

# Notes on Micah

2009 Edition

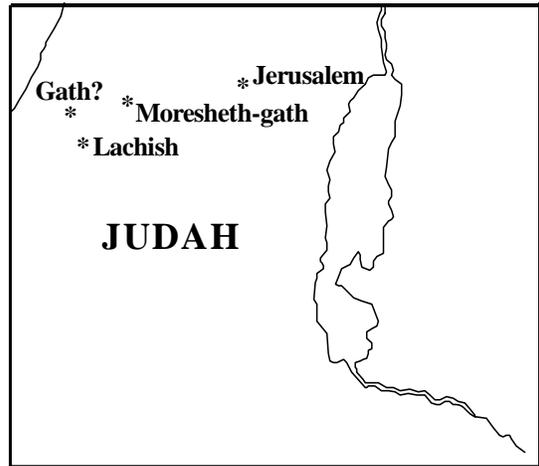
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## Introduction

### 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?"<sup>1</sup> The prophet's hometown was Moresheth-gath, which stood about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem in Judah (1:1). 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.<sup>2</sup>



### 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 have become the target of most critical attack, yet the book is harmonious in its basic structure.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A different 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).

<sup>2</sup>Leon Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 310. 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).

<sup>3</sup>See books on Bible Introduction 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. The Hebrew text of Micah is fairly well preserved.

### **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 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.<sup>4</sup> 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).

### **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.<sup>5</sup>

### **STRUCTURE AND EMPHASES**

The Book of Micah consists of three messages. 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). Eventually God would restore the Israelites to a position of world prominence under their Messiah.

### **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.

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<sup>4</sup>Wood, p. 309, believed Micah wrote between 735 and 710 B.C. because he did not mention Sennacherib's invasion of Judah. However, Allen, pp. 242, 244, 301, argued convincingly that 2:12-13 alludes to Sennacherib's blockade of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

<sup>5</sup>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.

Like the other eighth-century prophets, Micah attacked the idolatry that accompanied the acceptance of Canaanite worship. However, his distinctive burden was the social injustices that marked the ruling class (2:1, 8-9; 3:11; 6:11; cf. Amos). He was a champion of civil rights. He preached with Amos' passion for social justice and Hosea's heart of love.<sup>6</sup> He has often been called, "the prophet of the poor," or, more accurately, the prophet of the oppressed middle class.<sup>7</sup>

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."<sup>8</sup>

As many of the prophetic books, Micah is primarily 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).

"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

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<sup>6</sup>Henk Jagersma, *A History of Israel in the Old Testament Period*, pp. 152, 162.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *The Minor Prophets*, p. 594.

<sup>8</sup>McComiskey, p. 399.

his convictions of God's truth, must commend Micah to believers in every age."<sup>9</sup>

"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."<sup>10</sup>

## 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

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<sup>9</sup>Allen, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 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.

- 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

## 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

### 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.

#### 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 cried, "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.<sup>13</sup> 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

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<sup>11</sup>Allen, p. 265, noted that 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. 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.

<sup>12</sup>See my comments on the writer and date in the Introduction section above. Similar full headings (superscriptions) begin the books of Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Zephaniah.

<sup>13</sup>Micah presented his message in the setting of a courtroom trial. This is the *rib* (lawsuit) oracle form, examples of which are quite common in the Prophets.

given. The Lord would come out of His temple to give His testimony.<sup>14</sup> This appears to be a reference to His 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."<sup>15</sup>

1:3-4 The Lord was about to intervene in the affairs of His people. He is not only transcendent above all but immanent in the world, one of the most basic concepts in Old Testament theology. When He came, all the earth 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 land, where the Israelites worshipped in idolatry (cf. 2 Chron. 33:17), probably also implies that He would crush pagan worship.<sup>16</sup>

"If men would tremble before God, instead of before each other, they would have nothing to fear."<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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

<sup>14</sup>The Hebrew word *hekal* literally means "palace" rather than "temple." It refers to the location of the throne of judgment.

<sup>15</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Micah*, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup>McComiskey, p. 404; John A. Martin, "Micah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1477.

<sup>17</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 152.

<sup>18</sup>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 referred to the Northern Kingdom as "Israel" in contrast to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

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 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."<sup>19</sup>

## **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."<sup>20</sup>

### **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 for 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."<sup>21</sup>

- 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

<sup>19</sup>Allen, p. 274.

<sup>20</sup>Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 624.

<sup>21</sup>Idem, in *Obadiah, . . .*, p. 154.

(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."<sup>22</sup>

## **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.

"Interestingly Sennacherib too used wordplays when recording *his* conquests."<sup>23</sup>

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).

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).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, "Micah," in *The Bible Exposition Commentary/Prophets*, p. 391.

<sup>23</sup>Martin, 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.

<sup>24</sup>See D. W. Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 67, for Sennacherib's account.

- 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.
- 1:14 Zion (Jerusalem) would give Moresheth-gath as a portion of a parting gift to the invader. 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).<sup>25</sup>
- 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."<sup>26</sup>

### **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 just.

In chapter 1 the sins of the people of both Northern and Southern Kingdoms seem 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.

<sup>25</sup>Charles H. Dyer, in *The Old Testament Explorer*, pp. 784-85, charted these place names, their meanings, and their significances helpfully. The known towns encircle Micah's hometown of Moresheth-gath.

<sup>26</sup>McComiskey, p. 408.

### **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."<sup>27</sup>

"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!"<sup>28</sup>

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. 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 . . ."<sup>29</sup>

2:2 The plotting in view involved robbing others of their fields, houses, and inheritances (lands) 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). Furthermore they broke the second greatest commandment that 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.'"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . ., p. 156.

<sup>28</sup>McComiskey, p. 409.

<sup>29</sup>Waltke, in *The Minor* . . ., p. 636.

<sup>30</sup>Wiersbe, p. 392.

- 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."<sup>31</sup>
- 2:5 Evidently the Israelites determined 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. *natap*) 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, disgrace (for the sins they were charging the people with) would not leave the Israelites.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Allen, p. 291.

<sup>32</sup>This preferable interpretation sees the second and third lines of the verse as the words of the false prophets as well 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 were 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 probably 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.<sup>33</sup>

2:9 The rich Israelites also exacted payment from the dependent women of Israel so they could no longer afford to live in their own houses (cf. Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40). Their conduct affected the children since these

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<sup>33</sup>Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 646. This writer noted, *ibid.*, p. 647, 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.

children would have to live out their lives in a foreign land as exiles (cf. Exod. 22:21; Ps. 149:9). 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."<sup>34</sup>

- 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 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)."<sup>35</sup>

"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)."<sup>36</sup>

#### **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

<sup>34</sup>Allen, p. 298.

<sup>35</sup>Wiersbe, p. 393.

<sup>36</sup>Waltke, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 649.

exile.<sup>37</sup> The remnant refers to the part of them that would remain following their dispersion. 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 would be full of noise and people because it would be a time and place of great rejoicing, like the city of Jerusalem was during one of Israel's annual feasts.

"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."<sup>38</sup>

2:13 As a shepherd 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 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."<sup>39</sup>

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

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<sup>37</sup>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.

<sup>38</sup>Martin, p. 1481.

<sup>39</sup>McComiskey, p. 415.

### **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 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 practice justice (fairness, equity). It was not only proper, but it was essential. Again, Jacob and Israel are synonyms for all 12 tribes (cf. 1:5; et al.).

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."<sup>40</sup>

3:4 Because these rulers had turned deaf ears to the pleas of orphans and widows, they 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 picturing God disregarding them, 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).

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<sup>40</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 162.

"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 prophecy there was ever a temptation. Why not make the message match the customer's pocket?"<sup>41</sup>

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.'"<sup>42</sup>

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)."<sup>43</sup>

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 were outlawed in Israel (cf. Deut. 18:10). Thus these two titles were 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

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<sup>41</sup>Allen, p. 311.

<sup>42</sup>Wiersbe, p. 394.

<sup>43</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 163.

themselves. True prophets seek the Lord's gain; false prophets their own."<sup>44</sup>

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.<sup>45</sup> He 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). He 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.

### **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.<sup>46</sup> The judges gave favorable verdicts to those who bribed them (cf. Exod. 23:8; Deut. 27:25), and the priests only taught those who would pay them. The prophets likewise only prophesied for a price (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.

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

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<sup>44</sup>Idem, in *The Minor . . .*, p. 663.

<sup>45</sup>He virtually claimed that his prophecies were inspired. This statement also implies that Micah experienced continuous empowerment 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, continuously (cf. Num. 11:17; 1 Sam. 11:6; 16:13). See Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 87-90.

<sup>46</sup>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.

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."<sup>47</sup>

"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."<sup>48</sup>

## **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.<sup>49</sup>

#### **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.<sup>50</sup> "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—43). In the future, Mt. Zion would become the chief of all

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<sup>47</sup>Allen, p. 321.

<sup>48</sup>Wiersbe, p. 395.

<sup>49</sup>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.

<sup>50</sup>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 mountains on earth rising above all other hills in its importance (cf. Gen. 12:3; Zech. 8:3).<sup>51</sup> People 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 people will stream to it.<sup>52</sup>

"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."<sup>53</sup>

- 4:2 Many nations would 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.
- 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 their judges perverted justice (cf. 3:1-3, 9-11). In that future day, the Millennium when Yahweh through Messiah is reigning on earth, the nations will convert their implements of warfare into agricultural tools to promote life. They will not engage in warfare or train for battle any longer. Standing armies and stockpiles of armaments will be things of the past.<sup>54</sup>
- 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

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<sup>51</sup>"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).

<sup>52</sup>Mays, pp. 96-97.

<sup>53</sup>Allen, p. 323.

<sup>54</sup>In Joel 3:10 the reverse figure appears describing the Tribulation.

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."<sup>55</sup>

- 4:5 In Micah's day the Gentile nations, and many of the Israelites, followed other gods, but in the future they would 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.

The post-exilic books of the Old Testament (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).<sup>56</sup> 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.

- 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).

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<sup>55</sup>McComiskey, p. 422.

<sup>56</sup>"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.

4:8 Micah returned to contemplate again Mt. Zion in the future (cf. v. 1). It would become like a watchtower to the flock of God's people Israel and a stronghold to her descendants then. Israel's former dominion over her world under David and Solomon would return then, even the kingdom of the 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 strongly suggests the revival of the Davidic kingdom (cf. Isa. 9:17; 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).<sup>57</sup>

## **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.

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]."<sup>58</sup>

4:10 The Israelites would leave Jerusalem as a woman in labor. They would have to live in a field 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.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Martin, pp. 1483-84.

<sup>58</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 178.

<sup>59</sup>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."<sup>60</sup>

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.
- 4:13 In the future Israel would be the Lord's instrument to thresh the nations. He would strengthen Israel to overcome them and to turn over 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.
- 5:1 This verse is the last one in chapter 4 in the Hebrew Bible. It continues the theme of Zion's might.

Micah called 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.

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<sup>60</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 179.

"But," v. 2). Third, "judge" (Heb. *shopet*) is different from "ruler" (Heb. *moshel*) in verse 2 and probably describes a different individual.<sup>61</sup>

### **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:

- 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)"<sup>62</sup>

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 of royal promise as the key to the greatness of Jerusalem and Israel heralded in the surrounding pieces."<sup>63</sup>

- 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 (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).

<sup>61</sup>Micah may have chosen *shopet* because of its similarity to *shebet*, "rod." As noted earlier, Micah is famous for his wordplays. Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 181, understood the judge to be Messiah.

<sup>62</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 422.

<sup>63</sup>Allen, pp. 340-41.

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.

- 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 the peace that God promised that Israel 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."<sup>65</sup>

#### **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 continue 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

<sup>64</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Shepherd," by R. A. Stewart.

<sup>65</sup>Wiersbe, p. 397.

"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.

- 5:6 Israel's leaders will then 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."<sup>66</sup>

### **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!

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<sup>66</sup>Chisholm, *Handbook on . . .*, p. 424.

### **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).
- 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). Fortunetellers 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."<sup>67</sup>

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 angrily take vengeance on the nations that had 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."<sup>68</sup>

"God is not a machine but a person, and some things need to be said and done with passion."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 190.

<sup>68</sup>Allen, p. 360.

<sup>69</sup>Waltke, in *The Minor* . . . , p. 723.

**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).

**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.<sup>70</sup> 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 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).
- 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

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<sup>70</sup>Compare the function of memorial stones (Gen. 31:43-50; Josh. 22:21-28).

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).

### **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.<sup>71</sup> Specifically, He wanted them 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, to practice loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) by carrying through 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.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>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.

<sup>72</sup>Mays, p. 142. See also Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 197.

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 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."<sup>73</sup>

### **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 that he or she had accumulated through wicked behavior. For example, was there any seller who used a small ephah, one 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.<sup>74</sup> Micah's contemporaries were stretching the limits beyond what was acceptable.

<sup>73</sup>Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 403.

<sup>74</sup>*The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Weights and Measures," by D. J. Wiseman.

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 this was evidence of injustice that arose from a heart of unkindness toward others and lack of submission to God (v. 8).

### **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 repeating 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. 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).<sup>75</sup> 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 by other nations.

"Loss of reputation is ever the final indignity which rubs salt into the wounds of suffering."<sup>76</sup>

### **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

<sup>75</sup>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.

<sup>76</sup>Allen, p. 382.

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).

- 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.<sup>77</sup> 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."<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup>Waltke, in *Obadiah*, . . . , p. 200, taking a less literal view, believed "'both hands' refer to 'the great man' and the officials next to him. . . . The king and his depraved minions flagrantly pervert the covenant . . ."

<sup>78</sup>Allen, 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."<sup>79</sup>

#### **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).

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<sup>79</sup>Waltke, 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 vineyards would be rebuilt and the boundaries of Judah extended (cf. Ezek. 47:13-23; Obad. 19-20).<sup>80</sup> 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 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).
- 7:13 Before that, however, the earth will become desolate because God will judge 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 will immediately follow 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 (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.

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<sup>80</sup>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).

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).<sup>81</sup>

"Few passages in Scripture contain so much 'distilled theology' as Micah 7:18-20."<sup>82</sup>

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).

7:19 Yahweh would again have compassion (tender, heartfelt concern, Heb. *reham*) on the Israelites, as He had done so often in their history (cf. Ps. 102:13; 103:4, 13; 116:5; 119:156; Hos. 14:3; 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 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).

"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."<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Modern orthodox Jews read verses 18-20 in their synagogues on the day of Atonement following the reading of Jonah.

<sup>82</sup>Wiersbe, p. 402.

<sup>83</sup>McComiskey, p. 440.

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