

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

P. O. BOX 20331—GREENSBORO, N. C. 27420
 PHONE BR 3-1758

Second Class Postage Paid at Greensboro, N. C.

10c Per Copy Published Weekly \$6.00 Per Year

Winter Tragedies

Be aware of your Christmas decorations before you leave your home for a visit. Be sure that all Christmas lights, electrical appliances, and heating apparatus is disconnected or turned off.

During the winter season, families suffer more misfortunes — incidents and accidents — than any other season of the year. Quite often the fire vehicles create a noise going through the streets to some poverty stricken home. Upon their arrival the house is completely destroyed by fire. If not, the firemen usually damage the property beyond its usefulness with water and other apparatus used in extinguishing fires. Such misfortunes usually happen in old delapidated rented houses where four or five children or sometimes two families are living. The cause of fire is usually some shortages in electrical wiring, small inefficient oil burners, and loose-jointed, rickety wood and coal stoves which are left with the door half closed which may be broken and causes combustion. Tenants know when they rented the house, a contract was signed to keep the property just as they found it if there is damage because of their own carelessness, they should pay for it. The carelessness of fire at such places take place when the tenant waits for the landlord to repair damages. They never feel it is their duty to make any effort to protect the property from any misfortunes. Then when an incident occurs, they fault the landlord. On the other hand, the tenant does not have any household insurance. He is just looking for something for nothing without any protection. In most cases, it is the fault of the tenant when the door locks are damaged, windows broken, etc. Tenants prefer to stay there until some misfortune happens by fire, wind storms or flood, as well as depreciated electric wiring.

Misfortunes occur in the time of death in the family especially when it is accidental. In many cases, when the man who is head of the house dies, the wife and children become confused. They are unable to find the insurance policies, deeds, contracts, and loans and do not read them thoroughly to see if there is a clause showing that bills are paid in case of death. In case of a loan, it is automatically paid after death. The mortician usually advises them about expenses for a good burial out of their dividends. A statement was made by a widow that she didn't know the financial condition of the home until after the death of the husband. One agent would come and bring her a sum of money due from a certain insurance she didn't know about. The next day another agent would come with unpaid bills. This happened for about two years. There is no need for a woman to think she will be able to keep up with all the bills her husband made. A wife should invest in insurance on her husband whereby it will help to adjust many of the unknown bills after death.

Just about every week, especially when we read our Monday morning newspaper, we see a scene of a vehicle accident where both mother and father of five or six youngsters were killed on the highway. Now, the friends and relatives become upset as to what will become of the children. If these parents have been progressive enough to own an automobile then they will have relatives or friends to come to the rescue to adopt the children with the understanding that a lawyer or Welfare Department change the face value of the insurance policy over to them as well as the property and other dividends where there is an income. It is a rare occasion nowadays to send a child to an orphanage home unless he becomes a juvenile problem.

It is dangerous to exhibit large sums of money in public places, especially on street corners. This causes flim-flam and robbery. The insurance law advises that large sums of money which are to be paid to employees be counted in the office away from the public.

It is better to stay at home rather than to travel on snow and icy gloomy days. If you must travel, have your automobile checked thoroughly with chains applied to the tires. Also carry along a first aid kit. By all means, drink no alcoholic beverages while driving.

We advise our readers to be aware of the many misfortunes that are happening due to weather, auto accidents, flim-flam and robbery and fire during this season.

This Week's Sunday School Lesson

What God Requires Of Man

WHAT IS OUR CONCERN?

"Here I am in church again, Jesus. I love it here, but, as you know, for some of the wrong reasons. I sometimes lose myself completely in the church service and forget the people outside whom you love. I sometimes withdraw far, far inside myself when I am inside church, but people looking at me can see only my pious expression and imagine I am loving you instead of myself.

"Help us, Lord, who claim to be your special people. Don't let us feel privileged and selfish because you have called us to you. Teach us our responsibilities to you, our brother, and to all the people out there. Save us from the sin of loving religion instead of you."

This modern prayer touches on the realization that a person can be religious for the wrong reasons. One can participate regularly in the act of formal worship as a means of escape from involvement in the problems of the world; one can love religion itself without loving or serving the God whom that religion is designed to serve.

The ruthless honesty of this prayer reveals to us that in reality prayer and other acts of worship ought not be reserved for formal religious occasions. Unfortunately, for most of us religion is a rather formalized thing, being celebrated on special occasions and often having little or no bearing upon what we do in everyday life. This is true today, and it was true in Micah's day.

BEFORE YOU READ THE SCRIPTURE

To understand the message of Micah, one must first understand certain facts about him and about the book that bears his name.

First, the Book of Micah is a sort of anthology of prophetic thought. Chapters 1 through 3 (except 2:12-13) are almost universally regarded as composed entirely by Micah himself. In recent years scholars have tended to regard the material in 6:1 through 7:4 as also coming from Micah. However, Chapters 4 and 5 and most of Chapter 7 are later additions to the book.

To say that certain materials are later additions to a book by no means implies that those materials are of lesser value. In many instances the added material gives new and deeper meaning to the original material, as the later writers sought to interpret its meaning for their own day.

Second, Micah was apparently fond of using the imagery of the courtroom for conveying his message; that is, the form he uses is that of a lawsuit in which two parties state their case against each other. (See 1:2-7 and 6:1-5.) The real differences from an ordinary lawsuit are these: (1) The parties in the lawsuit are Yahweh (God) and Israel. (2) The courtroom is the entire universe with the earth and heavens, mountains and seas, called to hear the arguments presented.

The use of this imagery would catch the attention of the proph-

et's hearers. They were quite familiar with court procedures, since in those days judgments were rendered "in the gate" of the city, where all could hear and see the proceedings. (See Amos 5:10, 15.)

Micah used this literary device of the lawsuit to present a message in which the verdict was a foregone conclusion. What answer could an honest Judean give to the questions posed in Micah 6:3-4, 10-12? None, except that he was guilty.

Third, we should note that Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah of Jerusalem, living and prophesying during the last years of the eighth century B.C. Isaiah was at home in the city, but Micah was a prophet from the rural area to the southwest of Jerusalem and shared the concern of the peasant for the welfare of the poor. He apparently regarded the urban centers of his day as lying at the very root of Judah's religious and moral laxity. (See 1:5-6; 3:10.)

WHAT THE SCRIPTURE SAYS

The Scripture for today is Micah 1 through 3; 6. Selected verses are printed below. See Home Bible Study suggestions in the back of the quarterly.

Micah 6:1-8

- Hear what the Lord says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice.
 - Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel.
 - "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me!
 - For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
 - O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Be'or answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."
 - "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
 - He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?
- Memory Selection:**
 He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

—Micah 6:8

HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURE

The Northern Kingdom, Israel, had fallen to Assyrian armies in 721 B.C. This was past history for Micah, who prophesied mainly during the reign of King Hezekiah. But apparently the Judean people had learned little from the fate of their sister nation. Clearly the social, religious, and economic injustices so often mentioned in Amos and Hosea as being characteristic of the Northern Kingdom were rampant in Judah, too. (See Micah 2:1-2, 8-10; 3:1-3, 9-11.)

Micah vigorously attacked these evils. He attacked social and economic abuses; he criticized the failure of the leaders of Judah; he condemned the people for adding pagan practices or cults to the religion of Yahweh. Micah also had words of warning about the impending political and military doom.

Micah's View of God

Like most of the prophets, Micah was clearly convinced that Yahweh acted in historical events to reveal his will. Moreover, Yahweh was a jealous God who desired for himself the whole allegiance of his people; he could not tolerate any mixing of the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other deities.

Furthermore, Micah was convinced that Yahweh desired social justice as an expression of his people's devotion more than he desired the proper performance of the outward forms of worship. What this meant in practical terms was that whenever the expression of justice and mercy toward one's fellow men was neglected, God punished his people. This punishment came in real historical events; for example, in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria?

When we talk about God's punishing Israel or Judah, we imply another question, too. What was the purpose of this punishment? Was it retaliation? The prophets would certainly have answered with an emphatic No. God's punishment was not vindictive; it was discipline; that is, punishment administered in love to effect a change in behavior.

Finally, Micah was thoroughly convinced that Yahweh was a just God. God never punished unjustly. The very fact that many of the prophets chose the lawsuit style for the vehicle of their message proves this. Would they have used this literary form had they not been certain that when God's side of the "case" had been presented, no conclusive defense could be made?

The harsh words uttered by Micah were based on positive convictions about God's nature and the demands he makes upon men. These harsh words spoken by the prophets are the other side of the coin of the prophets' profound understanding of the nature of God.

Some Special Helps

A few passages require some special notes of explanation.

In Micah 1:5 the name Jacob is used to designate the ten tribes

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