

A Public Execution

Micah 1:1-9

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Introduction: Back in 1994, murderer David Lawson was put to death in a N.C. gas chamber. Earlier that year, talk show host Phil Donahue had joined with the death row inmate in an appeal to the N.C. Supreme Court for the right to have Lawson's execution televised. Lawson had argued that his televised execution would give meaning to his life, calling attention to the effects of depression, which he said led to the killing of another man. That appeal was denied. Whatever motives, whether right or wrong, is there a place in God's plan for public punishment? The Bible suggests that there are benefits from public punishment. It produces godly fear (Acts 5:1-11, in the case of Ananias & Sapphira); it prohibits future wickedness (Deut. 19:19-20); & it promotes wisdom (Pro. 21:11). You might well ask, what has that to do with the message of Micah? In chapter one, Micah calls the entire world to witness the coming execution of judgment upon Israel & Judah. Just as Hosea did in his prophecy in chapter 4, Micah sets forth a court scene. Both the Northern & Southern Kingdoms (Israel & Judah) were guilty of injustice, immorality, & ingratitude (among other sins). "Moral, social, & religious decay were eating away at the nation & would eventually destroy it" (Custer). That judgment would fall upon the North in 722 B.C. (by the Assyrians) & upon the South in 586 B.C. (by the Babylonians). Can we not consider this as a warning to America today? Proverbs 14:34 declares, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*" But as we find out in Micah's prophecy, the judgment begins with the leadership of the nation, particularly the religious leadership. So, too, Peter declared centuries later, "*For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God...*" (I Peter 4:17). Consider with me this morning 3 thoughts from the opening verses of Micah: A summons to witness (:2-4); a sentence of execution (:5-7); & a sign of sympathy (:8-9).

I. A **summons** to witness (:2-4)

A. A parallel situation with Micah > I Kings 22:13-28, Micaiah before King Ahab.

1. Both Micah & Micaiah contended against false prophets.
2. Both prophets condemned the Kingdom of Israel.
3. Both prophets constructed images of judgment.

B. A prophetic warning to all (:2) >

1. God's witness to the judgment of the world.
2. God's warning from His holy temple (in heaven).

C. A pictured description of judgment (:3-4) >

1. The Lord's descent from heaven:
 - a. The Lord arises from His throne.
 - b. The Lord leaves His heavenly palace.
2. The Lord's display on earth:
["*cometh forth*" – "to come forth for battle."]
 - a. The mountains melt as wax.
 - b. The valleys rent by earthquakes.

Summary: Micah's use of poetic language? Compare: "...He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored..." (in Battle Hymn of the Republic).

II. A **sentence** of execution (:5-7)

A. The causes for judgment (:5) >

1. "*Transgression of Jacob... sins of the house of Israel.*"
 - a. "*Transgression*" – "a breach of relationships, civil or religious, between 2 parties; a casting off of allegiance; a rebellion against rulers" (Theological Workbook). Compare I John 3:4.

- b. “Sins” – to miss the mark; to turn out of the way of God’s will & Word.
- c. “Samaria” – the capitol of the Northern Kingdom; the leadership is responsible.
- 2. “The high places of Judah?”
 - a. “High places” – Canaanite shrines or groves; speaks of idols & false worship.
 - b. “Jerusalem” – the capitol of the Southern Kingdom; also responsible leadership.
 - c. During the reign of Ahaz a pagan Assyrian altar was erected in Jerusalem.
- B. The consequences of judgment (:6-7) >

[The judgment of Samaria was to be a warning to Judah (see Jer. 3:6-10).]

 - 1. There was complete destruction (:6):
 - a. The walled cities had walls broken down; fit now only for vineyards.
 - b. The stones of the walls were cast down, exposing the foundations of the city.
 - 2. There were constructed idols (from destructed idols) (:7):
 - a. The destructed idols (“*graven images*”); & the “*hires burned*” (that is, the wages of the prostitute).
 - b. The constructed idols – “The Assyrians, in accordance with the practice of ancient conquerors, will take the silver & gold of the destroyed idols & mold new idols” (Wisdom).

Summary: “Ironically, the Lord used an idolatrous nation, Assyria, to destroy the idols of Samaria” (Wisdom).

Application: “Let those who would turn our country toward the pursuit of false gods ponder well the sin of Samaria & the tramp of God’s mighty feet” (Phillips).

III. A sign of sympathy (:8-9)

- A. The expression of sympathy (:8) >
 - 1. A parallel context is found in Luke 19:41-42, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.
 - 2. A pictured contrast – Micah is “*stripped*” (barefoot?) & “*naked*” (in undergarments?).
 - 3. A pitiful cry – like the “*wailing of dragons*” (jackals?) & the “*mourning of owls*” (ostriches?).
- B. The explanation for sympathy (:9) >
 - 1. The incurable would of Samaria:
 - a. Judgment is inevitable.
 - b. Assyria invades & conquers Samaria in 722 B.C.
 - 2. The infectious disease upon Judah (& cf. Isaiah 1:5-6):
 - a. The cancerous disease – sin is an infection that spreads.
 - b. The coming disaster – Assyria ravages the countryside, but is unable to take Jerusalem (spared, for now, under Hezekiah; just “*unto the gate*”?).

Conclusion: What lessons are we to learn from this opening message of Micah? First, God is Sovereign & He will ultimately judge sin. This is pictured by the Lord summoning witnesses to the sentence of judgment to come upon Israel & later Judah. Second, Micah is sensitive to the plight of his people. He wails & mourns, foreshadowing the weeping of Jesus over the city of Jerusalem. How grievous to us are the sins of America? Do we just groan & complain or do we moan & cry over what is happening in our day to our nation? Are we motivated to pray for our nation as well as to proclaim to our nation that the only hope we have is in Christ? Though II Chronicles 7:14 was spoken to Israel, it can also be the call of God to us today. Just as that O.T. call was to God’s people, so, too, today judgment must begin at the house of God. And third, God is merciful. In this Book of Micah we see the promise of the coming King (5:2) & the promise of the coming Kingdom (chapters 4-5). We, too, have the promise of the coming Kingdom. Consider Phillips’ outline of this Book: The prophecy of retribution (1-3); the promise of restoration (4-5); & the plea for repentance (6-7). Our prayer should be for preachers today to denounce sin & declare Christ as man’s only hope, asking the Lord for the hearts of people to be open in order to hear & heed God’s Word. Will that be your prayer?