

Notes on Micah

2014 Edition

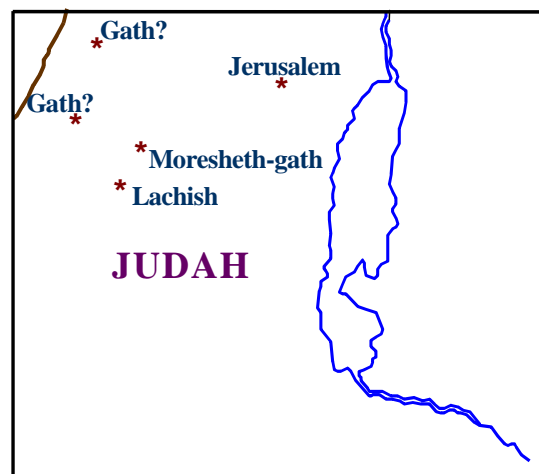
Dr. Thomas L. Constable

Introduction

TITLE AND WRITER

The title, as usual in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, comes from the name of the traditional writer.

The name "Micah" is a shortened form of "Micaiah," which means: "Who is like Yahweh?" This was an appropriate name since Micah helped the people understand what Yahweh is like. There are many other Bible characters with the same name. Another Micaiah, the son of Imlah, served as a prophet in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of King Ahab of Israel (874-853 B.C., 1 Kings 22:8-28; 2 Chron. 18:3-27). Micah's



hometown was Moresheth-gath, which stood about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem in Judah (1:1), between Azekah and Marisa. It was called Moresheth-gath (1:14) because it was fairly close to the Philistine town of Gath. Moresheth-gath was also about six miles northeast of Lachish, an important Judean town in Micah's day, because it stood on an international trade route. Since Moresheth-gath stood only about a day's walk west of Tekoa, Amos' hometown, these prophets, who were roughly contemporary, may have known each other.¹ However, Amos' ministry may have been over by the time Micah began his. Amos prophesied during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah (Amos 1:1), and Micah prophesied during the reigns of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah, who followed Uzziah (Mic. 1:1). This probably means that Micah was a younger contemporary of Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah.

UNITY

Critics of the book have tried to prove that it is the product of several writers or editors (redactors). The reason for this view is its lack of apparent coherence. Chapters 4—7

¹Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 310.

have become the target of most critical attacks, yet the book is harmonious in its basic structure.²

DATE AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION

Micah prophesied during the reigns of the Judean kings Jotham (750-732 B.C.), Ahaz (732-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.; 1:1). This made him a late eighth-century B.C. contemporary of Isaiah, who also ministered in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (cf. Isa. 1:1), and Amos and Hosea, who ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel (cf. Amos 1:1; Hos. 1:1). These were years of economic affluence and international peace—but spiritual decadence—for both kingdoms, especially Israel.

Micah witnessed the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722 B.C. He also lived through the invasion of Judah by the Assyrians under King Sennacherib in 701 B.C. Leon Wood believed that Micah wrote between 735 and 710 B.C., because he did not cite Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.³ However, Leslie Allen argued convincingly that 2:12-13 alludes to Sennacherib's blockade of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.⁴ According to Sennacherib's own records he captured 46 of King Hezekiah's strong cities, walled forts, and countless small villages. He claimed to have taken captive over 200,000 Judahites plus innumerable animals. Two of the Judean cities taken were Lachish, second only to Jerusalem in importance, and Moresheth-gath, Micah's hometown. Micah referred to the distress that this foreign invasion produced in Judah (1:10-16; 5:6).

DATES OF SOME OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS ACCORDING TO "NORMATIVE" BIBLICAL CRITICISM⁵	
EPOCH	LITERATURE
<i>Pre-exilic (760-586 B.C.)</i>	
Early	Amos
	Hosea
	First Isaiah (chs. 1—35)
	Micah
	Psalms of Zion (46, 48, 87)
Late	Jeremiah

²See Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 451-52, for further discussion, or T. E. McComiskey, "Micah," in *Daniel-Minor Prophets*, vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 396-97; J. Mays, *Micah: A Commentary*, pp. 21-33; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, pp. 241-52.

³Wood, p. 309.

⁴Allen, pp. 242, 244, and 301.

⁵From Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 170

EPOCH	LITERATURE
<i>Exilic (586—539 B.C.)</i>	
Early	Jeremiah
	Deuteronomist (Deuteronomy—2 Kings)
	Ezekiel
Late	Second Isaiah (chs. 40—55)
<i>Post-exilic (516—?350 B.C.)</i>	
Early	Zechariah
	Haggai
	Third Isaiah (chs. 56—66)
	Ezra, Nehemiah
Late	Malachi
	Joel

AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE

Micah ministered to the people of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. He predicted the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, and warned the Judeans that God would discipline them, too, for their sins. As in all the prophetic books, the standard by which God measured His people was the Mosaic Covenant. If they obeyed, they would enjoy blessing, but if they disobeyed, they could expect punishment (cf. Lev. 26; Deut. 28). Micah, too, pointed out how the Israelites had broken the covenant and that judgment was inevitable, but he also promised ultimate restoration in view of God's promises to the patriarchs. Micah never used the word "covenant" (Heb. *berit*), but it is clear from what he wrote that thoughts of the covenant were always in his mind.

Isaiah ministered in Jerusalem and had easy access to the court of the kings. He ministered to the kings and princes as well as the ordinary citizens. Micah ministered mainly outside Jerusalem among the ordinary Judahites. Micah was primarily a prophet of the poorer, ordinary Israelites and a friend of the oppressed. Micah's ministry was more rural, like Amos', and Isaiah's was more cosmopolitan. Micah was concerned with personal and social righteousness (contemporary issues), also like Amos, and Isaiah was concerned with more and larger issues covering the whole scope of history from his own day to the end times.

Micah's theme is *true religion* (cf. Amos; James 1:27). True religion is not conformity to external rituals but the practice of righteousness in personal and social life. His thesis is that God will discipline His own with judgment for their sins, but He will also fulfill His covenant promises in the future.

STRUCTURE AND EMPHASES

The Book of Micah consists of three messages, each of which begins "Hear" (Heb. *shema*; cf. Deut. 6:4). They may have been messages that he preached, or probably condensations of several addresses he delivered during his ministry.⁶ In each one the theme of judgment is prominent, but there is also mention of restoration and a remnant (2:12; 4:7; 5:7-8; 7:18).⁷ Eventually God would restore the Israelites to a position of world prominence under their Messiah.

"Much debate surrounds the structure of the book of Micah. Opinions vary radically. Some argue that the book has no overall structure but is simply a loose collection of prophetic oracles. Others identify extremely complex and sophisticated structures. A few points are certain: 1. Micah did not speak these oracles at one time. The book is best taken as an anthology of his prophetic messages over the years of his ministry. 2. Chronology is not the key to the structure of the book, though early in the book Micah does predict the capture of Samaria and Sennacherib's invasion, while at the conclusion of this book, he looks forward to the Babylonian captivity and the restoration. 3. The prophecy is roughly structured on the basis of alternating messages of threat and hope."⁸

DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

The main aspects of God that Micah emphasized were His sovereignty, self-consistency, and His leadership of all events and His people toward the fulfillment of all His ultimate plans and purposes for them.

Proportionately, this book has more prophecies about the advent and kingdom of Messiah, and Israel's future, than any other prophetic book. The future role of the Davidic dynasty, and its capital city, Jerusalem, receive greater attention in this prophecy than in the other eighth-century B.C. Minor Prophets (Jonah, Hosea, and Amos).

"Like his contemporary Isaiah, Micah stressed God's incomparability."⁹

"He had Amos' passion for justice and Hosea's heart of love."¹⁰

Like all the other eighth-century B.C. prophets, Micah also attacked the idolatry that accompanied the acceptance of Canaanite worship. However, his distinctive burden was the social injustice that marked the ruling class (2:1, 8-9; 3:11; 6:11; cf. Amos). He was a champion of civil rights. He has often been called, "the prophet of the poor," or, more accurately, the prophet of the oppressed middle class.¹¹

⁶C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 1:422.

⁷See Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 837.

⁸Longman and Dillard, p. 452.

⁹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, p. 201.

¹⁰J. M. P. Smith, cited by George L. Robinson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, p. 95. See also Henk Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period*, pp. 152, 162.

¹¹Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *The Minor Prophets*, p. 594.

Micah wrote about the coming Messiah. He predicted His birthplace, lineage, and origin (5:2), His future reign (4:1-7; 5:4), and he referred to Him as Israel's king (2:13) and ruler (5:2).

"Micah's doctrine of the remnant is unique among the Prophets and is perhaps his most significant contribution to the prophetic theology of hope. The remnant is a force in the world, not simply a residue of people, as the word 'remnant' (*she'erit*) may seem to imply. It is a force that will ultimately conquer the world (4:11-13). This triumph, while presented in apparently militaristic terminology (4:13; 5:5-6), is actually accomplished by other than physical force [cf. Matt. 5:3-12]. By removing everything that robs his people of complete trust in him (5:10-15), the Ruler from Bethlehem will effect the deliverance of his people. The source of power for God's people in the world is their absolute trust in him and his resources."¹²

Like many of the prophetic books, Micah contains much poetry. One of the prominent features of Hebrew poetry is parallelism of thought, and this marks Micah. Micah used his native language as a craftsman. He utilized puns, wordplays, and probing questions. This book, like most of the other Prophets, is a collection of messages that Micah delivered.

There is one citation from Micah in the Old Testament and two in the New. The elders of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day referred to Micah to support not persecuting Jeremiah for predicting judgment on Jerusalem (Jer. 26:17-19). Matthew quoted Micah 5:2 as predicting the birthplace of Messiah (Matt. 2:5-6), and he recorded Jesus' quotation of Micah 7:6 regarding conflict within families (Matt. 10:35-36). Micah drew on many other books of the Old Testament: Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Psalms, Proverbs, Amos, and Isaiah.

"In OT study Micah has tended to be overshadowed by Amos and Hosea and especially by his great contemporary Isaiah, whose prophetic material has been preserved in much greater quantity. Stylistically, to be sure, he sometimes has more of the qualities of an orator than of a poet. But his message is proclaimed with no uncertain sound, as with passionate forthrightness he attacks the social evils of his day. His stubborn refusal to float on the tide of his social environment, and his courageous stand for his convictions of God's truth, must commend Micah to believers in every age."¹³

"The church today needs men like Micah who can see the connection between the Western world's spurning of its Christian heritage and the international crises that surround it."¹⁴

¹²McComiskey, p. 399.

¹³Allen, p. 241.

¹⁴Bruce K. Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 139. Since both of Waltke's commentaries on Micah that I cite in these notes bear the same title, "Micah," I will hereafter distinguish them by using the names of the two books of which they are parts.

The Hebrew text of Micah is fairly well preserved.

OUTLINE

- I. Heading 1:1
- II. The first oracle: Israel's impending judgment and future restoration 1:2—2:13
 - A. The judgment coming on Israel 1:2-7
 - B. Lamentation over the coming judgment 1:8-16
 1. Micah's personal response 1:8-9
 2. Micah's call for the people's response 1:10-16
 - C. The sins of Judah 2:1-11
 1. Sins of the wealthy 2:1-5
 2. Sins of the false prophets and the greedy 2:6-11
 - D. A prediction of future regathering and leadership 2:12-13
- III. The second oracle: the guilt of Israel's leaders and her future hope chs. 3—5
 - A. Condemnation of Israel's leaders ch. 3
 1. The guilt of Israel's civil leaders 3:1-4
 2. The guilt of Israel's religious leaders 3:5-8
 3. The indictment of Israel's leaders 3:9-12
 - B. Blessing for Israel in the future chs. 4—5
 1. The exaltation of Zion 4:1-8
 2. The might of Zion 4:9—5:1
 3. The King of Zion 5:2-5a
 4. The peace of Zion 5:5b-6
 5. The vindication of Zion 5:7-9
 6. The purification of Zion 5:10-15
- IV. The third oracle: God's case against Israel and the ultimate triumph of His kingdom chs. 6—7
 - A. The Lord's indictment against His people 6:1-5
 - B. Micah's response for the Israelites 6:6-8
 - C. The Lord's sentence of judgment 6:9-16
 1. Israel's sins 6:9-12
 2. Israel's punishment 6:13-16
 - D. Micah's lament over his decadent society 7:1-7
 - E. Micah's confidence in the Lord 7:8-20
 1. Advice to the ungodly 7:8-13
 2. Prayer for deliverance 7:14-17
 3. Praise for forgiveness 7:18-20

MESSAGE

Micah directed all the nations to witness God's judgment of His Chosen People in these litigation speeches (*rib* [lit. lawsuit] oracles). He wanted the people of the earth to learn that Yahweh is sovereign by observing His dealings with Judah. If Israel had been faithful to God's purpose for her, all the nations would have learned how wonderful it can be to live under the government of Yahweh. But Israel had failed in her calling. Therefore, Micah pointed out—for the benefit of all people—that those who serve under God's government can expect judgment when they fail in their calling. As a police officer who breaks the law gets more severe treatment in court than the ordinary citizen, because of his calling, so the people of Judah got more severe treatment from the Lord, because of their calling.

Micah was very much aware of the throne in heaven, God's throne, that symbolized His eternal sovereignty over all people, including His chosen people. He was also aware of the failure of the throne on earth, the failure of King Ahaz of Judah.

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, and both of these prophets ministered in the Southern Kingdom during Ahaz's reign. But Micah's emphasis was different from Isaiah's. Isaiah focused on the throne in heaven. He saw the Lord high and lifted up above the earth, ruling in sovereign majesty and providing salvation for all people. Micah focused on the human rulers under the divine sovereign. He spoke of "the powers that be" that are ordained of God (Rom. 13:1). His eyes were on the earth. He saw the sin and corruption, the sighing and crying of the people, their agony and tears, and he traced these tragedies to misrule by people in authority in Judah.

The unique contribution of Micah is twofold: First, this prophet unmasked and denounced the false rulers. Second, he unveiled and proclaimed the true Ruler. The false rulers were the princes, priests, and prophets that surrounded him. The true Ruler was someone whom Micah saw coming in the future to rule and reign properly.

We see Micah's picture of false authority clearly in 3:11: "Israel's leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money." Micah identified all three major types of Judahite rulers as corrupt: civil leaders (the princes), religious leaders (the priests), and moral leaders (the prophets). The judges were judging according to who paid them best. The priests were teaching the people, but for what they could get out of it. The prophets were not really prophesying messages from the Lord but were divining messages from other sources. They were practicing sorcery and witchcraft for money and passing these revelations off as the word of the Lord. In every case, ministry was being conducted, but for selfish motives, for what the ministers could get out of ministering.

The judges (princes) were passing judgment in legal cases because they hated good and loved evil (3:1-3). They should have "known" judgment (3:1). That is, they should have practiced justice, ruled justly, and shown no partiality. Instead they were, as Micah described them, tearing the skin off the people, eating their flesh, and chopping up their bones like butchers (3:2b-3). They were robbing the people, like soldiers who took the

spoils of war. They were not impartial. They did not represent God, the true Judge of His people. They were corrupt.

The priests were no better (3:11). When we think of Israel's priests, we probably think of them offering the sacrifices that the people brought to the temple. But one of the primary responsibilities of the priests in Israel was to teach the people the Word of God (Deut. 17:8-13). This was really a more important ministry than cutting up animals. This man-ward duty was more significant than their God-ward duty. God scattered the priests in Israel, rather than giving them one geographic region to inhabit, so they could teach the people God's will. Yet the priests in Micah's day were just telling the people what the Judahites wanted to hear, not what God had said. And they were doing it for money. They distorted their messages to get a favorable response to their messages.

The prophets claimed to have received fresh messages from the Lord for the people, but most of the prophets in Micah's day delivered favorable "words from the Lord" only if they received adequate compensation. If the people did not pay them well, they either gave a message of gloom and doom, or no message at all. They were getting messages for the people all right, but they were messages from the wrong source. Their "prophecies" amounted to sorcery and witchcraft. Micah wrote of them in 3:5: "When they have something to bite with their teeth, they cry, 'Peace.' But against him who puts nothing in their mouths, they declare holy war." The people had to pay for good prophecies. Otherwise they would get prophecies of disaster.

Many Christian ministers make ministry decisions primarily on the basis of money. I am not just referring to people who go into the ministry because they think it is a comfortable way to earn a living. I am also referring to evangelicals who are in the ministry because they love the Lord and want to serve Him. It is a temptation to evaluate opportunities for various ministries on the basis of financial remuneration. As you consider opportunities for ministry, let me encourage you not to make your pay a significant factor in your decision. If you go where the Lord wants you, He will take care of you. Try to discover where you can make the greatest contribution and go there, not where you can receive the best salary. It is also a temptation to expect, or even require, payment for some forms of ministry. When we view ministry that way, we are really viewing it as a job, not as sacrificial service. We have become hirelings, not ministers in the true sense of that word.

Wherever you find distressed and suffering people, the cause is usually their leaders. If the leaders are out of harmony with God, if they love evil and hate good, if they are selfish rather than servants, the people suffer. This is true no matter what form of government exists. Every form of government has the equivalent of princes, priests, and prophets: civil, religious, and moral leaders. Corrupt authorities rule for their own benefit, not for the benefit of the people. This is the opposite of "servant leadership."

Micah saw through the smog of his own day to a Ruler on the distant horizon beyond. He saw this One coming out of human obscurity, not out of a position of power. He would arise from the obscure town of Bethlehem in Judah, but His real origin was eternity (5:2). He would arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord (5:4). He would faithfully represent Yahweh and act in His strength. He would not serve Himself but

Yahweh. He would not be a crooked judge but impartial. He would not pervert the truth to glorify Himself but would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He would not pass deceitful and destructive messages to the people, but only the true words of the Lord.

The result of His ministry would be peace, not distress and suffering (5:5a). The negative side of His rule would be the destruction of all the things the people's false rulers had encouraged them to trust in: horses, chariots, cities, strongholds, treaties, witchcraft, images, and idols. The strength of a nation is never in these things, but in its leaders. Israel would one day have a Leader who would provide adequate strength for her. He would not abuse her but glorify her.

The timeless value of Micah is that it reminds us that the test of authority is its motive. If the motive of leaders is self-aggrandizement, self-service, and self-glory, their leadership is corrupt and pernicious. The strength of leaders is in their recognition of Yahweh.

We see this clearly in that One whom Micah saw arising out of obscure human conditions, yet with the authority of eternity behind Him, to take the reigns of power and produce peace. When He came the first time, the obscurity of His human background so blinded the eyes of His contemporaries that they rejected Him and said: "We will not have this Man reign over us!" But when He comes the second time, no one will be able to resist His eternal authority, and He will reign over the whole world. He will provide the perfect civil, religious, and moral leadership that this world has longed for but has never yet enjoyed.

In the meantime, our duty is to obey Him because our eyes of faith have seen Him, and our hearts know Him. As His disciples, we must serve as He will serve, in whatever sphere of leadership or position of authority we may occupy. And we must eagerly await His return in power and great glory. Titus 2:13 says that we should be "looking for the blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Micah is a great book because it contrasts imperfect leaders with the Perfect Leader. It uncovers present corruption, but it also gives us hope of future celebration. It assures us that God will replace selfish leadership with selfless leadership. It provides negative and positive leadership models for church leaders and individual Christians today. I believe that the aspect of God that Micah helps us appreciate most is His leadership.¹⁵

¹⁵Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:2:243-55.

Exposition

I. HEADING 1:1

Prophetic revelation from Yahweh came to Micah concerning Samaria (the Northern Kingdom) and Jerusalem (the Southern Kingdom). These capital cities, by synecdoche, represent their respective nations and the people in them. These capital cities also, by metonymy, suggest the leaders of the nations, which Micah targeted for special responsibility. Micah "saw" these revelations (rather than "heard" them) because the Lord revealed them to him in visions and or dreams (Num. 12:6; cf. Isa. 1:1; Obad. 1; Nah. 1:1). Micah ("Who is like Yahweh?") was a resident of Moresheth-gath (v. 14), which was a Judean town in the Shephelah (foothills) of Judah, west and a bit south of Jerusalem. The mention of Micah's hometown, rather than his father's name, suggests that he had come to Jerusalem, and had become known there as "the Micah from Moresheth."¹⁶ Normally, a man who was a longtime resident of a town, was described as "the son of so and so," rather than as being from a particular place. Micah received and delivered his prophetic messages during the reigns of three of the kings of his nation: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This dates his ministry between 750 and 686 B.C.¹⁷ Similar full headings (superscriptions) begin the books of Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Zephaniah.

II. THE FIRST ORACLE: ISRAEL'S IMPENDING JUDGMENT AND FUTURE RESTORATION 1:2—2:13

This is the first of three messages that compose the Book of Micah (cf. chs. 3—5; 6—7). Each of these messages gives evidence of containing other messages that Micah evidently preached and then compiled into the canonical form in which we have them. Each of the three main messages begins with the same imperative (Heb. *shm*), translated "Hear" (cf. Deut. 6:4). In each one, promises of restoration follow predictions of ruin. Words of hope follow announcements of doom.

The first message deals with Israel's impending judgment and future restoration. The emphasis in this oracle is on the judgment coming on the Northern Kingdom, and Micah predicted the fall of Samaria (ch. 1). Then he gave reasons for divine judgment on both Israel and Judah, followed by a promise of future restoration and blessing (ch. 2).

A. THE JUDGMENT COMING ON ISRAEL 1:2-7

This opening pericope sets the tone and forms the backdrop for the rest of the book. All people were to hear God's indictment against His people (v. 2). Punishment was coming (vv. 3-4) that would be both reasonable (v. 5) and certain (vv. 6-7).

1:2 Micah shouted: "Hear ye, hear ye!" to the people of the earth, as a clerk summons a courtroom jury to pay attention to the testimony that will follow. Micah presented his message in the setting of a courtroom trial.

¹⁶Allen, p. 265

¹⁷See my comments on the writer and date in the Introduction section above.

This is the *rib* (lawsuit) oracle form, examples of which are quite common in the Prophets. Sovereign Yahweh was about to give His witness against His people ("you," Micah's audience; cf. Deut. 31:19-21, 26). This appeal assumes that those called on to listen will agree with the testimony to be given. The Lord would come out of "His *holy temple*" to give His testimony. The Hebrew word *hekal* literally means "palace" rather than "temple." It refers to the location of the throne of judgment. This appears to be a reference to God's *heavenly temple*, in view of the following verses (cf. Ps. 11:4; Isa. 3:13-14; Hab. 2:20).

"What the peoples are supposed to hear serves not to increase their knowledge but to determine their lives."¹⁸

1:3-4 The Lord was about to intervene in the affairs of His people. He is not only transcendent above all, but immanently involved in the world—one of the most basic revelations in Old Testament theology. When He came, all the earth ("mountains") would "melt," "split," and quake before His awesome power (cf. Judg. 5:4-5). Since He could affect the physical creation so drastically, His people needed to fear Him. Treading on the "high places of the earth" (land), where the Israelites worshipped in idolatry (cf. 2 Chron. 33:17), probably also implies that He would crush pagan worship.¹⁹

"If men would tremble before God, instead of before each other, they would have nothing to fear."²⁰

1:5 The Lord's intervention was due to the Israelites' sins and rebellion against their Sovereign Lord. "Samaria" personified "the rebellion" of the Israelites, and "Jerusalem" had become "a high place" for idolatry rather than for holy worship. These capital cities had become leaders in wickedness rather than in holiness.

Micah liked to use "Jacob" as a title for all Israel (2:7, 12; 3:1, 8, 9; 4:2; 5:7, 8), though he also used it to describe the Northern Kingdom (here) and the patriarch Jacob (7:20). This name recalls the rebelliousness that marked the patriarch for most of his early life and that had subsequently marked his descendants. Micah used the name "Israel" to describe both the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms. Several of the prophets referred to the Southern Kingdom as "Israel," especially after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., because that kingdom represented the true Israel under the Davidic kings and the Aaronic priesthood. They generally referred to the Northern Kingdom as "Israel" in contrast to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

¹⁸Hans W. Wolff, *Micah*, p. 55.

¹⁹McComiskey, p. 404; John A. Martin, "Micah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1477.

²⁰Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 152.

1:6 Israel's capital, Samaria, stood atop a mountain, but Yahweh said He would make it a pile of "ruins" in a field. That is, He would both destroy and humiliate it. It would become a rural rather than an urban place, suitable for planting vineyards. He would topple the "stones" of its buildings "into the valley" below and expose their "foundations" by destroying their superstructures. The fulfillment came with the Assyrian overthrow of Samaria in 722 B.C. Even today the foundations of Samaria's buildings lie exposed.

1:7 God would smash Samaria's "idols," proving them incapable of defending themselves, much less helping others. He would burn the luxurious ornaments that the people offered as temple gifts in the conflagration that would accompany Samaria's overthrow. All the pagan "images" that the people had made would perish. The Lord viewed these physical treasures as the "earnings of a harlot"—Israel—who had been unfaithful to Him (cf. Hosea). The Israelites had committed adultery with temple prostitutes, but the Assyrians would destroy the gifts that they had brought into their temples, and use them for their own idolatrous worship.

"The reference is probably to the gold and silver plating on the images, melted down from the dirty money handed over for the use of religious brothels. Invading soldiers are to tear it off as loot and spend it as currency for further prostitution, as soldiers will."²¹

B. LAMENTATION OVER THE COMING JUDGMENT 1:8-16

"The judicial sentence against Samaria (vv. 2-7), fulfilled in 722/721 B.C., certifies the doom of idolatrous Judah (vv. 8-16), predicted in connection with Sennacherib's invasion of the Shephelah [Judean foothills] in 701 B.C."²²

1. Micah's personal response 1:8-9

1:8 In view of this coming judgment, Micah said he felt compelled to "lament and wail." He would express his sorrow by going "barefoot and naked," a common way of expressing it in his culture (cf. 2 Sam. 15:30; Isa. 20:2; 22:12; Jer. 25:34). "Jackals" and "ostriches" (or owls) were nocturnal animals that lived alone, and were peculiar for their nocturnal hunting habits and their wailing sounds. Micah said he would mimic them.

"Unlike some tub-thumping modern preachers of fire and damnation, Micah preaches judgment out of such love that he weeps for his audience."²³

²¹Allen, p. 274.

²²Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 624.

²³Idem, in *Obadiah, . . .*, p. 154.

1:9 Samaria had a "wound" from which she could not recover, namely, a wound of punishment caused by her sin (cf. 1 Kings 20:21). This sin and its consequence had also infected Judah, even the capital city of "Jerusalem" (cf. Isa. 1:5-6). Jerusalem should have been especially holy because of the temple and God's presence there, but it was polluted. Punishment reached "the gate" of Jerusalem in 701 B.C., when Sennacherib attacked the city, but the Lord turned back the invader (cf. 2 Kings 18—19).

"The problem with Samaria was that she was toxic; her infection had spread to Judah."²⁴

2. Micah's call for the people's response 1:10-16

The prophet used several clever wordplays in this poem to describe the desolation that God would bring on Judah. He selected towns and villages near his own hometown, in Judah's Shephelah, whose names were similar to the coming devastations or to other conditions that he described. The known towns encircle Micah's hometown of Moresheth-gath.

"Interestingly Sennacherib too used wordplays when recording *his* conquests."²⁵

James Moffatt's paraphrase gives the sense of Micah's wordplays.

"Tell it not in Tellington!
Wail not in Wailing!
Dust Manor will eat dirt,
Dressy Town flee naked.
Safefold will not save,
Wallchester's walls are down,
A bitter dose drinks Bitterton." Etc.²⁶

"He [Micah] turned around the meaning of a number of town names as a way of describing the world being turned upside down."²⁷

1:10 Micah urged the Israelites not to report the Assyrian invasion of Jerusalem "in Gath" (cf. 2 Sam. 1:20), not even to indicate a crisis by weeping publicly. Why Gath? It was an enemy (Philistine) town, and news of Jerusalem's siege would encourage Israel's enemies. Specifically, "Gath" (*gat*) may have been chosen because of its similar sound in Hebrew to the verb "tell" (*taggidu*; cf. 2 Sam. 1:20).

²⁴Warren W. Wiersbe, "Micah," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 391.

²⁵Martin, p. 1479. See the map in Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, p. 339, for the probable locations of the places mentioned in this passage.

²⁶*The Old Testament, a new translation by James Moffatt.*

²⁷*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 1503.

However, in the cities of Israel, like "Beth-le-aphrah" (Beth Ophrah, "house of dust"), the inhabitants should "roll . . . in the dust," expressing their distress (cf. Josh. 7:6; Job 16:15; Isa. 47:1; Jer. 25:34).

- 1:11 Residents of "Shaphir" ("beautiful," "pleasant") would become the opposite of their name, shamefully naked, when the invasion came. Inhabitants of "Zaanan," a town name that sounds like the Hebrew word translated "come out," would "not" be able to come out of their town to "escape." The people of "Beth-ezel" ("house of removal") would lament because the Lord would remove "its support."
- 1:12 Residents of "Maroth," which sounds like the Hebrew word translated "bitterness," would become "weak" as they waited for help that would not come. Their expectation would become bitter because God would send calamity to the gates of Jerusalem. Before Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C., he defeated 46 other towns in Judah (2 Kings 18—19).²⁸
- 1:13 Sarcastically, Micah urged the people "of Lachish" (Heb. *lakish*), a town known for its horses, to hitch a "team" (Heb. *rekesh*) of "horses" to a "chariot" to escape from the enemy. They would not be able to escape, however, because Lachish had led Jerusalem, as horses lead a chariot, into the sin of idolatry.
- "There is no record of this in the historical books of the Old Testament, although it has been suggested that the horses given to the sun (2 Kings 23:11) related to idolatry were kept there."²⁹
- 1:14 Zion (Jerusalem) would give "Moresheth-gath" as a portion of a "parting gift" to the invader. "Moresheth" means "the possession of." The Davidic king would not be able to prevent the Assyrians from taking Moresheth-gath captive. The people of "Achzib" (Heb. *'akzib*), represented here by their "houses," would become deceitful (Heb. *'akzab*) "to the kings of Israel" because they could not fend off the enemy.
- 1:15 The Lord would bring on the inhabitants of "Mareshah" ("possessor") "one who" would take "possession" of them. "The glory of Israel," probably her leaders, would flee ashamedly for safety to "Adullam," as David had done earlier (1 Sam. 22:1).³⁰

"The point here may be that the situation would be so bad that the proper *heir* and *glory* of the nation—the members of the royal family—would have to flee in terror to remote hiding places."³¹

²⁸See D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 67, for Sennacherib's account.

²⁹Charles Lee Feinberg, *Jonah, Micah, and Nahum*, p. 58.

³⁰Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, pp. 784-85, charted these place names, their meanings, and their significances helpfully.

³¹*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1503.

1:16 Micah called on the Judeans to "cut" their "hair" very short, as a sign of sorrow over the departure of their "children" (perhaps the nobles) "into exile." "The eagle" appeared to be bald because its head was white.

"This section (vv. 10-16) begins with words that recall David's lament at the death of Saul and ends with the name of the cave where David hid from Saul. These dark moments in David's life form a gloomy backdrop to the description of the fall of the towns Micah spoke of. Though he is never directly mentioned, the figure of David appears hauntingly in the tapestry of destruction—not a David standing tall in triumph, but a David bowed down by humiliation. It is as if Micah saw in the fall of each town and the eventual captivity of the two kingdoms the final dissolution of the Davidic monarchy. Like David, the glory of Israel would come to Adullam."³²

C. THE SINS OF JUDAH 2:1-11

Micah identified the sins of the people of Judah, all of which violated the Mosaic Covenant. In view of these transgressions, divine punishment was inevitable and just.

In chapter 1 the sins of the people of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms seemed to be in view, but now Micah's audience, the people of Judah, appear to be the main subjects of his prophecy, in view of what he said. We should not draw this line too boldly, however, since the same sins that marked the people of Judah also stained the citizens of Israel.

1. Sins of the wealthy 2:1-5

Having spoken abstractly about rebellion and sin (cf. 1:5), Micah now specified the crime of the Israelites that had both social and theological dimensions.

"The oracles against Samaria and Judah in the first chapter speak in general terms of their rebellion and sin and put the accent on immediate political destruction. This oracle indicts them for specific crimes and puts the accent on the eternal and theological punishment."³³

"It is in 2:1-5 that the prophet establishes the basis for the national crisis and the future collapse of the nation. It was not the imperialism of Assyria or the fortunes of blind destiny that brought the house of Israel to this critical stage. It was her disobedience to her God. How different is the prophetic view of history from that of the secular mind!"³⁴

2:1 Micah announced that those who lay awake at night, plotting evil that they put into practice the next day, would experience "woe." Woe announces punishment coming because of guilt (cf. Isa. 3:9, 11; Jer. 13:27; Ezek. 13:3, 18; Hos. 7:13; Amos 5:18; Hab. 2:6; Zeph. 2:5). The people in view seem to be the rich because they had the ability to carry out their schemes.

³²McComiskey, p. 408.

³³Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 156.

³⁴McComiskey, p. 409.

In times of affluence and peace, the rich and the poor in society normally become richer and poorer, and this was true in Israel and Judah in the late eighth century B.C.

"This expectation of divine help and justice at morning (also in 2 Sam. 15:2; Job 7:18; Ps. 37:6; 73:14; 90:14; 143:8; Jer. 21:12; Hos. 6:3, 5; Zeph. 3:5) probably had to do in part with the king's practice of administering justice in the morning . . ." ³⁵

2:2 The plotting in view involved robbing others of their "fields," "houses," and "inheritance" (including land) through deception (cf. 1 Kings 21:3; Isa. 5:8). The wealthy not only violated the tenth commandment against coveting what belongs to a neighbor, but also the eighth commandment against stealing (Exod. 20:15, 17; Lev. 19:13; Deut. 5:19, 21; Col. 3:6-7). Furthermore, they broke the second greatest commandment, which said they should love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:18; cf. Matt. 22:34-40).

"They practiced the world's version of the Golden Rule: 'Whoever has the gold makes the rules.'" ³⁶

"To *covet* is not just to have a passing thought; it is a determination to seize what is not one's own." ³⁷

2:3 Because they had done these things, Yahweh was plotting to bring "calamity" on the "family" of the Israelites that they would not be able to escape. They would be locked into it like a yoke holds the neck of an ox. The coming judgment would be a hard time for them that would humble them.

2:4 When God's judgment fell, other people would ridicule the Israelites. God's people would also lament—with *bitter* weeping—and mourn their complete destruction, as the victims of the rich Israelites' crimes just cited had mourned. They would bewail God's removal of His blessings, including their lands, from them—and His giving them to others that they considered apostate.

"The situation envisaged seems to be the forced evacuation of the landed elite, who are marched away by the foreign invader while their estates are left to their erstwhile serfs, who are contemptuously spoken of as religious renegades." ³⁸

³⁵Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 636.

³⁶Wiersbe, p. 392.

³⁷*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1503.

³⁸Allen, p. 291.

2:5 Evidently the Israelites set the boundaries between some land plots by casting lots (cf. Josh. 14:1-5; Ps. 16:6). No one would remain in the land who could do this "in the assembly" of Yahweh, namely, the covenant nation. The reason was that God would send His people into captivity and give their land to their captors.

This is one of many examples of God's talionic justice. The Israelites would reap what they had sowed (cf. Gal. 6:7). They had taken land from their countrymen greedily and illegally, so God would take their land from them and let others occupy it.

2. Sins of the false prophets and the greedy 2:6-11

References to false prophets open and close this pericope (vv. 6-7, 11). In the middle, Micah again targeted the greedy in Judah for criticism (vv. 8-10). Apparently the false prophets condoned the practices of the greedy and took offense at Micah's antagonism toward their patrons.

2:6 The writer used another wordplay. False prophets were "speaking out" (lit. "dripping," Heb. *nataf*) and telling Micah not to "speak out," not to announce the message of coming judgment for sin. These prophets were trying to silence him because they did not like his message (cf. Isa. 30:10; Amos 7:10-13). They were saying that Micah and his fellow true prophets, such as Isaiah, should not prophesy as they were doing. As long as they did, "reproaches" (i.e., disgrace for the sins they were charging the people with) would not leave the Israelites. This preferable interpretation sees the second and third lines of the verse as the words of the false prophets as well, as much as the first part of the first line. The NASB translation interpreted the last two lines as the words of Micah.

2:7 Micah reminded his audience that the false prophets were telling them that God would be patient with them, and that judgment was not His way of dealing with them. They evidently felt that it was inconsistent to say that Yahweh would allow His people to experience disaster since He had committed Himself to them (cf. Deut. 26:17-18). Theirs was a completely positive message. They failed to remind the people that God had also promised to punish them if they departed from His covenant (Deut. 28:15-68).

Micah affirmed that God would indeed bless those who do right (Deut. 28:1-14). One should not blame the continuing disgrace of the nation on his and his fellow prophets' pronouncements. After all, God provided blessing, when His people obeyed Him, as well as discipline, when they disobeyed. It was the people's obedience or disobedience, not Micah's prophecies, that was responsible for their condition. Preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God involves telling people how they fall short of God's requirements, so they can repent and enjoy His blessing, as well as affirming them for their good deeds.

"Spirit" could refer to the spirit or attitude of the Lord, or it could refer to the Holy Spirit. Either translation makes sense, but since the Holy Spirit executes the will of God in the world, He is perhaps in view here (cf. Gen. 1:2).

- 2:8 By failing to warn them of coming judgment for sin, the false prophets were really treating their fellow Israelites as their enemies; they were not doing them a service but a disservice. Micah proceeded to list more sins that the wealthy in Judah were practicing. They had taken the clothing of their fellow Israelites as payment for their debts, something their law forbade (cf. Exod. 22:26-27; Amos 2:8). They also did this to "unsuspecting" travelers who passed through their land, and to soldiers who had recently "returned from war."

It is possible that Micah had the false prophets in view here, and in the following verses, and not just the rich Israelites (cf. 3:5). However, "My people" seems to imply a larger group of Israelites than just the false prophets, probably the numerous wealthy oppressors among the people. They might as well have been the Assyrians or the later Babylonians in spoiling Israel.³⁹

Waltke noted that in 1993, when he wrote, 35 percent of the wealth of the United States was concentrated in the hands of less than 1 percent of the people, many of whom functioned as patrons to the supposed representatives of the people.⁴⁰

- 2:9 The rich Israelites also exacted payment from the dependent "women" of Israel, so much that they could no longer afford to live in their own houses (cf. Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40). Their conduct affected the "children" as well, since these children would have to live out their lives in a foreign land as exiles (cf. Exod. 22:21; Ps. 146:9). The splendid heritage of the Israelites was the land Yahweh had given them (cf. Jer. 3:19).
- 2:10 Sarcastically, Micah told the rich oppressors to rise up and depart from the land (cf. Amos 4:4-5). They were wrong to be at rest in Israel when it had become an unclean place because of the people's sinfulness (cf. Deut. 12:9; Ps. 95:11). They should leave while they could because "painful destruction" was coming as punishment (cf. Lev. 18:24-28).

"Their dirty conduct in illtreating their needy neighbors has rendered them unfit to tread Canaan's soil any longer."⁴¹

- 2:11 Micah bemoaned the fact that the Israelites had become so responsive to the false prophets that if one of them even spoke out (cf. v. 6)—promising alcohol galore—they would follow *him!* Any prophet who preached

³⁹Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 646.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 647.

⁴¹Allen, p. 298.

greater affluence and prosperity would have a receptive audience. In contrast, Micah's message of doom was unpopular. God's people would follow anyone whose prophetic fantasies blew with the wind, in contrast to being led by the Spirit (v. 7), or who lied to them by speaking falsehood.

"But we today need to deal with our sins of covetousness, selfishness, and willingness to believe 'religious lies.' We must abandon 'soft religion' that pampers our pride and makes it easy for us to sin. Why? Because 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29), and 'The Lord shall judge His people' (10:30). Remember, judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17)."⁴²

"Unfortunately the evangelical church today is too closely associated with the business establishment, too usually motivated by serving self, not others, and too little concerned with the oppressed and needy, in spite of the clear teaching of the NT on this subject (Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 12:31; Acts 4:32-37; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 1 John 1:6; 2:10; 3:16-18)."⁴³

D. A PREDICTION OF FUTURE REGATHERING AND LEADERSHIP 2:12-13

The message of the false prophets was not completely wrong; it presented the positive aspects of God's promises to Israel—but omitted the negative. Micah's message had been mainly negative; the people needed to repent or they would experience divine chastening. Now Micah reminded his hearers that there were positive blessings ahead for Israel, but they would come later.

2:12 The Lord Himself would "assemble" the scattered "remnant" of "all" the Israelites ("Jacob" and "Israel"; cf. 1:5) following His dispersion of them in exile. The Assyrian and Babylonian exiles were only the first of several that the Jews have experienced. More recently, the Romans scattered them in A.D. 70, and since then most Jews have lived dispersed around the world, rather than in a homeland of their own. The return of many modern Jews to the State of Israel does not fulfill this prophecy, as is clear from what Micah and the other prophets said about that future regathering.

"The remnant" refers to the part of the people that would remain, following the dispersion of the majority. Yahweh would assemble them as a shepherd gathers "sheep in" a "fold," "in the midst of" a "pasture" (cf. 5:4; 7:14). This pictures the regathering of the Israelites in the Promised Land, which is similar to an island in the world. This pen "will be noisy" and crowded with people, because it will be a time and place of great rejoicing—like the city of Jerusalem was during one of Israel's annual feasts.

⁴²Wiersbe, p. 393.

⁴³Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 649.

"That long-awaited time of blessing will come about for the nation of Israel in the Millennium. Some interpreters claim that this promise of blessing is being fulfilled now in the church, rather than in the future for Israel [i.e., covenant theologians]. However, if Micah 2:12 refers to spiritual blessing for the church, then Israel has been misled all these centuries since Abraham to think that she will inherit the land forever."⁴⁴

2:13 As a shepherd ("the breaker") breaks through obstacles and barriers to lead his sheep into pleasant pastures, so Israel's Good Shepherd will clear the way for His sheep to return to the land (cf. Ps. 78:52-53; 80:1). They will "break out" of their former habitations, "pass through" the way ("the gate") He opens for them, and leave all parts of the world to return to the Promised Land.

Yahweh would not only function as their Shepherd but also as their (Davidic) King (cf. Isa. 6:5). He will lead them as a mighty conqueror and ruler (cf. Isa. 33:22; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:9).

"If studied in isolation from the total context of the prophecy, the passage may be understood simply as a prediction of the return from the Captivity. But this is inadequate in view of the broader background of Micah's concept of the future."⁴⁵

"Passages such as the one we have just contemplated are the strongest proof that God's heart yearns for a remnant in Israel."⁴⁶

III. THE SECOND ORACLE: THE GUILT OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS AND HER FUTURE HOPE CHS. 3—5

Micah's second oracle identifies the guilt of Israel's leaders and holds out hope for the future. Micah contrasted present conditions of injustice and corruption (ch. 3) with future blessings: Zion's exaltation, the Gentile nations' punishment, and Messiah's coming to put down idolatry (chs. 4—5).

In the first oracle, only the last two verses dealt with Israel's future blessings (2:12-13), while everything preceding exposed her sins and guilt. In this second oracle, the balance of emphasis is different. About one-third deals with present sins (ch. 3), and two-thirds with future blessings (chs. 4—5).

A. CONDEMNATION OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS CH. 3

This chapter consists of three sections. The first two point out the sinfulness of two groups of Israel's leaders, civil and religious, and the last one climaxes to assure their

⁴⁴Martin, p. 1481.

⁴⁵McComiskey, p. 415.

⁴⁶Feinberg, p. 71.

punishment. The leaders of God's people were not the only guilty individuals, of course, but they were particularly responsible and culpable because they affected so many other Israelites.

1. The guilt of Israel's civil leaders 3:1-4

3:1 This second oracle begins like the first and third ones, with a summons to hear the prophet's message (cf. 1:2; 6:1). The initial "And I said" ties this oracle to the preceding one and provides continuity. Micah asked rhetorically if it was not proper for Israel's rulers to "know" (practice) "justice" (fairness, equity). It was not only proper, but it was essential. Again, "Jacob" and "Israel" are a metonymy for all 12 tribes (cf. 1:5; et al.). A metonymy is a figure of speech in which something is named that is associated with or suggested by something else that is related to it.

3:2-3 Yet these rulers had stood justice on its head. They hated good and loved evil (cf. Prov. 8:13; Isa. 1:16-17; Amos 5:15). Tearing the flesh off the people, eating their flesh, and cooking their bones all represent abuse of their victims for their own selfish ends. The figure is of a hunter, and the implication is that the rulers regarded and treated the ordinary citizens as mere animals rather than as human beings. The rich stripped the poor of their money and property, and oppressed them unmercifully (cf. Zeph. 3:3)

"Nothing short of new appetites, resulting from the new birth (Jn. 3:3-8) can remedy moral corruption."⁴⁷

3:4 Because these rulers had turned deaf ears to the pleas of orphans and widows, they *themselves* would eventually "cry out to" Yahweh in prayer, asking Him for help. "But He" would "not answer" them (cf. Ps. 27:7-9; Prov. 21:13; Jer. 7:12-15). God hiding His face from them is an anthropomorphism that pictures God disregarding them and turning His back on them. God hears all prayers because He is omniscient, but He chooses not to respond to some of them.

2. The guilt of Israel's religious leaders 3:5-8

3:5 The Lord also had a message concerning the false prophets who were misleading His people. The false prophets gave benedictions to those who paid them, but people who did not give them anything received maledictions of doom and gloom (cf. Lam. 2:14; Jer. 6:14). Self-interest motivated these prophets, rather than the fear of the Lord (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3).

"It was an ancient and respectable practice for a prophet to accept payment for services rendered to his clients. After all, as Jesus affirmed, 'the worker is entitled to his wages' (Luke 10:7). But with so apparently subjective a craft as

⁴⁷Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 162.

prophecy there was ever a temptation. Why not make the message match the customer's pocket?"⁴⁸

Even today, some ministers favor those who treat them well—and neglect, or worse, those who do not.

"Few men are as pitiable as those who claim to have a call from God yet tailor their sermons to please others. Their first rule is 'Don't rock the boat'; their second is 'Give people what they want.'"⁴⁹

3:6 Because of this type of treatment, the Lord would withhold prophetic revelations from them. Rather than seeing the light, they would grope in the darkness. "The sun," a symbol of God who bestows blessings and favor, would set on their day, and they would have to live in the "darkness" of His disfavor.

3:7 "Seers" and "diviners" would suffer embarrassment because they would not be able to come up with any word from the Lord when the people asked for it. Covering the face was a sign of mourning (cf. Lev. 13:45; Ezek. 24:17, 22).

"Like unclean lepers they will go about with covered moustaches (*faces*, NIV; Heb., *shapim*) the very area of their abused gift (cf. Lv. 13:45)."⁵⁰

Seers received visions (v. 6), and diviners practiced divination (v. 6) to ascertain the future. The title "seer" is an old one describing a prophet (1 Sam. 9:9), but "diviners" sought knowledge of the future through illegitimate means, and they were outlawed in Israel (cf. Deut. 18:10). Thus, these two titles became derogatory terms for the false prophets.

"True prophets had insight into Israel's history from a sympathy with God's kingdom perspective; false prophets could not discern the hand of God in history because they saw life through vested interests. True prophets conditioned the nation's well-being on its fidelity to the Lord, whereas false prophets arrogantly conditioned it on fidelity to themselves. True prophets seek the Lord's gain; false prophets their own."⁵¹

3:8 In contrast to the false prophets who were full of greed (cf. Acts 5:3), Micah claimed to be full of spiritual "power" (not ecstasy) as a result of God's "Spirit." He virtually claimed that his prophecies were inspired. This statement also implies that Micah experienced continuous empowerment

⁴⁸Allen, p. 311.

⁴⁹Wiersbe, p. 394.

⁵⁰Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 163.

⁵¹Idem, in *The Minor* . . . , p. 663.

by the Holy Spirit as a prophet (cf. Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14). Whereas the Spirit empowered some Old Testament servants of the Lord only temporarily (cf. Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Sam. 16:14), He apparently empowered others, including most of the writing prophets, more or less continuously (cf. Num. 11:17; 1 Sam. 11:6; 16:13).⁵²

Micah followed the will of God, and God's Spirit filled him (cf. Eph. 5:18). "Justice" marked his pronouncements (cf. vv. 1-3, 5), and "courage" his ministry (cf. vv. 4, 6-7; cf. Acts 4:13). These two words may be a *hendiadys*, meaning "courageous justice."⁵³ Micah did not tailor his prophecies to his honorarium, or fear what people might withhold from him if his message was negative (cf. 1 Thess. 2:2-6). His ministry was to declare the sins of the Israelites (as well as their future hope), and he fulfilled it faithfully and boldly.

"In this eighth verse of our chapter we have a pen portrait of the preparation and equipment of the prophet of God."⁵⁴

3. The indictment of Israel's leaders 3:9-12

3:9 Micah proceeded to carry out his ministry (cf. v. 8). He called on all Israel's leaders to pay attention to what he had to say to them, they who despised (lit. utterly abhorred) "justice" and perverted right ways (cf. Isa. 5:20).

3:10-11 He further described his audience of leaders as those who built Jerusalem by sacrificing the lives of innocent people. Micah used "Zion" and "Jerusalem" as synonyms to describe the same place (cf. v. 12; 4:2, 8; Ps. 149:2; Isa. 4:3; 40:9; Amos 6:1). However sometimes, as here, Zion carries theological overtones meaning not just the city but what the city represented, namely: the kingdom of God on earth.

The judges ("leaders") gave favorable verdicts to those who bribed them (cf. Exod. 23:8; Deut. 27:25), and the "priests" only taught "for a price." The "prophets" likewise only prophesied for those who would pay them (cf. Deut. 16:19). Yet they all claimed to trust in the Lord, and encouraged themselves with the false hope that since the Lord was among them, He would allow no evil to overtake them (cf. Ps. 46:4-5; Jer. 7:4).

3:12 Micah announced a wholly different future for the Israelites. God would plow up (overthrow) Jerusalem like "a field," and tear down its buildings until they were only "ruins" (cf. 1:5-6). Even the temple mount, the most holy place in all Israel, would become like a hilltop in a forest: overgrown and neglected. This happened when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70.⁵⁵

⁵²See Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 87-90.

⁵³*The Nelson . . .*, p. 1505.

⁵⁴Feinberg, p. 77.

⁵⁵See Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 7:2:1.

Jeremiah, who lived a century later, quoted this portion of Micah's prophecy to assure the Jerusalemites of his day that the doom of their city was certain (Jer. 26:18). Jeremiah prefaced this quotation with, "Thus the LORD of hosts has said." He viewed Micah's prophecy as inspired of God (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16).

"Micah's words, remembered for their shocking severity a hundred years later, deserve to be taken to heart by each generation of God's people. They challenge every attempt to misuse the service of God for one's own glory and profit. They are a dire warning against the complacency that can take God's love and reject his lordship. They are a passionate plea for consistency between creed and conduct. The Lord is content with nothing less."⁵⁶

"If Micah were ministering among us today, he would probably visit denominational offices, pastors' conferences, Bible colleges, and seminaries to warn Christian leaders that privilege brings responsibility and responsibility brings accountability."⁵⁷

B. BLESSING FOR ISRAEL IN THE FUTURE CHS. 4—5

These chapters contain much revelation about the future kingdom of Messiah, to which almost all the writing prophets referred. This section contrasts conditions in Israel in the future with those the prophet just described in the present (ch. 3).

1. The exaltation of Zion 4:1-8

Micah mentioned several characteristics of the future kingdom of Messiah in this section. Verses 1-3 are similar to Isaiah 2:2-4. Scholars debate whether Isaiah borrowed from Micah or vice versa, whether they both drew from an older original source, or whether they each received their similar words directly from the Lord. There is no way to tell for sure.

Zion's positive future role 4:1-5

4:1 Reference to "the last days" often points to the eschatological future in the Prophets, and it does here (e.g., Deut. 4:30; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5). This phrase usually refers to the Tribulation and or the Millennium. Some New Testament writers said that Christians live in the last days, namely, the days preceding Messiah's return to the earth and the establishment of His kingdom on earth (e.g., Heb. 1:2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20).

"The mountain of the house of the Lord" is Mt. Zion where the temple, the Lord's house, stood in the past and will stand in the future (cf. Ezek. 40—

⁵⁶Allen, p. 321.

⁵⁷Wiersbe, p. 395.

43). In the future, Mt. Zion would become "the chief of" all "the mountains" on earth, rising above all other hills in its importance (cf. Gen. 12:3; Zech. 8:3). Some interpreters believe that this text projects a future change in the physical topography of Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 8:1-3; 14:1-11).⁵⁸ "Mountain" is also a figure for a *kingdom* in the Old Testament (e.g., Dan. 2:35, 44-45).

Here it probably has the double significance of literal Mt. Zion (Jerusalem) and the whole kingdom of Israel that Mt. Zion represents (by metonymy). "Peoples" (various ethnic groups) from all parts of the earth will migrate to it. This is quite a contrast from what Micah predicted about the immediate future of Jerusalem and the temple: its destruction and abandonment (cf. 3:12). Literal streams of water will flow from this millennial temple (Ezek. 47), but "peoples will stream to it."⁵⁹

"Year by year bands of pilgrims would make their way to Jerusalem to engage in festive worship, in the course of which they would receive instruction in the moral traditions of the covenant. This Israelite pilgrimage is here magnified to universal dimensions. Not merely Israel, but their pagan neighbors from all around would one day wend their way to Yahweh's earthly residence, and there learn lessons which they would put into practice back in their own communities."⁶⁰

4:2 "Many nations will" acknowledge the superiority of Israel by coming to the millennial Jerusalem to learn the Lord's ways from the Israelites. Israel will finally fulfill its function as a kingdom of priests, by mediating between God and the people of the world (cf. Exod. 19:6). Gentile people will want to obey His will, in contrast to the Jews of Micah's day who did not. Jerusalem will become the source of communication concerning the Lord and His will.

"Imagine for a moment, if you will, Washington, London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and others proceeding to Jerusalem to learn the will of God! Could these things apply to our day? No, they will and must take place in the era of the personal and visible reign of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, on the throne of His father David."⁶¹

4:3 The Lord will serve as the global Judge, deciding disputes between many strong nations far removed from Israel geographically. The Jews of Micah's day did not want God telling them what to do and not to do, and

⁵⁸E.g., *The Nelson . . .*, p. 1506.

⁵⁹Mays, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁰Allen, p. 323.

⁶¹Feinberg, pp. 84-85.

their judges perverted justice (cf. 3:1-3, 9-11). In that future day, the Millennium, when Yahweh Messiah is reigning on earth, the nations will convert their implements of warfare into agricultural tools to promote life. They will never again engage in warfare or train for battle. Standing armies and stockpiles of armaments will be things of the past. In Joel 3:10, the reverse imagery is used in describing the Tribulation.

4:4 Peace will prevail worldwide. The figure of people sitting under their vines and fig trees describes them at rest, enjoying the fruits of their labors and God's blessings (cf. 1 Kings 4:25; Zech. 3:10). They will not fear. Perhaps because it is so hard to believe that these conditions will ever prevail on earth, Micah assured his audience that the very "mouth" of Almighty Yahweh had spoken these words. These promises came from Him, not just from the prophet. They were prophecies that were sure to come to pass, in contrast to those of the false prophets of Micah's day (cf. 3:5).

"While the people of God who are the church have experienced peace in their hearts, it is difficult to limit this prediction only to Christians. The prophecy is national and even universal in scope and looks forward to a time when the nations will come so fully under the benign influence of God's Word that war will be no more."⁶²

"They will be safe living in the open fields. There will be no poverty, none to grasp property not his own, no war to dispossess or to terrify the even tenor of life. Though this seems beyond belief it is true, nonetheless, because God has said it."⁶³

4:5 In Micah's day the Gentile nations, and many of the Israelites, followed other gods, but in the future they will all follow Yahweh. Consequently the Israelites needed to follow Him immediately. These promises encouraged Micah to make a fresh and lasting commitment for Israel to "walk" in the Lord's ways rather than in the ways of the gods of other nations (cf. 2 Pet. 3:11-12; 1 John 3:3). Walking "in the name of" Yahweh means living in dependence on His strength, which His attributes manifest.

Zion's future greatness 4:6-8

4:6 In "that day" the Lord also promised to "assemble" His people whom He had allowed the nations to abuse. This will occur when He turns the tide for Israel and begins to bless her, namely, at the beginning of the Millennium.

⁶²McComiskey, p. 422.

⁶³Feinberg, p. 86.

Some of the postexilic books of the Old Testament (i.e., Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) show that the tide did not really turn for Israel at the end of the Babylonian Captivity. The Jews continued to suffer under "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), and will do so until Messiah returns to the earth (cf. Matt. 24:31). This includes suffering in the Tribulation to come (Dan. 7:25; Zech. 14:5). The Jews of Micah's day were weak morally and spiritually, and were about to go into captivity.

"The times of the Gentiles" are the times during which Gentiles control the affairs of the Jews, Israel having lost her sovereignty. These times began when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews into exile in 586 B.C., and they will end with the return of Jesus Christ to the earth at the Second Coming.

4:7 The Lord promised to make these "lame outcasts" of the earth, the Jews, a surviving, "strong nation," and to "reign over them" personally from "Mt. Zion"—"forever" (cf. Ps. 146:10; Zeph. 3:19; Luke 1:33; Rev. 11:15). He will do this through the Messiah, Jesus Christ. His millennial reign will continue until the destruction of the present heavens and earth. Then it will continue on a new earth throughout eternity (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

4:8 Micah returned to contemplate again on Mt. Zion in the future (cf. v. 1). It would then become like a watchtower to "the flocks" of God's people, Israel, and a stronghold to her descendants. Israel's "former dominion" over her world—under David and Solomon—would return then, called here "the kingdom of the daughter (descendants) of Jerusalem."

Only if we spiritualize the meaning of "the daughter of Jerusalem" to mean the church can we get away from the clear promise of Israel's restoration here (cf. Rom. 11:26). Reference to restoration of the glory of the former Davidic kingdom predicts the revival of the Davidic kingdom (cf. Isa. 9:7; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11).

One writer counted 11 characteristics of the future messianic kingdom in verses 1-8. These are: the global prominence of the temple (v. 1a) and its attraction of people worldwide (1b). Jerusalem will function as teacher of the world (2a) and as the disseminator of revelation (2b). The Lord will judge the world from Jerusalem (3a), and peace will be universal (3b). Israel will experience peace and security (4), spiritual sensitivity (5), regathering to the land (6), strength (7), and dominion (8).⁶⁴

2. The might of Zion 4:9—5:1

One of the events that would occur before the realization of these great promises of blessing was Israel's exile, but the burden of this pericope is also future restoration.

⁶⁴Martin, pp. 1483-84.

4:9 Micah, speaking for the Lord, addressed the Jews in captivity. He was looking into the future, not as far as the restoration previously promised, but into the captivity. He asked, rhetorically, why the Israelites were crying out in "agony," like "a woman" in labor pains who can do nothing to relieve her misery. Did the Jews have "no king" leading them and providing counsel for them? This would be their condition during the captivity. The Babylonian Captivity is in view, primarily (v. 10).

"The *now* has a certain width of reference, embracing both the Assyrian and Babylonian crises. Prophets saw the future not diachronically [consecutively] but synchronically [simultaneously]."⁶⁵

4:10 The Israelites would leave Jerusalem as a woman in labor. They would have to live "in the field" (the countryside) temporarily until they arrived in "Babylon," but in Babylon "the LORD" would eventually rescue and "redeem" them. He would deliver them from captivity and return them to the land. This is one of the earliest references to the Babylonian Captivity in prophetic Scripture (cf. Isa. 39:1-7).

This prediction of captivity in Babylon was unusual in Micah's day, because then Assyria was the great threat to the Israelites. The Babylonian deportations came a century later. In Micah's day, Babylon was part of the Assyrian Empire. Probably "Babylon" here has a double meaning: the historic Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's day and the future Babylon, the symbol of Gentile power that has held Israel captive since Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Gen. 10:10; 11:4-9; Rev. 17—18).

"God chose Babylon because in Micah's pagan world it functioned as the equivalent of Rome in the Middle Ages and of Mecca in Islam. The darkest land will become the place where the daylight of the new age dawns."⁶⁶

Micah had just prophesied an eschatological redemption of Israel, and that future vision stayed with him (vv. 1-8).

4:11-12 In Micah's day, "many nations" desired to see Israel "polluted" and destroyed. However, they did "not understand" God's purposes for Israel or for themselves. They failed to see that He would gather the nations for judgment, as a farmer gathers "sheaves" of grain on a "threshing floor" in preparation for beating them out.

"With many others we believe that the prophet has in mind a different siege from that of verse 9. From the contemplation of the Babylonian siege his mind is carried on by the Spirit of God to the last great attack of the nations

⁶⁵Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 178.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 179.

of the world against Israel. The events are those of Joel 3, Zechariah 12 and 14, Ezekiel 38 and 39, and other prophetic portions of the Old Testament Scriptures."⁶⁷

4:13 In the future, Israel would be the Lord's instrument to "thresh" the nations. He will strengthen Israel to overcome ("pulverize") them, and to turn over ("devote") "their wealth" to Him, namely, to bring them into subjection to the sovereign Lord. Israel has not yet done this, so the fulfillment lies in the future, when Messiah returns to reign (cf. Zech. 14:12-15). Universal peace (in the Millennium, vv. 3-4) will follow this judgment of the nations.

"Heathen conquerors used to set apart a portion of their spoils to the gods in their temples. Victorious Israel will devote the wealth gained from their triumphs to adorn the temple of the Lord."⁶⁸

5:1 This verse is the last one in chapter 4 of the Hebrew Bible. It continues the theme of Zion's might.

Micah called on the Israelites to prepare for war, and reminded them that they had often engaged in war, by referring to them as a "daughter of troops." This expression means that Jerusalem was a city marked by warfare. Jerusalem's rich had been at war with the poor (2:8; 3:2-3, 9-10; 7:2-6), but now their external enemies would wage war against them. These enemies had "laid siege against" them (2 Kings 24:10; 25:1-2; Jer. 52:5; Ezek. 4:3, 7; 5:2), and would even "smite" Israel's "judge . . . on the cheek" (4:2-3)—a figure for humiliating him (cf. 1 Kings 22:24; Job 16:10; Lam. 3:30).

The judge in view appears to be King Zedekiah for the following reasons (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-7). First, according to this verse, the time of this smiting is when Israel was under siege. Second, verses 2-6 jump to a time in the distant future, whereas verse 1 describes a time in the near future (cf. "But," v. 2). Third, "judge" (Heb. *shopet*) is different from "ruler" (Heb. *moshel*) in verse 2, and probably describes a different individual. Micah may have chosen *shopet* because of its similarity to *shebet*, "rod." As noted earlier, Micah is famous for his wordplays. Waltke, however, believed the judge to be Messiah.⁶⁹

3. The King of Zion 5:2-5a

"In chapter 5 the prophet repeated and expanded the major themes of 4:6-10, only in reverse order. This creates a chiasmic structure for the central portion of the speech, which can be outlined as follows:

⁶⁷Feinberg, p. 89.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 90.

⁶⁹Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 181.

- A The Lord strengthens a remnant (4:6-7a)
- B Dominion restored (4:7b-8)
- C Zion and her king are humiliated (4:9-10)
- D Zion saved from the present crisis (4:11-13)
- C' Zion and her king are humiliated (5:1)
- B' Dominion restored (5:2-6)
- A' The Lord strengthens a remnant (5:7-9)"⁷⁰

This section introduces another ruler of Israel who, in contrast to Zedekiah, his *foil*, would effectively lead God's people.

"This royal oracle is obviously intended to be the central peak of the range of oracles in chs. 4 and 5. It presents a longer hope section than any other unit, and points to the fulfilment [*sic*] of royal promise as the key to the greatness of Jerusalem and Israel heralded in the surrounding pieces."⁷¹

5:2 In contrast to the humiliation of Israel's judge (king) Zedekiah, a greater "ruler" would emerge later in Israel's history (cf. 4:7). He would be Yahweh's representative (cf. John 17:4; Heb. 10:7), and would arise from the comparatively insignificant town of "Bethlehem" (House of Bread) "Ephrathah" (Fruitful). "Ephrathah" (also Ephrath) was an old name for the district in which Bethlehem of Judah lay, in contrast to other Bethlehems in the Promised Land (cf. Gen. 35:16-19; 48:7; Josh. 19:15; Ruth 4:11). Bethlehem was, of course, the hometown of David (1 Sam. 16:1, 18-19; 17:12), so the reference to it allows for the possibility of a familial connection with King David. As David had been the least notable of his brothers, so Bethlehem was the least honorable among the towns in Judah. The most insignificant place would bring forth the most significant person. This Ruler must be divine, since He had been conducting activities on Yahweh's behalf from long ago—even "eternity" past (lit. days of immeasurable time; cf. Isa. 9:6; John 1:1; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:17; Rev. 1:8). The New Testament identifies this Ruler as the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Matt. 2:1, 3-6), though some of the Jews in Jesus' day did not know that Bethlehem was His birthplace (John 7:42).

This messianic prophecy not only gives the birthplace of Messiah, and thus assures His humanity, but it also asserts His deity. No mere human could be said to have been carrying out the will of Yahweh eternally.

"The preexistence of the Messiah is being taught here, as well as His active participation in ancient times in the purposes of God."⁷²

⁷⁰Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 422.

⁷¹Allen, pp. 340-41.

⁷²Feinberg, p. 95.

- 5:3 Yahweh would give the Israelites over to chastening, until Israel had ended her painful period of suffering (like a woman in labor, 4:9), and she had brought forth a child. In view of previous revelation about Israel's continuing discipline by God until her Redeemer appeared (4:10), this seems to be a reference to the second coming of Messiah, not His first coming. This interpretation gains support from the promise in the last half of this verse. "Then the remainder" of the Redeemer's "brethren," the Jews, will experience a regathering (cf. 2:12; 4:6-7). They "will return" to the land and rejoin other Israelites.
- 5:4 This Redeemer "will arise and shepherd" Yahweh's flock (Israel) in Yahweh's "strength" and "majesty," in harmony with His character (cf. 2:12; 7:14; Zech. 10:3). Contrast the failure of Israel's leaders in Micah's day (3:1-11). The Redeemer will worship Yahweh as His God, another indication of His humanity. In the ancient Near East, kings frequently referred to themselves as the shepherds of their people.⁷³ It is the pastoral role of Israel's messianic King, leading and caring for His people, that is in view here. The Israelites "will remain" in their secure and glorious position because "*He* will be" so "great"; His greatness will guarantee His people's security (cf. Zech. 14:11). People throughout the world will acknowledge His greatness (cf. Mal. 1:11).
- 5:5a "This" Redeemer would also be responsible for—and the source of—the "peace" that God promised Israel that she would experience (in the Millennium; cf. 4:3-5; Eph. 2:14).

"Whenever a prophet foretold the future, it was to awaken the people to their responsibilities in the present. Bible prophecy isn't entertainment for the curious; it's encouragement for the serious."⁷⁴

4. The peace of Zion 5:5b-6

This pericope continues the emphasis on future peace.

- 5:5b Assyria was the main threat to the Israelites in Micah's day, but this prophecy predicts Israel's victory over the Assyrians. This did not happen in the history of Israel; Assyria defeated the Northern Kingdom and most of the Southern Kingdom. Thus, this prophecy must be a continuation of the vision of the distant future that God gave Micah (4:1—5:5a). When future Assyrians, representative of Israel's enemies (cf. 7:12; Isa. 11:11; Zech. 10:10), again invade the Promised Land and break down its mansions (cf. Zech. 12:9; 14:2-3), the Israelites will rise up against them. The expression "seven . . . and eight" means the same as "three . . . and four," a phrase that occurs often in Amos (cf. Amos 1:3; et al.). It implies completeness *and then some*. The Israelites will have more than enough leaders to defeat their enemy then.

⁷³*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Shepherd," by R. A. Stewart.

⁷⁴Wiersbe, p. 397.

5:6 Israel's leaders will then "shepherd" (lead and care for) "the land of Assyria with the sword"; they will bring it under Israelite control. The "land of Nimrod" is a synonym for Assyria (cf. Gen. 10:8-9; 1 Chron. 1:10), and "its entrances" imply the strategic areas of its territory. The Redeemer, and Yahweh behind Him, would deliver the Israelites from the Assyrian-like enemy that they would face in that day (cf. Zech. 14:3).

"Only the most hyperliteral interpreter would suggest that a revived Assyrian Empire will reappear during the messianic era. Assyria is an archetype here. In terms that would have been very inspiring and meaningful to an eighth-century B.C. Israelite audience, Micah assured God's people that a time was coming, unlike their own day, when they would no longer be threatened by powerful, hostile nations. In other words, Micah's vision of Israel's future is contextualized so that his contemporaries might fully appreciate it. The essential point is that the new era will be one of peace and security for God's people where God's ideal king prevents the lionlike 'Assyrians' of the world from terrorizing helpless sheep."⁷⁵

5. The vindication of Zion 5:7-9

5:7 In that day "the remnant of Jacob" will live all over the world, scattered among the other nations. "The remnant of Jacob" is one of Micah's favorite terms for the believing Jews living in the "last days" (cf. 2:12; 4:7; 5:8; 7:18), and here it refers to them after God judges the nations (vv. 5b-6). The presence of the Jews will be a divine gift to the other people of the world, as dew and rain are to the earth (cf. Gen. 12:3). God will have sent them among the nations as He sends the dew and rain; their presence there will be due to His working, not the result of human choices or national policies ultimately.

5:8-9 The Israelites will be dominant and powerful over the other people of the world then, but in an irresistible rather than a ferocious sense (v. 7; cf. Deut. 28:13). They will have the upper hand, and their enemies will not be able to rise up against them. What a change this will be compared to the downtrodden and abused condition that the Jews have known since Nebuchadnezzar!

6. The purification of Zion 5:10-15

5:10-11 In that future eschatological day, the Lord also promised to remove the vain sources of security that had always tempted the Israelites, represented by: "horses," "chariots," "cities," and "fortifications" (cf. Deut. 17:16).

⁷⁵Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 424.

5:12-14 He would also remove the accouterments of pagan worship that had plagued His people. "Sorceries" involved seeking information from demonic sources (cf. 2 Kings 9:22; Isa. 47:9, 12; Nah. 3:4). "Fortune-tellers" cast spells by calling demonic spirits to influence other people (cf. Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10). "Carved images" were pagan idols (cf. Exod. 20:4). "Sacred pillars" and "Asherim" were stone and wooden symbols of the male and female Canaanite deities (cf. Deut. 16:21-22; 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; 18:4; 23:14). Yahweh would free His people from these human inventions that had always oppressed them. "Cities" were infamous as places where spiritual impurity flourished (cf. 1:5), and God would "destroy" them, too. These were Israel's internal enemies whereas other nations were her external enemies.

"Secular man more effectively manipulates life by his use of science than his ancestors did by magic, but no more than they can he secure eternal life for himself. By continuing to substitute the creation for the Creator, he individually deprives himself of eternal life and collectively hastens his eternal death."⁷⁶

Occultism will continue into the Tribulation (Rev. 9:21), but the Lord will finally root it out in the Millennium.

5:15 Finally, the Lord promised to take "vengeance" angrily "on the nations" that "have not obeyed" His will (cf. Ps. 2:9; Rev. 12:5; 19:15). They are not responsible to keep the Mosaic Law, as Israel was, but they fail to acknowledge and worship Him as the only true God. "Vengeance" is "a legal term for the action of a royal suzerain against rebels who will not acknowledge his sovereignty."⁷⁷

"God is not a machine but a person, and some things need to be said and done with passion."⁷⁸

IV. THE THIRD ORACLE: GOD'S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL AND THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF HIS KINGDOM CHS. 6—7

The writer recorded a third round of messages that first announce judgment on the Israelites for their sins (ch. 6) and then promise future restoration (ch. 7). This third oracle lays out God's case against Israel and assures the ultimate triumph of His kingdom. Micah vindicated God's justice in this section. He justified God for punishing Israel and promised ultimate fulfillment of His promises in the future. All of this is certain because God is faithful. Chapter 6 explains the causes of judgment, and chapter 7 the coming glory.

⁷⁶Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 190.

⁷⁷Allen, p. 360.

⁷⁸Waltke, in *The Minor* . . . , p. 723.

A. THE LORD'S INDICTMENT AGAINST HIS PEOPLE 6:1-5

- 6:1-2 In this litigation speech, Micah called his audience to hear what Yahweh had told him to say. Yahweh had a "case" (lawsuit, Heb. *rib*) to bring against His people. The Lord was summoning Israel to defend herself in a courtroom setting. He addressed the "mountains," "hills," and "foundations of the earth" as the jury in this case (cf. Deut. 32:1; Isa. 1:2). The Lord called this jury, which had observed Israel's history from its beginning, to hear His indictment against the nation. Compare the function of memorial stones (Gen. 31:43-50; Josh. 22:21-28). If these jurors could speak, they would witness to the truthfulness of the Lord's claims.
- 6:3 The Lord called the Israelites, His people, to testify how He had caused them to be so weary of Him that they ceased to obey Him. His rhetorical questions were unanswerable; He had not given them reason to become dissatisfied with Him (cf. 1 Sam. 17:29; 20:1; 26:18; 29:8; Isa. 5:4). His questions convey a sense of pathos; rather than simply criticizing them, He asked how He had failed them. They had complained against Him very often, but He had given them no occasion to do so.
- 6:4 Instead of wronging them, He had done nothing but good for them. Instead of letting them down, He had lifted them up. He had brought them from Egyptian bondage into the Promised Land of milk and honey. He had brought them out of "the house of slavery"—"Egypt"—which their Passover celebrated (cf. Exod. 12:3, 7, 12-13; Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18). And He had given them capable leaders for their wilderness travels in "Moses, Aaron, and Miriam," a trio of siblings whom the Israelites respected throughout their history. Moses, the prophet, had given them their law (cf. Deut. 18:15-22). Aaron served them as their first high priest, and Miriam was a prophetess who led them in praising God for His goodness (Exod. 15:20-21).
- "The unforgettable act of God's goodness to them was His redemption of them from unbearable bondage in Egypt."⁷⁹
- 6:5 Yahweh charged the Israelites to "remember" that "Balak, king of Moab," wanted God to curse His people, but "Balaam" revealed that God would never do that (Num. 22—24). God's intentions for His people had consistently been good. The events of their crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land showed the same thing. "Shittim" was the Israelites' last camping place before they crossed the Jordan, and "Gilgal" was where they camped first after crossing (Josh. 3:1; 4:18-19). God had always done what was consistent with His covenant obligations to His people, never burdening them but always protecting, defending, and enabling them. He had lovingly led them from slavery, in a hostile foreign land, to settlement in their own comfortable country (cf. Josh. 24; 1 Sam. 12).

⁷⁹Feinberg, p. 104.

B. MICAH'S RESPONSE FOR THE ISRAELITES 6:6-8

In this pericope, Micah responded to God's goodness, just reviewed, as the Israelites should have responded. His was the reasonable response in view of Yahweh's loyal love for His people (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

- 6:6 The prophet, for his people, asked himself what offering he should bring to the exalted Lord in heaven that would be appropriate—in view of Yahweh's mercies to the Israelites throughout their history. Would "burnt offerings" of year-old "calves" be suitable, since they were the very best offerings and expressed the worshipper's total personal dedication to Yahweh (cf. Lev. 9:2-3; 22:27)?
- 6:7 Or would the Lord take pleasure if he offered Him "thousands of rams" and an extravagant amount of "oil," like Solomon and other kings had done (cf. Lev. 2:1-16; 1 Kings 3:4; 8:63; 2 Chron. 30:24; 35:7)? Neither the quality of a sacrifice nor its quantity was the important issue. Perhaps making the ultimate sacrifice and offering his "firstborn" son to atone for his sins would please the Lord. Micah, of course, did not believe that these sacrifices by themselves would please Him, but he used them as examples of ritual worship that the Israelites thought would satisfy God.
- 6:8 No, these sacrifices were not what the Lord wanted. He had already told the Israelites what would be "good" (beneficial) for them when they sinned (cf. Deut. 10:12, 18; 1 Sam. 12:24; Hos. 12:6). He wanted each of His people ("O man") to change his or her behavior. The address "O man" emphasizes the difference between God and man, particularly man's subordination under God. It also connects Micah's hearers, the people, not just the leaders, with the vain worshippers described in the two previous verses. Specifically, the Lord wanted His people to practice "justice"—rather than continuing to plot and practice unfairness and injustice toward one another (cf. v. 11; 2:1-2; 3:1-3). He also wanted them to "love kindness," and to practice loyal love (Heb. *hesed*), by carrying through on their commitments to help one another, as He had with them (cf. v. 12; 2:8-9; 3:10-11). And He wanted them to "walk humbly with" Him, to live their lives modestly trusting and depending on Him, rather than arrogantly relying on themselves (cf. 2:3). There is a progression in these requirements, from what is external to what is internal, and from human relations to divine relations. Doing justice toward other people demands loving kindness, which necessitates walking humbly in fellowship with God.⁸⁰

This verse contains one of the most succinct and powerful expressions of Yahweh's essential requirements in the Bible (cf. Matt. 22:37-39; 23:23; 1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 3:12; James 1:27; 1 Pet. 1:2; 5:5). It explains the essence of spiritual reality—in contrast to mere ritual worship. Though the Lord asked His people to worship Him in formal ways, which the

⁸⁰Mays, p. 142. See also Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 197.

Mosaic Covenant spelled out, His primary desire was for a heart attitude marked by the characteristics Micah articulated (cf. Ps. 51:16-17; Jer. 7:22-26).

"No vital relationship with God is possible if one is unfaithful to the responsibilities arising out of his God-given relationships with his fellow men."⁸¹

C. THE LORD'S SENTENCE OF JUDGMENT 6:9-16

The Lord became specific about Israel's sins, as a prosecuting attorney, and then announced His verdict, as a judge.

1. Israel's sins 6:9-12

- 6:9 Micah announced that Yahweh would "call to the city" of Jerusalem; He would declare something important to the people of that town, Micah's audience of Judeans. They would be wise to "hear" Him and to "fear" Him because of *who He is* (cf. v. 1; 3:1; Prov. 1:7). The Lord summoned His people—the "tribe" of Judah—to hear Him because it was *He* who had sovereignly chosen them.
- 6:10 The Lord asked if there was still anyone in "the wicked house" of Judah who had "treasures (of wickedness)" (i.e., possessions) that he or she had accumulated through wicked behavior. For example, was there any seller who used a small ephah ("short measure"), a false measurement that was less than a true ephah? If so, this was evidence of not acting justly (v. 8; cf. Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16; Amos 8:5). The ephah was a basket that held about six gallons of dry produce. Using a slightly smaller basket robbed the buyer of some product that he was purchasing for the price of an ephah. The implication of the question is that this practice was common in Jerusalem.
- 6:11 Likewise, dishonest "scales" and inaccurate "weights," used in commercial transactions, were things God could not declare were all right. Ancient weights and measures were not as exact as our modern equivalents, varying as much as six percent.⁸² Micah's contemporaries were stretching the limits beyond what was acceptable.
- 6:12 The "rich" people of Jerusalem practiced "violence" (lawlessness) in obtaining what they wanted from the weak. They lied to one another and practiced trickery and deception to obtain their desires. All of these dealings presented evidence of "injustice," which arose from a heart of unkindness toward others and lack of submission to God (v. 8).

⁸¹Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 403.

⁸²*The New Bible Dictionary*, 1962 ed., s.v. "Weights and Measures," by D. J. Wiseman.

2. Israel's punishment 6:13-16

- 6:13 Because of these sins, the Lord promised to make His people sick, downtrodden, and desolate.
- 6:14 They would continue to "eat," but their food would not bring them satisfaction (cf. Lev. 26:26). Their excessive accumulation of things would result in more garbage and waste products that they would have difficulty getting rid of. They would try to keep safe what they had bought, but they would not be able to do so, and what they did lock away would only become the property of invading soldiers eventually (cf. Lev. 26:16-17; Deut. 28:30). The Lord was restating the curses for covenant unfaithfulness listed in the Mosaic Code.
- 6:15 They would "sow" seed, but they would "not reap" a harvest, because the Lord would not bless the land with rain and cause the crops to grow (cf. Deut. 28:30). They would harvest and press their "olive" crops, but there would be so little product that they would not even be able to "anoint" themselves "with oil." Similarly, their "grape" harvests would be so small that they would produce too little "wine" to "drink" (cf. Deut. 28:39-40; Amos 5:11).
- 6:16 The people of Judah were living like their brethren in Israel who followed the instructions of the wicked Israelite kings: "Omri," "Ahab," and their descendants ("house"). This group of Israel's kings constituted some of the worst in the history of the Northern Kingdom, largely because of their idolatry and unjust oppression of the weak (cf. 1 Kings 16:21—22:40). Micah emphasized Israel's social sins more than idolatry, about which Isaiah had more to say, though there is a close relationship between both types of sin. Because of this wickedness, Yahweh promised to turn the residents of Jerusalem over to "destruction." Even though they were His people, they would become objects of horror and scorn ("reproach" or contempt, and "derision") by other nations.

"Loss of reputation is ever the final indignity which rubs salt into the wounds of suffering."⁸³

D. MICAH'S LAMENT OVER HIS DECADENT SOCIETY 7:1-7

This section is an individual lament similar to many of the psalms (cf. 1:8-16).

- 7:1 Micah bewailed his own disappointment with Israel's situation. He compared himself to Israel's "fruit pickers" and "grape gatherers" who felt great disappointment over their poor harvests (6:15). Israel should have produced more spiritual fruit, but she did not (cf. Isa. 5:7; Mark 11:12-14, 20-22; John 15:1-8; Gal. 5:22-23).

⁸³Allen, p. 382.

"He [Micah] is declaring that Israel is as lacking in good men as an orchard or vineyard after the fruit has been gathered with only gleaning left."⁸⁴

- 7:2 The prophet, using hyperbole, said he could find no faithful "godly" (Heb. *hasid*, from *hesed*; cf. Hos. 4:1-2) or morally and ethically "upright" people (evidently rulers, cf. v. 3) in the land. Obviously there were some righteous, including Isaiah, but by overstating his case he made his point: there were very few. "All of them" seemed to "wait" for the opportunity to advance their own interests, even resorting to violence and "bloodshed" to do so (cf. 3:10; 6:12). They behaved like hunters waiting to snare unsuspecting birds in their nets.
- 7:3 They were so skillful at doing evil that it seemed they could do it equally well with either hand; they were ambidextrous when it came to sinning. Another view is that "'both hands' refer to 'the great man' and the officials next to him. . . . The king and his depraved minions flagrantly pervert the covenant . . ."⁸⁵ The leaders always had their hands out to receive "a bribe" (cf. 3:11). The powerful could expect to get the evil things they wanted because they pulled the necessary strings. These leaders formed networks of conspiracy, like a basket, to entrap the weak.
- 7:4 "The best" and most upright of the people were like briars and thorn hedges in that they entangled and hurt all who came in contact with them. As when the people posted a watchman to warn of coming danger, so the prophets, God's "watchmen," had announced coming "punishment" from Yahweh. Yet the people had not heeded their cries of danger. When captivity came, the result would be "confusion" among the people.
- 7:5-6 Micah warned the Judeans against trusting in their neighbors, friends, or even wives who reassured them that everything would be all right. They could trust no one because everyone was telling lies to gain their own advantage. They could not trust the members of their own families because everyone was after his or her own interests, and would stoop to betrayal to obtain them (cf. Matt. 10:35-36; Mark 13:12; Luke 12:53).

"Man is so made that he finds security in a small group among whom he is accepted and receives support. At the heart of the concentric circles of people known to him there must ever be a stable core of friends, and usually family, if his psychological equilibrium is to be maintained. The prophet gradually penetrates to the center of these inner circles of familiarity: friend—best friend—wife. A man is now forced to go against his nature, retiring within himself and keeping his own counsel, if he is not to face betrayal."⁸⁶

⁸⁴Feinberg, p. 113.

⁸⁵Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 200.

⁸⁶Allen, p. 388.

7:7 In contrast to the Israelites of his day, the prophet determined to "watch expectantly" and "wait" patiently "for the LORD" to act as He had promised (cf. 1 Sam. 4:13; Tit. 2:13). He would bring salvation to His people ultimately (cf. Isa. 59:20). This commitment gave him confidence that the Lord would "hear" his prayers.

The reason Micah did not succumb to utter pessimism—in view of the terrible conditions in his day—is that he determined to trust God. The same faith is much needed in our dark day (cf. Phil. 2:15-16).

E. MICAH'S CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD 7:8-20

This final section of the book is also in the form of a lament (cf. vv. 1-7). While Micah spoke as an individual, he spoke for the faithful remnant of Israelites in his day. His sentiments would have been theirs. Thus the lament is communal, but it gives way to glorious praise. Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and many of the psalmists likewise prayed as spokesmen for the faithful as well as for themselves (cf. Dan. 9; Ezra 9; Neh. 9; Lam. 1:10-16, 18-22).

"Micah concludes his book with a liturgical hymn, consisting of expressions of confidence, petition, and praise."⁸⁷

1. Advice to the ungodly 7:8-13

7:8 When Micah's enemies saw him experience some discouraging situation, they rejoiced. He told them not to rejoice, because though he fell, God would raise him up. Though he appeared to be groping "in" the "darkness" (cf. Lam. 3:6), "the LORD" would be "a light" to him and illuminate the right path for him to take.

7:9 Micah identified with his people by confessing his guilt (cf. Dan. 9:5, 8, 11, 15). Though he had not personally committed the sins that he criticized his fellow Israelites of practicing, as a part of his nation he was with them in their guilt. He would have to bear the consequences of divine discipline as they did. Nevertheless, the Divine Advocate, whom we have seen indicting the Israelites in this book, would come to the prophet's defense. Micah would not suffer the same amount of punishment as the guilty in the nation. He would eventually come out of his dark circumstances into "the light" of God's presence, and he would behold God's "righteousness." That is, he would see God demonstrate His justice and faithfulness to His promises. God will vindicate the faithful.

7:10 Then Micah's enemies would see God's rightness and feel ashamed for accusing Yahweh of abandoning His watchman. Micah would also see these enemies humiliated and brought low, trodden down like mud in the street (cf. Josh. 10:24; Ps. 110:1).

⁸⁷Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 754. See Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 426, for a structural analysis of this section.

- 7:11 "That day," when the Israelite critics of Micah and his prophecies would see they were wrong, would be when the "walls" around their vineyards would be rebuilt, and the boundaries of Judah "extended" (cf. Ezek. 47:13-23; Obad. 19-20). The word used here to describe walls, *gader*, elsewhere refers to the walls around vineyards (cf. Num. 22:24; Isa. 5:5), not walls around a city. In the Millennium, Jerusalem will have no walls (Zech. 2:4-5). This refers to the distant future when God will re-gather and reestablish Israel in her land, in the Millennium, not following the Babylonian Captivity. This is clear from what follows.
- 7:12 Israel's former enemies from all over the world, represented by "Assyria" and the "Euphrates" River on the northwest, and "Egypt" and its "cities" on the southeast, would "come to" the Israelites in their land (cf. Isa. 19:23-25; Amos 9:11-15). They would come from everywhere between the seas and the mountains, a synecdoche for everywhere on earth (cf. Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10). A synecdoche is a figure of speech that uses a part of something to represent the whole.
- 7:13 Before that, however, "the earth will become desolate" when God judges its "inhabitants" for their sinful "deeds" (cf. Isa. 24:1; 34—35). This will happen in the Tribulation and in the judgment of the nations that immediately follows the Lord's Second Coming (cf. Matt. 25:32-33, 46).

2. Prayer for deliverance 7:14-17

- 7:14 Micah prayed that the Lord would again take an active role as the Shepherd of His people Israel. Shepherding with His rod ("scepter," Heb. *shebet*) implies kingly leadership. This is a request for the promised descendant of David to appear and lead Israel. Presently the Israelites, the flock that Yahweh possessed uniquely (cf. Deut. 4:20), were isolated even though they inhabited the land that God had given them. Micah prayed that they might enjoy God's blessings, as when their flocks fed on the lush, grassy hills of "Bashan" and "Gilead" earlier in their history.
- 7:15 The Lord replied to Micah's prayer. He promised that He would "show" Israel "miracles" again, as when He sent the plagues on Egypt just before the Exodus (cf. Exod. 3:20; 15:11). The Jews' liberation from Gentile domination and return to their own land at the beginning of the Millennium will be another miraculous Exodus (cf. Hos. 9:3; 11:5, 11; 12:9).
- 7:16 The Gentile "nations" will observe this miracle, and feel "ashamed," because they will realize that "all their might" is inferior to God's power demonstrated in bringing Israel home (cf. v. 7; 3:7). They will not want to speak out against Yahweh or Israel—because of reverence and awe—or hear any more about what God is doing for His people, apparently because His power will be so overwhelming.

7:17 They will become as servile and humble as snakes. Licking the dust is a figure describing total defeat (cf. Gen. 3:14; Ps. 72:9 Isa. 49:23; 65:25). They will surrender to Yahweh, Israel's God, and "come . . . before" Him in fear and "dread" of what He will do to them (cf. Phil. 2:10).

3. Praise for forgiveness 7:18-20

Micah had prayed, he received the Lord's answer, and this answer moved him to worship (cf. Exod. 34:6-7). Modern orthodox Jews read verses 18-20 in their synagogues on the Day of Atonement following the reading of Jonah.

"Few passages in Scripture contain so much 'distilled theology' as Micah 7:18-20."⁸⁸

7:18 The prophet praised Yahweh as a God who is *unique* in that He pardons the rebellious sins of the surviving "remnant of His people." "Who is a God like You?" is another rhetorical question (cf. Exod. 15:11; Ps. 35:10; 71:19; 77:13; 89:6; 113:5), and it may be a play on Micah's name, which means, "Who is like Yahweh?" No one is just like Him! Pardoning such grave sins is contrary to human behavior, but Yahweh would "not retain His anger" against the Israelites "forever" (cf. Ps. 103:9). He will "pardon" them (cf. 1:5; 3:8; 6:7; Exod. 34:6-7) because He delights to be faithful to His "love" (Heb. *hesed*) for them (cf. v. 20).

"Here we have a description of God's grace unsurpassed in Scripture."⁸⁹

7:19 Yahweh would "again have compassion" (tender, heartfelt concern, Heb. *rehem*) on the Israelites, as He had done so often in their history (cf. Ps. 102:13; 103:4, 13; 116:5; 119:156; Hos. 14:4; Zech. 10:6). He would subdue their "iniquities"—as though they were insects that He stepped on and obliterated. He would do away with "their sins," as surely as someone gets rid of something permanently by throwing it "into the . . . sea" (cf. Ps. 103:12). The use of three words for sin in verses 18 and 19 (iniquity, rebellious acts, and sins) gives added assurance of forgiveness. God will forgive all types of Israel's sins.

7:20 The basis of Micah's confidence was that God would be faithful to His promises "to Jacob," and loyal to His commitment (Heb. *hesed*) to bless "Abraham" (cf. Gen. 12:2-3; 13:15; 15:18-21; 17:7-8, 13, 19, 21; 28:13-14; 35:10-12; 48:4; et al.). These were ancient promises to their "forefathers," that God had sealed with His oath, vowing to fulfill them (e.g., Gen. 22:16-18; cf. Rom. 4:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 4:1-10; 8:10; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 21:3, 7).

⁸⁸Wiersbe, p. 402.

⁸⁹Feinberg, p. 121.

"Like a day that begins with a dark, foreboding sky but ends in golden sunlight, this chapter begins in an atmosphere of gloom and ends in one of the greatest statements of hope in all the OT."⁹⁰

⁹⁰McComiskey, p. 440.

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