

Micah

INTRODUCTION

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah in the eighth century before Christ. Both concentrated their ministry in the southern kingdom, Judah, yet included Samaria (Capital of the northern kingdom, Israel) and "the nations" within the scope of their prophecies. For a few years in his early career Micah also was contemporary with Hosea, a prophet located in the northern kingdom. Micah lived in a town about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem and prophesied mostly in that region.

Micah's name predicates a likeness to the Lord: "He Who Is Like Yahweh." Micah was so completely and sincerely committed that he was even willing to go stripped naked on occasion to get his message across (1:8). Micah's prophecy had an impact that extended far beyond his local ministry. A century later his prophecy was remembered and quoted (Jer. 26:17-19), and events seven centuries later attest to the authenticity of Micah's prophecy (Matt. 2:1-6; John 7:41-43).

Micah prophesied according to his own statement (1:1) during the reigns of the southern kings Jotham (740-731 B.C.), Ahaz (731-716 B.C.), and Hezekiah (716-686 B.C.). Since he died during the administration of Hezekiah and before Manasseh's partly overlapping era (696-642 B.C.), a date between 704 and 696 B.C. seems likely.

In the period between the beginning of the divided Solomonic kingdom (Israel to the north, and Judah to the south) and the destruction of the temple, many "high places" had been introduced in Judah through the influence of Samaria. This placed Canaanite idolatry in competition with the true temple worship of the Lord (1:5). Micah shows how this spiritual declension will inevitably lead to judgment on the whole land. And, although King Hezekiah had won a notable victory over Sennacherib and the Assyrian army, Judah was bound to fall unless the nation turned back to God in wholehearted repentance.

Micah's introductory statement (1:1) is in prose form, but the entire compilation of prophecies after that is poetry. The advantage of poetry to his contemporaries was that the rhythmic message would be easier to remember. The disadvantage to us is that poetry is more difficult to translate into another language without loss. Micah depends on shortened units of thought (with the nonessential words implied), plentiful parallelisms and nameplays (since name meanings were important to Hebrews), and poetic prepositions. He also uses an abundance of word pictures. For instance, instead of abstractly saying the Lord will conceal or otherwise make invisible our sins, he declares: "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). He cannot avoid the abstract word "sins," but he concretely depicts for us their burial like weights into the ocean depths, never to be recoverable again.

Micah is a prophecy about the Lord, who has no rivals in pardoning sins and having compassion on sinners. His compassionate faithfulness keeps covenant with Abraham and his descendants. "The majesty of the name of the LORD" (5:4; see also 4:5; 6:9) is featured, as well as the Lord's face (3:4), His glory (2:9), His ways (4:2), His thoughts (4:12), His strength (5:4), His righteousness (6:5; 7:9), and His consequent indignation (7:9) and anger (5:15; 7:18) against all forms of moral rebellion.

In the opening vision, the Lord comes from His holy sanctuary in heaven to witness against the people (1:2). The most remarkable factor in the Lord's handling of His case is how far down He has come to make His complaint (6:2), even being willing to sit at the defendant's table and let His people bring any grievances with the way God has treated them (6:3). Moreover, one who truly repents will have the Lord as his defense lawyer (7:9)!

While Babylon was not yet a world power that could stand independently of Assyria, the Babylonian captivity (over a century later) was clearly predicted as the judgment of God for rebellion against Him (1:16; 2:3, 10; 4:10; 7:13). But as with Isaiah, Micah's colleague, hope was held out for a remnant to be restored, whether from this captivity or from a spiritually restored people in the days of the Messiah (2:12, 13; 4:6, 7; 5:3, 7, 8; 7:18). The Lord would deliver the remnant (2:12, 13; 4:3-8, 10; 5:9; 7:7).

Micah had to censure the leadership of the nation for consuming the flock with which they were entrusted. Nevertheless, God's great compassion colors His every attitude and action toward His people, portrayed as an errant daughter (1:13; 4:8, 10, 13), for His compassion that once redeemed Israel from Egypt (6:4) will also redeem Judah from Babylon (4:10). His compassionate faithfulness to Abraham and the patriarchs (7:20) is updated with each new generation. This message is focused on the one central question for the entire prophecy: "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?" (7:18). Yahweh's compassion (7:18, 19) is the precious attribute no false deity can match. Compassion and covenant faithfulness are unique with God. The people's hope to live under God's full blessing was bound up with the coming of the Messiah. God in His love, foreseeing the glories of His grace to be manifested in Jesus, kept declaring that future Day and kingdom as the event in which the faithful should place their hopes.

Prophecies of Christ make Micah's book glow with hope and encouragement. The book opens with a magnificent display of Yahweh's coming (1:3-5). It will be for later prophecies to assert the personal aspect of His arrival in historical time. But the disposition of God to come down and interact is established at the outset.

The first messianic prophecy occurs in a shepherding scene. After their homeland had been defiled and destroyed, a remnant of the captives would be rounded up like sheep enclosed in a fold. Then one would break open the enclosure and lead them out the gate into freedom (2:12, 13). This one is their "king" and "LORD." The whole episode accords

beautifully with Jesus' announcement of liberty to captives (Luke 4:18), while actually setting the physical and spiritual captives free.

Micah 5:2 is one of the most famous of all Old Testament prophecies. It authenticates biblical prophecy as "the word of the LORD" (1:1; 2:7; 4:2). The term Yahweh's "word" (4:2) is a title applicable to Christ (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). The Micah 5:2 prophecy is explicitly messianic ("Ruler in Israel") and specifies His birthplace as Bethlehem at a time when Bethlehem was hardly known. His words were given many centuries before the event; he had no local cues to draw on. Another feature of this prophecy is that it cannot refer to just any leader who might originate from Bethlehem. Christ is the only one to whom it could refer, because it equates the Ruler with the eternal One: "Whose goings forth *are* from of old, from everlasting." This prophecy asserts both the humanity and deity of the Messiah in a sublime manner.

The prophecy of Micah 5:4, 5 asserts the Messiah's shepherdhood ("feed His flock"), His anointing ("in the strength of the LORD"), His deity ("in the majesty of the name of the LORD") and humanity ("His God"), His universal dominion ("He shall be great to the ends of the earth"), and His being the leader of a peaceful kingdom ("this One shall be peace").

The climax of the prophecy (7:18, 19) plus the final verse (7:20), while not including the name of the Messiah, definitely refer to Him. In the expression of divine mercy and compassion, He is the One who "will subdue our iniquities," dropping them into the ocean depths that God might pardon sins and replace sin with truth.

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Micah, Willard S. Elijahson)

Micah 1:1-3:12

It was during the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz that Micah's ministry began. It seems to have reached its climax in the early days of Hezekiah, who followed Ahaz after that monarch's miserable reign of 16 years and found the kingdom a heritage of shame and peril. One single incident is left us in the book of Jeremiah respecting the results of Micah's testimony in connection with Hezekiah.

It would seem as if he had the high honor of being the instrument of Hezekiah's conversion, even as the prophet Isaiah had afterwards of being the teacher and counselor of the same glorious king. Word had been brought to Hezekiah that Micah was uttering loud and fearful denunciations against the kingdom, and even proclaiming the utter destruction of Jerusalem, and that "Zion will be plowed like a field" (Micah 3:12).

This was looked upon as a dangerous and perhaps seditious agitation, and men like Joash and Ahaz would have speedily ended it by the prophet's arrest and perhaps execution. But Hezekiah was of a different mold. He heeded the terrible warning, humbled himself before God, summoned the people to repentance, averted the curse and brought upon himself and his kingdom the glorious days of blessing which made his reign the brightest epoch of Jewish history after the days of Solomon. This incident gives our prophet a very high place of importance and distinction, and entitles his message to our most careful consideration.

The personality of Micah is not left to vague conjecture. His own writings give to us a most vivid picture of the man. In contrast with the courtly Isaiah and the polished Elisha, who were the companions of kings, Micah was a typical Oriental prophet. He came from a country village on the borders of the Philistines, and seems to have been not unlike the great Elijah in the quaintness and weirdness both of his dress and his gestures and expressions. While speaking, perhaps on some street corner or in the temple to the assembled multitudes, very much as a street preacher would address the crowd today, his gestures and tones would become wild and violent. Stripped to the waist, until he seemed almost naked, with his tangled hair streaming behind, and with violent gesticulations and cries of anguish, he would depict the horrors that were coming on the land, as though enacting the very scenes in a sort of pantomime. Describing his own manner in Micah 1:8-9, he cries, no doubt as he had cried while uttering his message before the crowd, "Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself." And then looking down to his old home and the villages of his childhood, he cries out as he sees their destruction passing before him in vision, "Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all. In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust. Pass on in nakedness and shame, you who live in Shaphir" (1:10-11). "Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come" (1:12). "Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile" (1:16).

The name of Micah is quite suggestive; it means "Who is like God?" And it is the basis of one of the finest passages of his prophecy. In Micah 7:18 the prophet makes a play upon his own name: "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin?" It is beautiful thus to have the man identified with his message and the name will suggest to us the practical lesson of impersonating our own sermons and making our messages the echo of our lives.

In studying the writings of these ancient prophets we must ever remember that most of what they said was of special local and temporary interest, arising out of the circumstances that called forth their message; then continuing with some special prediction for future times. The prophets of Israel were the counselors of their age, the moral and spiritual teachers of their times, and therefore we must not seek to find in all their messages some special vision applying to our age.

The moral and spiritual lessons are of permanent value, but much of the colorings belong to local and temporary conditions. At the same time, interspersed with these immediate messages, we find ever and anon some glorious vision that reaches out to coming ages and contains the substance of some larger prophecy of later times.

Let us gather out of Micah's remarkable little message of less than 4,000 words, about the length of an ordinary sermon, his special messages for our times.

First there is God's judgment against sin. The searchlight falls upon the scene and what a picture do we behold of the secret thoughts and even dreams of sinful men. "Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it" (2:1). How solemn to think that God sees us in the darkness of the night and even in the dreams of our slumbering hours, as we live over our thoughts and perhaps our sins.

Next we have a message of judgment against the rulers of his people:

But as for me, I am filled with power,
with the Spirit of the LORD,
and with justice and might,
to declare to Jacob his transgression,
to Israel his sin.
Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob,
you rulers of the house of Israel,

who despise justice
and distort all that is right;
who build Zion with bloodshed,
and Jerusalem with wickedness.
Her leaders judge for a bribe,
her priests teach for a price,
and her prophets tell fortunes for money.
Yet they lean upon the LORD and say,
"Is not the LORD among us?
No disaster will come upon us."
Therefore because of you,
Zion will be plowed like a field,
Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble,
the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets. (3:8-12)

(The Christ in the Bible Commentary, A. B. Simpson)

Micah 1 tells of the vision Micah saw concerning Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Jerusalem, capital of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). **Compare this vision with that of Isaiah's in Isaiah 1.**

The weeping prophet (Jer. 9:1) and Micah lament the punishment of sinners as well as the suffering of saints in the world. **How does Micah express himself as a mourner?**

Mic. 1:8

God by the fulfillment of His threats against His ancient people, is a "witness" to His own justice and truth against their apostasy. **Is this especially so of the judgment under which Israel and the Jews have been for ages suffering?**

What judgment comes upon those who conceive evil plans (premeditated) upon their bed at night (Micah 2:1)?

Mic. 2:3

Who did Micah compare the unjust leaders to?

Mic. 3:2-3

How will God respond to those who "hate good and love evil" (Micah 3:2)

Mic. 3:4

Micah 4:1-13

The enemies of Israel, literal and spiritual, little know the thoughts of love and unsearchable wisdom which God entertains towards His people. The very trials which He permits them to endure at the hands of the enemies are being overruled to the ultimate salvation of His people, and to the destruction of their enemies. When the latter gather themselves against the Church (Israel), to feast their eyes insultingly on her calamities, they are unconsciously being gathered together to be trodden under foot by her (Mic. 4:13, Rev. 2:26-27)

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

The people crying out under the sufferings of their siege knew nothing of the redemption that would eventually come; the nations gloating over Jerusalem knew nothing of God's plan to deal with them. (John B. Taylor) **How is the explanation of what was happening explained in the latter part of Micah 5:1?**

Micah 5:1-15

The prophet guards against the carnal security which the preceding glorious promises might have otherwise generated in the elect nation, by reminding them of the indignities which were awaiting their judges and princes soon. Even the Messiah, the coming Savior, was to be smitten on the cheek—the greatest of insults—before the glory and kingdom should be fully manifested. Let us hence learn that in our own case also, if we are to win the heavenly crown, we must bear the cross, and mortify our earthly members.

In the appointment of Bethlehem as Messiah's birthplace, the universal principle of God's way of redemption is exemplified, that out of seeming littleness and weakness God has perfected strength. Not royal Jerusalem, but humble Bethlehem; not the best house of that petty village, but a common inn; not the best room in the inn, but a stable or outhouse—was the scene of the nativity of Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (v. 2).

This divine "Ruler in Israel," more-over, *came forth unto the Father*. God's glory was and is the ultimate end of redemption. To fulfill the eternal counsel of the Father, "to the praise of the glory of His grace," was the purpose of the Son in His incarnation: as He saith, "Lo, I come ... I delight to do thy will O my God" (Ps. 40:7-8). As Son of God, His "goings forth are from everlasting" (v. 2): as Son of man, He "cometh forth" to fulfill the will of the Father on earth.

God's giving up Israel to her foes is to "last until she which travaileth hath brought forth" (v. 3). The virgin-mother's travail before the first coming of Messiah is to have its counterpart in Zion's pains, which shall precede the second coming of the same Jesus as the "Deliverer who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26): at which time also "the remnant of Israel's brethren shall return" from their long-continued dispersion. There is another counterpart, also, in the sighing prayers of the elect Church for the second coming of the Lord, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20-21): in concert with which are the groans of the whole creation, travailing in pain together (Rom. 8:22), and longing "to be delivered from the bondage of corruption." Thus a principle of interpreting Scripture prophecies is given us—namely, we are to remember that, while they receive a fulfillment in the immediate future, and in Messiah's first advent, they also look forward to their exhaustive fulfillment in the final consummation of all things at Messiah's second advent in glory.

The accurate knowledge which the scribes evinced to Herod of the exact birthplace of Messiah, according to the prophecy of Micah, is a striking confirmation alike of the supernatural character of the inspiration of the prophets, and of the reality of Jesus' claim to be both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The scribes were constrained by the power of the truth involuntarily to confirm, from Jesus' very birth, the Messiahship of Him whom they then neglected, and subsequently rejected and condemned. Thus alike friends and foes, the testimony of his contemporaries and that of the holy men of the Old Testament, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:21), assure us that Jesus is both Lord and Christ.

The Savior now "feeds" His people in the green pastures of His Word, and by the inward teaching of His Spirit. Hereafter "He shall stand and feed" (v. 4), or rule "in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God," fully manifested. Now but a "little flock" (Luke 12:32) follow Him: hereafter "He shall be great unto the ends of the earth." Now he is "the peace" of His believing people, giving them peace with God and with their own consciences, through faith in Him (John 14:27; 16:33; Rom. 5:1). Hereafter He shall give them external peace also, so that no longer shall they have, as now, "tribulation in the world;" for the Church shall be then co-extensive with the world, and the world with the Church; and all enemies of both the literal and the spiritual Israel shall be destroyed (vv. 5, 6).

Israel restored to God's favor and to her own land, though at first but a "remnant in the midst of many people," shall soon be multiplied as the drops of rain, and shall act with the same happy influence spiritually on the surrounding nations that the rain or dew exercises in reviving the withering grass (v. 7). The spiritual dews from above are as independent of man, so far as power or merit is concerned, as are the literal dews of the atmosphere above and around us. Conversion and sanctification are altogether of grace, not of works. This shall be specially manifested in the new birth of all Israel and of the nations as in a day (Isa. 66:8).

As Israel and Israel's King shall wear a benignant aspect to the obedient, so shall He and the elect nation be formidable as a lion to all that oppose themselves, tearing them in pieces, so that "none can deliver" (v. 8). Her "hand" shall be strengthened by Jehovah's hand against her "adversaries," and when lifted up shall cut them off (v. 9). Thus ever the Lord's coming wears a double aspect to the believing and to the impenitent respectively. Let us see that we take our portion with Israel and with Israel's God.

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

Show how the Assyrian of Micah 5:5-6 is most likely the Antichrist.

Isa. 10:5, 12 Isa. 30:31-33

Israel will be stripped of all their past creature confidences and dependencies and be able to just trust and rest in the Lord alone. **"In that day" (Micah 5:10) what will happen to those nations who oppose Israel?**

Mic. 5:9-15

Micah 6:1-16

In Micah 6:1-4 the prophet returns from his vision of the future to the actual condition of his people, which was utterly desperate. The mountains, as the most enduring monuments of nature, are summoned as witnesses in the great trial between Jehovah and his people. Like Israel, we have been delivered from the house of bondage with infinite love, but how wayward and willful we have been! Verses 5-8 prove the impotence of a religion which is only external.

Few have known more sublime truth than Baalam, v. 5, but he loved the wages of unrighteousness; and this eclipsed

the divine radiance that became overcast and finally overwhelmed. Verses 9-11 reveal the fruitlessness of a life of sin. Sooner or later nature herself becomes unresponsive—sowing, but no harvest; the treading of the press, but no juice. The only path to real satisfaction and peace is in the love and faithful service of God. Why are we so slow to tread it?
(Through the Bible Day by Day, F. B. Meyer)

In Micah 6:1-3 God presses charges in a lawsuit against His people and in Micah 6:6-8 is Israel's reply to God's lawsuit in which she claims ignorance, posing the questions to the Lord about what is acceptable to Him. **How does the prophet answer his own question, "what does the Lord require of thee"?**

Mic. 6:8 Heb. 9:11-14, Heb. 10:1-14

Micah 7:1-20

When earthly friends fail us, and because of our religion "our enemies are the men of our own house" (v. 6), our only and unailing resource is, like the prophet, to "look unto the Lord" (v. 7), as if there were no other one to look to in the universe. Moreover, we must not only look *unto*, but also "wait for the God of our salvation." The believer, though all others forsake him, still finds unspeakable joy in knowing God to be *his* God. His confidence of being heard rests on this, "My God will hear me."

When we leave ourselves wholly in the hands of God we may rest confident that He will Himself "plead our cause and execute justice for" us (v. 9). And though He suffer us to fall for a time, in order to make us feel our own exceeding weakness, He shall raise us up again. "He will bring forth" His people from "sitting in darkness" (vv. 8, 9) "to the light" which He at once gives and is. Thenceforth we shall renounce all trust in righteousness of our own making, and shall walk in the light of *His* righteousness. Let our feeling be continually, "with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36:9).

Satan often suggests the unbelieving thought to the child of God in trial, "Where now is the Lord thy God?" (v. 10.) It is the same taunt as Satan's agents threw against the suffering Savior, "He trusted in God: let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God" (Matt. 27:43). But faith furnishes confident hope of divine deliverance at last, and patient submission to the will of God in the meantime. The triumph of the enemy over the people of God is short, and shall soon be reversed. Though cast down, we are not destroyed. Only wait, and our "eyes shall behold" the enemy, who so lately looked exultingly at us in our trial, cast down and destroyed forever.

(Bible Commentary, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown)

The prophet Micah sadly laments the thorough woeful decay of religion in Israel (Micah 7:1-6), effecting even those in his very household, those closest to him. **How did Micah approach God in the midst of this corrupt situation plus realizing the state of corruption that resided in his own soul?**

Mic. 7:7-20