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Dear Associates and Friends,

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“[The Book of Micah](#)” is the article for July 2013. Dr. Ernest Martin discusses the background and the primary messages conveyed by Micah. In this Book of the Twelve, Micah’s message is to both the people of Israel and Judah, but it seems as though his primary audience was Judah, because Israel in the north was either soon to be lost, or was destroyed already. While a precise date of Micah’s composition is uncertain (even though verse 1:1 dates it originally within the reigns of three kings of Judah), commentators note that it appears to have been “edited” several times which complicates its study by scholars. This does not influence its value as Scripture. After all, Matthew refers directly to Micah 5:2 in Matthew 2:5–6, and Jesus makes an obvious allusion to Micah 7:6 in Matthew 10:35–37.

Reading Micah one gets the impression that Samaria, the northern kingdom, was gone from God and any hope of repentance. Therefore Micah seems to say repeatedly, watch what happens to Samaria. Learn from their negative example and God’s judgment on them. Samaria did not listen, but Judah (and all God’s people) should pay attention to what God has to say through His prophet Micah.

Micah and Babylon, Some Background

There is one interesting prophecy in the Book of Micah about a future enemy of the southern kingdom of Judah. It involves mention of the city of Babylon. Looking backward in history we know Babylon replaced Assyria as a threat to Judah. The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, says this:

“Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shall you go forth out of the city, and you shall dwell in the field, and you shall go even to Babylon; there [from Babylon] shall you be delivered; there [from Babylon] YHWH shall redeem you from the hand of your enemies.”

• *Micah 4:10*¹

This is an explicit prediction that Judah will be conquered and her people exiled to Babylon, just as the northern Israelites were exiled to Assyria. In the entire Book of Isaiah there is no straightforward prediction Babylon would be used as a tool to punish Judah and Jerusalem.² However, the idea that Babylon is extremely dangerous to Judah is implied in every mention of Babylon in Isaiah. Perhaps Isaiah did not need to mention it because Micah had already given his clear and plain prophecy. There is an interesting account

¹ Other nations will assist Babylon in humbling Judah, but they will not know God is leading them to carry out His judgment against Judah. Micah 4:11–12:

“Now also many nations are gathered against you, that say, ‘Let her [Judah] be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.’ But they know not the thoughts of YHWH, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.”

² Although Isaiah 39:5–7 says Hezekiah’s royal descendants and the wealth of his kingdom will be taken to Babylon. While Isaiah nowhere says the people of Judah will be deported, Micah 4:10 says that very thing.

in Isaiah chapters 38 and 39 which relates directly to this prediction in Micah.

First some background. In the 14th year of the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah, the Assyrians army attacked Judah, conquered every fortress in the land including the great citadel of Lachish, and surrounded Jerusalem. This took place around 701 BC. God miraculously rescued Judah as told in 2 Kings 18:13–19:37; 2 Chronicles 32:1–23; and Isaiah chapters 36–37. It is a fascinating narrative.

Later in the same 14th year, King Hezekiah suffered a life-threatening illness. Another miraculous event occurred. Hezekiah was healed by God, who gave Hezekiah 15 more years of life (2 Kings 20:1–11; 2 Chronicles 32:24–26; and Isaiah chapter 38). After his recovery Hezekiah received letters and gifts brought by envoys sent from Merodachbaladan, the King of Babylon (2 Kings 20:12–19; 2 Chronicles 32:31; and Isaiah 39:1–8), congratulating Hezekiah on his recovery.

There was probably an additional reason for the Babylonian visit. They likely sought information about the destruction of the Assyrian army. We know God destroyed the Assyrians, but the Babylonians only heard those reports from travelers, ambassadors, and displaced Babylonians placed in Samaria by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:24). The Babylonian envoys learned a great deal more than they hoped. Besides the miracles of the Assyrian army's destruction and Hezekiah's recovery, the Babylonians also learned about the great wealth of Judah, all neatly stored in one place in Jerusalem.

At that time the kingdom of Judah was very wealthy. The source of its wealth came from trade with Egypt to the lands north of Judea and then east to Mesopotamia. Wealth also came from Samaria when people of the northern kingdom of Israel came south to escape Assyrian massacres, bringing wealth and population to Judah. Also, after Assyria eliminated Samaria as a competitive power, Judah was able to expand its power. So Hezekiah made a great error in judgment:

“And Hezekiah was glad of them [the Babylonian envoys], and shewed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.”

• *Isaiah 39:2*

He showed them everything. While it is likely (given the timeline of events) that Hezekiah knew about the prophecy of Micah 4:10, he either forgot about it or ignored it. We know Micah prophesied to Judah during the reign of Hezekiah (Micah 1:1). Perhaps Hezekiah thought Babylon was so far away, it could not threaten his kingdom. After all, Assyria was still the great power in the Middle East and a potential threat to Judah. Babylon was a rising power but not yet a threatening empire. Read Isaiah 39:5–7 to learn what Isaiah told the king. Hezekiah was content with God's judgment (Isaiah 39:8).

Keep this all in mind while you enjoy Dr. Martin's article.

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