

6. Micah 740-690 B.C. (written c.700)

The book of Micah has seven chapters. It is a Pre-Exilic Southern Kingdom book.

Date, Author, and Background

Micah is a shortened form of the name Micaiah, which means “Who is like Yahweh?” Micah was from the Judean town of Moresheth, about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. His ministry was primarily among the peasants and villagers, who were regularly harassed by enemy troops, and exploited by the wealthy rulers and false religious leaders of Judah. Micah was a contemporary of Amos and Isaiah, during the 700s B.C. *in the days of Jotham* [750-732 B.C.], *Ahaz* [732-715 B.C.] *and Hezekiah* [715-686 B.C.], *kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria* [the capitol of the Northern Kingdom of Israel] *and Jerusalem* [the capitol of the Southern Kingdom of Judah]. The book was most likely written during the reign of Hezekiah [715-686 B.C.].

Jotham was basically a good king, except he did not remove the idolatrous high places. Ahaz was a bad king who tried to make peace with Assyria. It was during his reign in Judah that the Northern Kingdom was taken captive to Assyria in 722. Hezekiah was a good king. God answered his prayer to preserve Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 (2 Kings 18:13–19:36).

There are several significant passages in Micah:

- In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 26:18 quotes Micah 3:12 *...Zion will be plowed as a field...*
- In the New Testament, the priests and scribes quoted Micah 5:2 in answer to Herod’s question about the birthplace of the Messiah, *...Bethlehem Ephrathah...* (Matthew 2:5-6). Christ quoted Micah 7:6 *...daughter-in-law against mother-in-law...* to the disciples (Luke 12:53).
- Micah 4 is one of the most important descriptions in the Bible of the future glory of Israel.
- Micah 6:8 is one of the favorite verses about the spiritual life *...walk humbly with your God...*

There are three major sections in the book, each introduced with the word “Hear” (1:2; 3:1; 6:1) what the Lord had to say to the Southern Kingdom, followed by an oracle of doom, and ending with a statement of hope and restoration.

Micah’s main audience was Judah, and his messages showed Judah to be just as guilty as Israel. But ultimately, that guilt included the whole world, and the whole world will be judged by God. Like Hosea, Micah revealed how the people of Judah also failed to live up to the Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 27–30), so God’s justice required their judgment. But He also promised ultimate restoration because of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18).

Many claim that this book has more prophecies about the advent and kingdom of the Messiah, and Israel’s future, than any other prophetic book. Micah wrote about the Messiah’s birthplace, lineage, origin, and reign (4:1-7; 5:2-4).

Purpose

The purpose for the book of Micah is to let the Southern Kingdom of Judah know they were as guilty as the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and their fate, under the judgment of God, would be like

that of Israel. The difference is the judgment of Judah means dissolving the Davidic monarchy, but its restoration also means a Messiah will come from Judah (5:2-8; 7:20).

Theme

Subject: God's compassion

Complement: finds a way to pay for the sins of His people

Key Verses - Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and unchanging love to Abraham, Which You swore to our forefathers from the days of old.

Outline

First Message: Judgment Will Come (chapters 1–2)

Second Message: Blessing Will Follow Judgment (chapters 3–5)

Third Message: An Indictment of Sin and a Promise of Blessing (chapters 6–7)

Commentary

First Message: Judgment Will Come (chapters 1–2)

Verse 1:1, *The word of the LORD which came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.* Notice, it was *The word of the LORD which came to Micah*, not some mystical feeling. The word *saw* had probably to do with the fact that the revelation saw into the future.

Verses 2-7, *For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth* (verse 3). Micah called on the people of the whole earth to hear God's charge against His own people. God is coming down from *His place* to destroy the places of idol worship all over the earth. Then he focuses on the destruction of the high place in both Israel and Judah. *He will make Samaria a heap of ruins...and all of her idols will be smashed* (verses 6-7).

Verses 8-16, *For her wound is incurable, for it has come to Judah; it has reached the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem. Tell it not in Gath* (verses 9-10a) *...Lachish* (verse 13) *...Adullam* (verse 15). Ryrie says, "Micah traces the route of the invading army from the Philistine coastal plain through the Judean hills to Jerusalem." Others suggest Micah is naming towns where David fled while escaping from Saul. Many of these towns are unknown today (possibly suburbs of larger cities), but some are well-known, such as Gath, Lachish, and Adullam. At any rate, the point is, none of these cities are safe. Goliath was from Gath, David's army first gathered at the cave of Adullam, Lachish was often used by the enemy of Judah as a staging ground for battle against Jerusalem, as when Jerusalem was saved from Sennacherib in 701 (2 Kings 18:13–19:36).

Verses 2:1-5, *They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritances* (verse 2). Many of the people lay awake at night thinking up evil things to do the next day: to *covet...seize...and rob*. As they took from others, so God will take from them. The Land that had been Israel's possession would become the property of her enemies.

Verses 6-11, [Those oppressing the poor say to Micah,] *"Do not speak out," so they speak out* [themselves, against their oppressors]. *But if they do not speak out concerning these things* [even if they do not speak out against their oppressors] *reproaches will not be turned back*. [Then Micah answers] *"Is it being said, O house of Jacob: is the Spirit of the LORD impatient? Are these His doings?" Do not My words do good to the one walking uprightly"* (verses 6-7)... *"If a man* [some form of false prophet] *walking after wind and falsehood had told lies and said, 'I will speak out to you concerning* [prosperity, as in plenty of] *wine and liquor,' he would be* [considered a] *spokesman to this people* (verse 11). The false prophets wanted to silence Micah because they did not like his message of coming judgment. The false prophets preached peace and prosperity. Micah said that will come only in obedience to God (according to the Mosaic Covenant of Deuteronomy 28–30).

Verses 12-13, *The breaker goes up before them; they break out, pass through the gate and go out by it. So their king goes on before them, and the LORD at their head*. This is a prophecy of the regathering of Israel under Christ at the Second Coming. The Messiah is *the breaker* who removes barriers so the people can *break out* of their oppression.

Second Message: Blessing Will Follow Judgment (chapters 3–5)

In the first (of the three messages), only the last two verses dealt with Israel's future blessings (2:12-13), while everything preceding these verses exposed her sins and guilt. In this second message, about one-third (chapter 3) deals with present sins, and two thirds (chapters 4–5) deal with future blessings.

Verses 3:1-4, *And I said, "hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. Is it not for you to know justice? You who hate good and love evil"* (verses 1-2a). It is expected and essential for rulers to know justice, yet these rulers of the Southern Kingdom of Judah *hate good and love evil*.

Verses 5-8, *Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; when they have something to bite with their teeth* [that is, when they are paid so they eat well] *they cry, "Peace," But against him who puts nothing in their mouths* [those who do not bribe them] *they declare holy war. Therefore, it will be night for you—without vision, and darkness for you—without divination* (verses 5-6). Micah said the false prophets *lead My people astray*. When someone feeds them, *they cry, "Peace."* They told the people who paid them what those people wanted to hear— prophecy for a price. Notice that the false prophets are practicing divination, mysticism, and witchcraft. These come from one of two sources: demons or superstition.

Verses 9-12, *Her* [Jerusalem's] *leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us"* (verse 11). Micah, filled with *the Spirit of the Lord*

(verse 8) condemns the leaders of Jerusalem, especially the religious leaders, for taking bribe money.

An Application: It is legitimate for a ministry to make its real needs known, but it is not legitimate to favor those who give money or those who give more money.

Verses 4:1-3, *And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For from Zion will go forth the law even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war"* (verses 2-3). At the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, the Gentile nations of the earth will come to the temple in Jerusalem, (described in Ezekiel 40–48), where the leaders in Jerusalem will teach the nations of the earth the ways of the Lord and the law of the Lord from the Word of the Lord. The result of the world following the Word of God is world peace. This peace will last until Satan is released prompting the world into a final rebellion against God (Revelation 20:7-9). An abbreviated form of verse 3 can be seen in a bronze statue at the United Nations Garden called "Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares."

Verses 4-8, focus on verse 7, *"In that day," declares the LORD, "I will assemble the lame and gather the outcasts, even those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant and the outcasts a strong nation, and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever."* In the Millennial Kingdom, the Lord Jesus will reign over the earth. Notice two things: First, His reign includes the people He has afflicted, those who He Himself has made lame and outcasts. Second, notice the phrase *from now on and forever*. We know from later revelation (Revelation 20) the earthly kingdom of Christ to be 1,000 years. Of course, Christ's millennial reign extends into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22) and is therefore eternal. But, like the words for "all" and "every," the word *forever* is not here give a mathematical definition. The point is, Micah sees no end to Christ's rule *in Mount Zion*.

Verses 9-10, *For now you will go out of the city, dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.* This is a prediction of Judah being taken captive to Babylon (in 605 and 586), which is an amazing prophecy, not only because it happened about 100 years later, but at the time, Babylon was under Assyrian control.

Verses 11-13, *And now many nations have been assembled against you... But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, and they do not understand His purpose; for He has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor* (verses 11a-12). These verses take the current situation of the Southern Kingdom and look to the distant future, to the tribulation period where the nations are assembled against Israel, but God has gathered them to defeat them at the Second Coming of Christ.

An Application: The nations of the world will always be against true Bible-believing Christians, *But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, and they do not understand His purpose.* For example, the persecution of believers has only led to the growth and strengthening of the church. “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” (Tertullian, A.D. 155-220). Jesus said, “*Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*” (Matthew 16:18).

Verses 5:1-3, “*But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore, He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child* (verses 1-3a). Ephrathah (meaning “fruitful”), earlier called Ephrath (Genesis 35:16-19; 48:7), seems to be both an older name for Bethlehem (meaning “house of bread”) and the surrounding area, about five miles (8 km) south of Jerusalem. David (1 Samuel 16:1, 18-19; 17:12; Ruth 4:11) and Jesus (Matthew 2:1) were born in Bethlehem. The one who *will go forth for Me* is a reference to Jesus, the Messiah the Son of God. *Goings forth from long ago... eternity,* refers to the preincarnate appearances of Christ. *She who is in labor* refers to the virgin Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23).

Verses 4-15, *This One will be our peace. When the Assyrian invades our land, When he tramples on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight leaders of men* (verse 5) ...*I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and you will have fortune-tellers no more. I will cut off your carved images and your sacred pillars from among you, so that you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands* (verses 12-13). The Assyrian invaders here are a figure for all of Israel’s enemies. But our attention is now turned inwardly to Judah, where God says He will cut off *sorceries, fortunetellers, carved images, and sacred pillars.* All of these represent replacing faith with either demonic worship or human superstition.

Third Message: Indictment of Sin and Promise of Blessing (chapters 6–7)

Verses 6:1-5, The mountains and hills have been a witness all through history to what God did for Israel (6:1-3) Then the Lord lists four specifics:

1. *Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery,*
2. *I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.*
3. *My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered him* [God reversed the intended curse of Balaam (Numbers 23-24)], *and*
4. *from Shittim* [pronounced sha-teem, the last encampment of Israel before crossing the Jordan] *to Gilgal* [near Jericho], *so that you might know the righteous acts of the LORD* (verses 4-5).

Verses 6-8, The rhetorical questions, beginning with *Does the Lord take delight in...*, are hyperbolic statements to show what the Lord does not delight in (*1,000 rams or 10,000 rivers of oil*). These extreme things are contrasted with the spiritual characteristics that please Him. *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God* (verse 8).

Verses 9-16, *Can I justify wicked scales and a bag of deceptive weights?* The question God asks is “How can a just God, justify sin?” Then in verses 9-12, He lists sins being committed by Judah

and, in verses 13-16, He lists the punishments for Judah. In verse 16, He compares Judah's sin to the worst of the kings of Israel, *Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab*.

Verses 7:1-6, *The godly person has perished from the land, and there is no upright person among men. All of them lie in wait for bloodshed; each of them hunts the other with a net* (verse 2)... *For son treats father contemptuously, daughter rises up against her mother, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household* (verse 6). God brings judgment when there is no godly person left, as at the time of the Genesis Flood (Genesis 6:6) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:32). The same is true after the Rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:9). When all believers are gone and only unbelievers remain, the judgment of the seven-year tribulation period will begin (Daniel 9:24-27; Matthew 24:4-28; Revelation 6–18). Jesus used the statement of family members being against one another to describe His ministry of distinguishing a heavenly family over an earthly family (Luke 12:53).

Verses 7-13, *I will bear the indignation [literally: rage, wrath, or displeasure] of the LORD because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me out to the light, and I will see His righteousness* (verse 9). This verse has the gospel story. We are sinners that deserve the wrath of God because we have sinned, but God executed justice for us Himself, by the death of Christ on the cross. The result of our salvation is that He brings us out of darkness into the light of His righteousness.

Verses 14-20, *Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love* (verse 18). *He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea* (verse 19). By way of interpretation, the last paragraph of Micah 7 is about the restoration of Israel and Judah in the Millennial Kingdom. Micah is speaking about God pardoning the sins of the nation. By way of application, it completes the salvation of verse 9. The result of God paying for our sins by the death of Christ, is that He pardons, passes over, treads underfoot, and casts into the sea, our iniquity. Because of His unchanging love, He will have compassion on us.

An Application

Although a book or passage only has one correct interpretation, it may have many possible applications. The interpretation is that God is telling Judah that they are just as guilty as Israel, and God will both destroy them and ultimately restore them, in the future Millennial Kingdom. But there is another key message in the book. It is captured in Micah 6:7-8.

Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice [literally, execute just judgment] to love kindness [literally, love (have an affection for) loyal love (or lovingkindness)], and to walk humbly with your God?

If you want to please God, do not try to do it with religious practices, rather: *do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God*.