

## Bible Notes: Micah 7

**Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July, 7.30pm in the Breakspear Room – how has Micah been for you?**

**All and any reactions welcome.**

We've come now to the last chapter of the book of Micah, and it is a slightly curious and disjointed chapters. There are no great Messianic visions, as in Chapters 4 and 5, and no great summaries of the prophetic message as in Chapter 6. Instead, it is as if we have fallen slightly back from those heights, as the prophet's eye returns once more to the grim realities of his country's present position and the necessity for patient endurance in faith.

One striking feature of vv.1-7 is Micah's emphasis on how, in a society driven by the pursuit of power and wealth (as the book has depicted Judah throughout) the most basic relationships of trust are undermined. There is indeed no such thing as society: rather a mass of individuals who are out for themselves at the expense of others: 'they all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets'. Such language can describe not just a society steeped in endemic bloodshed (we read this week that Mexico, for instance, has had on average 94 murders a day in 2019), but also the less obvious violence of ones based around the exploitation of cheap labour, and of giving people as little wages and welfare as is thought possible. The key thing is that people are viewed not as neighbours and friends to be served, but as competitors or enemies. The prophet sees that this grim rivalry extends ultimately even into the family: blood relationship might hold out longer than most against the acid of social disintegration, but even it soon gives way.

7:4 could be read as suggesting that this social collapse is not just the logical outcome of people choosing to exalt their own self-interest above all other considerations, but also represents the divine punishment of that decision. God lets the nation slide into the consequences of its own decisions: his 'wrath' is not so much an outburst of divine anger, as just allowing reality to take its course. Such a theology of judgement is very common across the Bible, not least in Paul's famous diagnosis of universal sinfulness in Romans 1:18-32.

Along with this stern doctrine of judgement, however, Micah also sounds the note of restoration. Judah must now indeed 'bear the indignation of the Lord' (7:9) – and the prophet certainly counts himself personally as sharing in that collective fate – but she remains the chosen people, the people to whom the divine promises have been made and will never be retracted (once again, there are strong echoes in Paul: the faithfulness of God to his people is one of his central themes – see especially Romans 11). Micah's faith is that Israel always has a glorious future, even if it lies on the far side of judgement. The nations which now surround her, and threaten to devour her, will be forced to acknowledge her place of honour and privilege.

What are Christians today meant to make of this emphasis? Some, known as Christian Zionists, say that such prophecies are to be literally fulfilled in either a future – or the present – State of Israel. Historically, the much more mainstream position is to view the promises made to Israel as having been transferred to the Church – a view known as 'supersessionism' as the Church supersedes Israel in God's plans. Mainstream as it once was, this view has come under intense fire since the Holocaust, as supersessionism in practice led to the fatal mixing of Christianity and anti-Semitism. For those who don't want to be Christian Zionists or supersessionists, perhaps the best course is simply to say that Micah's fundamental point – that God never utterly abandons his people, and that their ultimate happy destiny is assured – stands; but that this conviction need not entail any particular view about the current State of Israel or the surrounding nations. In Micah's historical context, the most obvious way to express the fundamental conviction was in terms of the supremacy of Israel over her threatening neighbours. However, the fundamental conviction might be able to be expressed in wholly different way in our changed historical context.

The chapter closes with wonderful imagery: the sins of Judah will be cast into the depths of the sea. All the failure, all the violence and corruption will be ended, forgotten, drowned. We would do well to remember that this is part of the background of our baptismal ritual: what is baptism but a symbolic drowning? Paul once again: 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, everything has become new!' (2 Cor. 5:17). That repays careful consideration: what is there in your life which is destined for the depths of the sea? How should you begin to send it on its way?

That closes our series on Micah. It would be really useful to know whether this experiment of providing weekly Bible Notes should continue, and if so, whether there are any suggestions out there as to how to make it more useful. Please let me know ... silence may well be taken as lack of interest, and so lead to the Notes stopping...