bundles of straw to be burned, I am headed for the barn to be preserved, to be stored up, to reflect God's glory. We've got to check, because we're complex, there's many different areas of our life, and you can't point to one or two good ones and ignore the bad ones, because it's the bad ones for which we're going to be judged.

There were good portions of Judah. There were still people being faithful in Judah, probably

these little Bible classes and Bible churches in Bethlehem and some of these other places. It doesn't stop God's judgment of the nation.

And one or two good things in our lives is not going to stop God's judgment on us as individuals if we willfully neglect our so great salvation. So what we're going to see in the remaining chapters, and I'm slowing down just a little bit on Micah because it is so precious valuable as a flashlight to shine on us and let us helpfully analyze our own souls as well as our own culture, both locally and in a wider context, and ensure that we're not unconsciously lined up for judgment. And like these people saying, well, I don't understand why God's taken my stuff away.

How tragic. We will be illuminated. We will be informed.

We will be aware. We will be watching and praying and alert. And the day of judgment will not overtake us like a thief overtakes those who dwell in darkness.

We're not of the darkness or of the night. We're of the day and we're of the light. So this is going to be a very helpful and encouraging as well as sobering and warning section in the remainder of Micah.

And we'll resume our study next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for your gracious communication to us. You are not a silent father.

You're not a father who is away on business for months at a time. You are ever present. You speak to us.

You exert fatherly care on us. You chasten us as your children because you love us, and we're so grateful for your expressions of grace and faithfulness to us even when we are unfaithful and we are apathetic and we lose focus. Thank you for your Holy Spirit and his constant presence and encouragement and reminders from your word.

Thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ who has through his work conferred on us the wonderful status of being your children, of representing him as his body on this earth, having so many potentials and blessings that weren't even available to people in the Old Testament. And we pray that as we spend time reflecting and thinking about what we've seen in your word, that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us and illuminate us and help us to live as we should, to accomplish the goals and purposes for which you have left us here and placed us in our specific circumstance, our specific people and places and things, so that when the day comes that the Lord Jesus calls us to himself and we stand before that evaluation seat, that we will be found to be good and faithful servants, to be well-behaved children reflecting his glory and yours. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.