

The Book of Micah – A Brief Commentary

Dub McClish

Introduction

Micah 1:1 serves as an appropriate outline for introductory details.

Identity of Micah

Micah (an abbreviated form of *Micaiah*) means, “Who is like unto Jehovah,” almost the very question with which the prophet concluded his book (7:18). He identified himself as “the Morasthite,” that is, a dweller in Moresheth, a rural village about 22 miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was also known as “Moresheth–Gath” (1:14) due to its former dependency upon the Philistine city of Gath. He may have identified himself by his home town to distinguish himself from the fearless prophet Micaiah, son of Imlah, who withstood Ahab and his 400 hired prophets some two centuries earlier (1 Kin. 22:8). Although Micah was a man of the country rather than of the city, this in no way diminished his power as a spokesman for God. We are told nothing of his parents, leading to the conjecture that he was of humble origins. If he had any family, we are not told of it.

Times and Background of Micah

The Word of the Lord came to Micah “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.”¹ From the beginning of the reign of the first to the end of the last of these successive monarchs spanned approximately 740–687 B.C. A reasonable speculation about the time of Micah’s prophetic activity would thus be from about 740–700 B.C. Although Micah does not so inform us, he was also contemporary with Isaiah, the great Judean prophet (Isa. 1:1) and with Hosea, the prophet of Israel in its last evil days (Hos. 1:1). While Micah lived in Judah, his prophecy concerned both “Samaria and Jerusalem” (i.e., Israel and Judah).

The political background of the time of Micah found the small and weak kingdoms of Israel and Judah between the power–hungry forces of Egypt to their southwest and Assyria and Syria to their north. Jeroboam II (who died about a century before Micah’s time [1 Kin. 14:23–28]), was the last politically strong king of Israel. His successors were a sorry lot who led Israel into increasing wickedness and weakness. Pekah of Israel joined Rezin of Syria to make war against Jerusalem during the reign of Ahaz of Judah (736–716 B.C.). Ahaz appealed to Assyria and received her help. The Assyrians first conquered the Syrian stronghold of Damascus and later (722 B.C.) sacked Samaria and took Israel into captivity as punishment from God for her sins (2 Kin. 17:6ff).

Assyria placed Judah under tribute in return for its help, but Hezekiah rebelled (2 Kin. 18:7), provoking Sennacherib, the Assyrian monarch, to invade Judah and overrun much of its territory (v. 13). Next, he threatened Jerusalem, causing Hezekiah to petition Jehovah for deliverance. God answered, destroying 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night, and causing Sennacherib to immediately return to Nineveh (2 Kin. 18:17–19:37). Such were the conditions of terror, political turmoil, and bloodshed during the life of Micah. Some of these events will be seen to be the subject of some of the prophecies of Micah.

The Source of Micah's Prophecy

This book claims to be “the word of the Lord that came to Micah.” Later in the book he declared: “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (3:8). He was still counted a true prophet a century later (Jer. 26:18) and seven centuries later, as well (Mat. 2:6; 10:35–36). He was included in Peter’s explanation of the source of the prophetic writings: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Skeptics and destructive critics, with an *a priori* denial of supernatural predictive prophecy, have long claimed that Micah must be dated later than Micah 1:1 claims, due to the graphic description of the destruction of Samaria (1:6–7). Their postulation is that it must have actually been written after Samaria was destroyed (perhaps even in the days of Manasseh, who succeeded Hezekiah) and couched in the future tense, thus making it to appear prophetic. This is as blasphemous as it is absurd. For one thing, this makes a liar and deceiver of Micah. Further, it does not solve any “problem” for the faithless critic. I know of none who are willing to date it after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.), over a century later than Micah, yet he clearly prophesied that catastrophe (3:12), just as he did that of Samaria. If he could accurately foresee the destruction of the capital of Judah some 125–150 years after his time, why should the critics have a problem with his foreseeing the destruction of Israel’s capital by perhaps only 18 years? An even worse problem for the critic and his denial of true predictive prophecy is the announcement that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem 700 years before it came to pass (5:2; Mat. 2:6)! There is simply no way of explaining the prophecy of Micah (and that of the other Biblical prophets) apart from the claims they made for their source of information—the Spirit of God.

Miscellaneous Information Relating to Micah's Prophecy

Micah proclaimed two very significant Messianic prophecies. One is the notable declaration of Jesus' birthplace (5:2–5), and the other is the full description of the establishment, nature, and extent of His kingdom, the church (4:1–3). The almost word-for-word parallels between the last-mentioned passage and Isaiah 2:2–4 are well known. A senseless controversy has long existed concerning which prophet borrowed from the other. The simple truth is that the same Spirit moved both of these men who lived at the same time and addressed the same nation to serve as two independent witnesses of this prophecy of surpassing importance. Moreover, Isaiah was a “city prophet,” while Micah was a “rural prophet, so their spheres of influence were not the same. Micah's prophecy of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ was the very passage from which the chief priests and the scribes read when wicked Herod, on behalf of the wise men, asked where the new King was to be born (Mat. 2:1–6).

Two additional passages from Micah are quoted elsewhere in the Bible: (1) Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem over a century after Micah and the corrupt priests and prophets in Jerusalem clamored for his death. The elders of the people cautioned them against the evil plan by reminding them that Micah had said the same thing a century earlier and instead of killing the prophet, Hezekiah besought God to spare the city, which He did (Jer. 26:11–18). They read from Micah 3:12 on that occasion, and Jeremiah's life was spared. (2) The Lord twice incorporated Micah 7:6 in His words of warning concerning the perils His disciples would encounter (Mat. 10:35–36; Luke 12:52–53).

Micah provides three distinct divisions in his book. Each of them is introduced with the exhortation for the reader to hear the prophetic message. Section one proclaims judgments against both Samaria and Jerusalem (1:2–2:13). Section two further denounces the sins of the people, but also promises the building of the “house of the Lord” and the birth of a new ruler (3:1–5:15). Section three is a description of a “controversy” the Lord has with His people (6:1–7:20). I have divided my exposition of Micah into these three sections.

Judgments Against Samaria and Jerusalem (1:2–2:13)

Chapter 1:2–5: These verses are for the purpose of arresting the reader's attention to the judgments which will be uttered. In verse 2 the whole earth is called upon to hear and learn from the terrible things God will do to Israel and Judah. God's words of judgment through Micah would testify against all nations in their evils: if God would destroy His own people, what would He do to the nations? God is depicted as coming down out of Heaven in wrath with judgments

so severe that they are typified by descriptions of earthquake and volcanic eruption (vv. 3–4). “For the transgression of Jacob is all this” explains the cause of these awful judgments (v. 5). “Jacob” likely stands for both nations of the divided kingdom. Samaria (the capital of Israel) and Jerusalem (the capital of Judah) are held accountable as the fountains of wickedness and ruin in the respective nations.

Chapter 1:6–7: These verses prophesy and describe the destruction of Samaria. That of Samaria is first described just as it would be the first destroyed. The once proud capital would be leveled, as if ground prepared for a vineyard and the once–stately buildings would be torn down to their foundations (v. 6). Idolatry, the source of God’s wrath against her, would be obliterated (v. 7).

Chapter 1:8–9: Here we have a graphic lament over the awful fate of Samaria that would be destroyed less than 20 years after his prophecy. Micah depicted himself as making the wailing sound of the jackal (ASV) and the mourning sound of the ostrich (ASV) (v. 8). Her spiritual wound or ailment was too grievous to be repaired; it had come to affect even Judah and Jerusalem (v. 9). This may mean that the news of the destruction of Samaria had reached Jerusalem, or (more probably) that the spiritual disease of idolatry (Israel’s incurable wound) had invaded even the holy city of Zion, and it, too, must perish.

Chapter 1:10–16: This section contains a listing of numerous towns and cities in Judah, beginning with the old Philistine stronghold of Gath. Since these are cities in Judean territory (even the doom of Jerusalem is mentioned, v. 12), it seems that with verse 9 the prophet shifted his emphasis from the destruction of Israel to that of Judah. In some cases Micah indicated the kind of lamentation various cities should make or not make. In others he warned of impending doom. He spoke of responses various cities would make to their calamities. Numerous commentators have pointed out the many paronomasias (i.e., “puns”) employed by the prophet in this section. They are lost in the English translations, but a fair sampling of them is seen in James Moffat’s paraphrase of verses 10 and 11: “Tell it not in Tell–town (Gath), Weep tears at Tear–town (Bochim), Grovel in the dust at Dust–town (Beth–ophra), Fair stripped, O Fair–town (Saphir)! Stir–town (Zaanan) dares not stir....”²

By the time of Micah, Gath (v. 10) had likely ceased to be an important Philistine city, if it still existed. It is therefore likely that the prophet was using this statement from David’s lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (uttered some 3 centuries earlier, 2 Sam. 1:20) in a proverbial sense. The intent of the statement, as used both by David and Micah, was to warn

against letting God's enemies know of the shame, sorrow, and defeat of His people, lest they gloat.

It may be that this listing of cities traces the route which Sennacherib, the Assyrian, would follow when he assaulted "all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them" (involving Lachish, cf. Micah 1:13) in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18:13–14). It also involved a threat against Jerusalem, begun by Sennacherib's generals and later joined by Sennacherib himself (18:17; 19:20–32). God answered Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance and slew 185,000 of the Assyrians encamped against Jerusalem, forcing the heathen king to return to Nineveh empty-handed (19:35–36). This would seem to harmonize with Micah's expression that "evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem" (1:12, *emph. DM*), but not within the city at this time.

While God spared this assault on the city through Hezekiah's intercession (19:20) and for His own and David's sakes (v. 34), the day would come when those of Jerusalem would make themselves bald in the shame of the captivity into which they would be taken (Mic. 1:16). This is believed to be a reference to the destruction wrought upon the city by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., upon which its survivors were taken into 70 years of Babylonian captivity (2 Chr. 36:11–21).

Chapter 2:1–11: In this section Micah describes and denounces some of the oppressions and injustices being perpetrated by the powerful and wealthy in his time, and for which they would eventually pay the penalty of removal from their land. In their covetousness they lay awake at night, scheming how they could rob others of their houses, lands, and inheritances (vv. 1–2). While they were devising evil against their fellows, God was devising evil against "this family" (i.e., "the house of Jacob" (v. 7), consisting of a yoke of servitude and humiliation they could in no wise avoid (v. 3; cf. 1:9).

Verse 4 tells of the retribution in kind of God's justice, concerning which even their enemies would take up a pretended lamentation. As they had stripped their brethren of their lands, so would others strip theirs and divide it to others. They would no longer possess their measured fields (v. 5). Verse 6 indicates that there were those among the people (perhaps the rich oppressors and false prophets) who did not want to hear these words of their own destruction. They forbade God's true prophet to further rebuke them and remind them of their coming woes. Over in Jerusalem, Isaiah was hearing the same thing from the stiff-necked city people:

That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord:
Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things,

Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us (Isa. 30:9–11; cf. Amos 7:10–13).

While the wording in the latter part of verse 6 is somewhat ambiguous, it appears that Micah is saying that the guilty folk do not want to hear any more such outcries against their sins and promises of doom lest they be made to feel ashamed. The piercing power of God's Word is ever present in condemning the guilty. God's people who are bent on continuing in their wickedness have ever sought to silence those who hold up before them the mirror of Divine revelation. Almost 2,700 years ago worldly members of God's family were demanding "positive-only" preaching and "make-us-feel-good-about-ourselves" sermons!

In verse 7 it appears that some of the evil-doers were arguing that Micah's prophecy against them could not be true because the Lord promised good rather than evil to His people. How then could he bring such calamity upon them? Micah's answer is a reminder that such promises of blessings from God are ever conditional—they never applied to anyone but the upright. Moses had plainly stated God's conditional promise in his final address:

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known (Deu. 11:26–28).

God's promise of blessings for His people, including eternal salvation, is still conditioned upon faithful obedience: "And being made perfect, he [Christ] became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). Men may chafe at insistence upon obeying the Law of Christ all they please. They may hurl *legalist* at those who emphasize the importance of keeping the commandments of Christ as loudly as they please. The fact still remains that those do not love Him who disobey Him (John 14:15).

Verses 8 and 9 are intended to quash even the thought of self-justification in the oppressive aristocracy. Far from being those who walked uprightly (v. 7), Micah recited additional crimes they were committing against those who are defenseless. They were robbing some of the very clothes on their backs and casting women and children out of their homes. These things God willed them to have as His own glorious gifts, but the iniquitous took them away "forever" (i.e., never to be returned, or perhaps, persistently). God made it plain in Moses' law that the widow and the orphan were special interests of His care: "Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child" (Exo. 22:22). The Law of Christ teaches the same: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jam 1:27).

Verse 10 brings yet another promise that their removal from the land would take place. They would one day have to arise and depart. As they had cast the widow and orphan out of their places, so would they be cast out and not be allowed rest. They had polluted the land by their wickedness, and in its destruction, they would be destroyed as a nation.

Having mentioned the efforts of evil men to squelch the faithful prophet (v. 6), Micah told them (v. 11) the sort of prophet they would accept and support. Their kind of prophet was a liar who would prophesy to them of wine and strong drink, apparently encouraging them to imbibe. It is interesting to note in passing that one thing many brethren clamor for today in preachers is silence concerning and justification for their worldly practices, including drinking of alcoholic beverages. Sadly, many a preacher is now willing to “prophesy” the lie to them that such behavior is perfectly acceptable.

When a people reject the true messenger of God (thus rejecting both God’s message and God Himself), they encourage the false prophet. There have always been unscrupulous men and women who would tell people what they wanted to hear for a price, regardless of how big the lie or damnable the heresy. Wicked Ahab had 400 hired court prophets who were quite willing to say whatever the king wanted to hear (1 Kin. 22:6–7). He hated and persecuted Micaiah (perhaps the namesake of Micah), God’s true prophet, because “...he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (vv. 8ff).

False prophets abound in the spiritual Israel of the church. Wicked and false brethren readily prefer them and their lies over the Truth. They are being retained and eagerly sought after as preachers and professors and, in many cases, with exorbitant wages, while they spread their toxic teaching. Paul prophesied to Timothy of this very abhorrence of the Truth and lust for error that is now found among us: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3–4). A preference for error over Truth and for the heretic over the faithful messenger of God in God’s people today, if persisted in, will bring upon those corrupt brethren the spiritual captivity of sin and excision from the promised eternal inheritance.

Chapter 2:12–13: In the very midst of these prophecies of doom and calamity, Micah issued a hope-filled promise. The general and immediate meaning of these verses is that although God would cause their enemies to overwhelm and displace them to a strange land, the remnant of them would one day be called forth by God and returned to their land. The particulars of verse 12 involve the following: This promise would involve all of Jacob’s being put

together once more, thus a reuniting of Israel and Judah. Bozrah (in Edom), famed for its vast flocks of sheep, indicates a large gathering, as does the great noise they would make. “The breaker” (v. 13) is likely descriptive of God, who would break open the gate of their captors and lead them out, clearing the way as would a king who would “pass before them.”

Since the immediate context of chapters 1 and 2 prophesies the fall of Samaria to Assyria and of Jerusalem to Babylon and the respective displacements that followed them, it would seem unnatural not to primarily apply this promised return to that of the exiles to Canaan. This began with the God-inspired encouragement of Cyrus the Persian in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1–3). This return would include not only those of Judah, but those of Israel, who would be once more one people. Jeremiah distinctly promised this very thing relative to the return of the captives (Jer. 31:1–28). While part of the captivity in Babylon, Ezekiel once took two sticks and placed them together in one hand to graphically prophesy the reunification of the separate states (Eze. 37:15–22).³ Thus, when Micah declared that all of Jacob would be put back together (v. 12) we see the fulfillment in the return of the captives. It was God who allowed them to “break up, pass through, and go out of” the gate of captivity by ordering Cyrus to send the captives home and build Him a house in Jerusalem (2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:2–3).

It is quite possible that Micah 1:12–13 have Messianic overtones as well. The reference to assembling all of Jacob and the remnant of Israel could well refer to the preaching of the Gospel by which Christ called (and calls) His people out of the captivity of sin and into His kingdom of spiritual Israel (Rom. 2:28–29; 6:17–18; Eph. 4:8; 2 The. 2:13–14). Christ has brought all nations together in one body through the cross (Eph. 2:16–19), thus He would be the “Breaker” “...who breaks down the wall of sin that separated them from the Lord and made them bondsmen.”⁴

Denunciation of Evils and Messianic Promises (3:1–5:15)

Chapter 3:1–4: These words of condemnation are addressed to the heads and princes of the people. They are derided for not knowing the meaning of judgment or justice when they are entrusted with exercising it (v. 1). They had totally reversed their values, hating good and loving evil. They had become so rapacious in robbing and defrauding the people that they are compared to cannibals feasting on the flesh of their fellows (vv. 2–3). In the trials which would come upon these evil rulers God would turn his face and ears away from plight because of their wickedness (v. 4).

Chapter 3:5–8: This paragraph is an outcry against false prophets. They caused error among the people by their false teaching which wounded its victims as if bitten by the false prophets, all the while posing as messengers of peace. They would make war against those who did not support them (v. 5). The doom of these bearers of error is described as the night and darkness with no word from God (vv. 6–7). So shall it eventually be with all purveyors of religious error. In contrast, Micah was full of God’s Spirit, of judgment, of power to faithfully convey God’s message of condemnation to Israel (v. 8).

Chapter 3:9–12: In this section Micah denounces prince, judge, priest, and prophet (v. 9) and graphically describes Jerusalem’s destruction. The princes were condemned as those who had built Jerusalem upon the blood money of their victims (v. 10). The judges sought bribes, and the priests and prophets worked only for money, yet foolishly thought God would forever protect them (v. 11). Not so! The day would come when their evils would be avenged in the leveling of Jerusalem (v. 12). This is the very verse that caused the life of Jeremiah to be spared when he was making similar pronouncements of doom against Jerusalem a century later (Jer. 9:11; 26:18). Nebuchadnezzar would leave it no better than a heap of rubble after his siege and conquest in 586 B.C. (v. 12). While God’s judgment against corruption in government or religion is not always immediate, it is no less certain and severe!

Chapter 4:1–8: This paragraph interrupts the message of judgment upon Jerusalem with one of great hope and promise. As discussed in the introduction, verses 1–3 are almost identical with Isaiah 2:2–4. This prophecy is the most beautiful, detailed, and incontrovertible description of the establishment of the church of Christ to be found in Holy Writ, and it is found not once, but twice. Little wonder the devil, through unbelieving skeptics, does his best to discredit these sublime and significant verses!

In the latter days (last days, KJV) or literally, at the end of the days (v. 1a), marks a time frame. It may mean the last days of the Jewish dispensation or it may refer to the last dispensation (the present Christian Age) as a whole. In either case, the actual time is the same since the end of the former marked the beginning of the latter. This is an unmistakable reference to the time of the Messiah. “At the end of the days’...always denotes the Messianic era when used by the prophets....”⁵ The first Pentecost after the resurrection of the Christ is identified by Peter as the time referred to in this phrase, although he quoted it from Joel 2:28 (Acts 2:16–17).

The mountain of Jehovah’s house... (v. 1b) is a reference to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem on which the temple then stood. It represented the presence, worship, and religion of God. The

previous verse (3:12) had told of the utter destruction of the literal “mountain of the house” then standing. It would be replaced with one far better and more exalted, and its place of establishment would be Jerusalem. This phrase can refer to nothing but the kingdom of the Christ, His church, the establishment of which was the outcome of the events on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47).

And people shall flow unto it (v. 1c). This statement points to the universal nature of the Lord’s house. Isaiah’s wording is a bit plainer: “And all nations shall flow unto it” (2:2). The first phrase of the next verse (4:2) proves this to be Micah’s meaning. *Nations* is the common Old Testament word for Gentiles. The Gospel and the religion of Christ were to be for all the nations, all the world, the whole creation (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47), in contrast with the national restrictions of Judaism. Thus on Pentecost, Peter declared that the promise included not only those to whom he then spoke (Jews), but also “to all that are afar off” (Gentiles) (Acts 2:39).

In this new age and with this new religion men of many nations would seek salvation of the God of Jacob and in His house (v. 2a). They would understand that they must go to Him to receive knowledge of His will. The religion of Christ would be (is) one that would (does) require men to learn and understand the Truth of the Gospel (Rom. 10:17; John 6:45). The church is the dispenser of the Gospel to the world (1 Tim. 3:15).

The Law/Word of the Lord would proceed from Zion/Jerusalem (v. 2b). This promise foretells the sending forth of the Gospel and specifies that it would go forth from Jerusalem when the new order was set up. This is precisely what occurred on Pentecost when the Gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, resulting in the establishment of the church of the Lord (Acts 2:14–47). Jesus specified Jerusalem as the beginning place for taking the Gospel to the world (Luke 24:46–47; Acts 1:8).

It is worthy of note (for the benefit of those who deny that Christ has any spiritual Law which we must obey) that Micah described the Gospel as “the law.” In the events recorded in Acts 2—and only in those events—are all the necessary features found to fulfill this remarkable manifold prophecy, uttered some seven centuries years before its fulfillment. Further, none can read this prophecy and properly apply it and still allege that the church is only an afterthought, a substitute, an emergency-necessitated institution, not originally planned, but “hatched up” in a moment to operate in the place of the alleged “failed” kingdom of Christ. God’s “eternal purpose” for man’s redemption included the church (Eph. 3:9–11).

Micah depicts Christ as final judge and arbiter of all questions (v. 3a), which authority is exercised through His written Word. His kingdom will not be advanced by fighting armies and carnal weapons (v. 3b; cf. John 18:36). Unlike those in the old kingdom, about to be broken, those in the new kingdom would not need to study or perform military maneuvers anymore. The figure of sitting under the vine and fig tree (v. 4a) connotes peace, safety, and security; none would ever prevail against this new kingdom, not even the “gates of hades” (Mat. 16:18). This promise had all of the integrity of God behind it (v. 4b); it could not and it did not fail.

Micah observed that while those who are not God’s people would go on trusting in their false, dead, and powerless deities, God’s people would walk in the name and by the strength and authority of Jehovah, the true and living God (v. 5a). The empires, institutions, and religions of men come and go, but the church of the Lord would remain and prevail “for ever and ever” (v. 5b). It is “the kingdom which shall never be destroyed, ...and it shall stand forever” (Dan. 2:44). It is “the kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:23, 28), which our Savior will at last deliver it safely into the Father’s eternal care (I Cor. 15:24).

In the day when all these wonderful things would occur the Lord would gather even those he was going to afflict and cast out so that they could be accepted into His new kingdom (v. 6). They would be once more a “strong nation” with the Lord as their king in Zion (v. 7). This poetic language seems to be saying that even the rebellious and corrupt stock of Israel would not be cut off from the Messianic kingdom, provided, of course, that they choose to be gathered unto God by obeying Him.

Flock towers (v. 8a) were erected by shepherds from which they could better observe and protect their sheep. Zion/Jerusalem is likened unto such a watchtower as a stronghold, a symbol of safety and strength, from which the Lord would watch over His people. To Zion a kingdom would come that would involve the “first [former] dominion,” which refers to the restoration of the throne of David (8b). This foretells the coming of the Messiah, the Son of David, who was to be given a throne and a kingdom eternal (2 Sam. 7:12–13). These were fulfilled in Jesus, the Christ, “the Son of David” (Mat. 1:6–17), who was raised from the dead, has ascended on high, and has received that throne at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:29–36; Heb. 1:3; cf. Dan. 7:13–14). That everlasting kingdom is His church (Mat. 16:18–19; Col. 1:2, 13; Heb. 12:23, 28; Rev. 1:6; et al.), which was established on Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2:36–47).

Chapter 4:9–13: In this final part of the chapter, Micah moved from the glorious events of the future (relative to him) “last days” back to the painful realities of the more immediate

present and future circumstances of his people. They would cry aloud as a woman in advanced labor in their pangs of suffering and humiliation as they would be stripped of their king/counsellor (v. 9). The principal source of their pain would be their captivity, during which they would be forced from their homes to live in the fields in the faraway land of Babylon (v. 10a). Here is another absolutely amazing example and proof of Biblical/prophetic inspiration. None but God could know these events of more than a century beyond Micah's time. These events not only involved the fact of Judah's captivity, but also that Babylon, which in the time of Micah was little more than a province of Assyria, would be a world power and the place of exile!

Although the terrible travail was once more announced, it was tempered with the corresponding promise of deliverance (10b). I do not see a Messianic application (except perhaps in a remotely typical sense) in this statement, due to the specific reference to Babylon. I rather take it as simply the promise that they would not evermore remain in their impending captivity. As seen earlier (cf. comments on 2:12–13), Cyrus the Persian (at God's instigation) would end their captivity 70 years after the beginning of the exile (Isa. 44:28; 2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–3).

The nations were watching God's people, eager to witness their destruction (v. 11). However, it was not God's plan to destroy, but merely to punish her for her corruption; it was the blood-thirsty nations that would be destroyed like wheat on the threshing-floor (v. 12). Israel ("daughter of Zion") would be empowered by God to do the threshing of the nations (v. 13a). This is variously understood in reference to (1) the destruction of Sennacherib's army that would soon surround Jerusalem, (2) the ultimate demise of Assyria and the return of the remnant from captivity, or (3) the Maccabean victories over Syria in the second century B.C. The spoils of whichever conquest is involved in this prophecy would be devoted to the Lord (v. 13b). The judgments and victories described in verses 11–13 would surely typify the spiritual power of spiritual Israel which would be (and now is) exercised through Messiah's law which issued forth from Zion.

Chapter 5:1–15: The precious gem of this chapter is the announcement of the birthplace of the Messiah (v. 2). Many commentators suggest that verse 1 actually fits better as the conclusion to chapter 4. Jerusalem was called upon to gather her forces against her besieger who would smite their judge upon the cheek (v. 1). This verse is generally applied to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., which ended with the humiliation of King Zedekiah (their "judge"), which may be correct. It has at least a typical force (as does 4:11–13), however, in reference to the enemies of Christ who would smite and humiliate Him before

crucifying Him (Mat. 26:67–68; John 18:22; 19:1–3; et al.). Indeed, one commentator believes that its primary reference is to Christ and suggests that “judge” should be capitalized to so indicate.⁶ This understanding of verse 1 would admittedly furnish a perfect preface to verse 2.

That verse 2 is primarily and fundamentally Messianic cannot be rationally disputed. Such was the correct understanding of it by the leaders in Judaism who were contemporary with the Lord (Mat. 2:1–6). None other than the Messiah, the Son of David, Shiloh out of Judah (Gen. 49:10) fits the *ruler in Israel* designation. *Ephrath* is affixed to Bethlehem lest it be confused with any other town by that name (e.g., Jos. 19:15). Little known even in Judah, Bethlehem would be propelled to unrivaled fame by being the birthplace of the “only begotten from the Father” (John 1:14). His incarnation is declared in that he had not merely a fleshly, temporal origin, but also an eternal one. This prophecy of manifold specifics is another irrefragable evidence of Biblical inspiration.

The next few verses describe some of the works of this “ruler in Israel.” Micah first introduced the figure of a woman in labor to deliver in 4:9–10. There, Micah compared exiled Judah to a woman in birth travail, likely, also the intended application of verse 3 here. The meaning seems to be that God would give Israel up to trial and subjection, yet preserving a remnant of her, until she brought forth the babe in Bethlehem through Mary. Afterward, they would be allowed to become part of the true Israel, the church.

The Christ is depicted as a powerful Shepherd who, by the authority of Jehovah, would feed His flock (v. 4; cf. John 10:11). Micah describes Him as the provider and protector of the peace against all enemies, which enemies were typified by the Assyrians, Israel’s terrible tormentors of the moment (vv. 5–6). The “seven shepherds, and eight principal men” are likely intended to convey a more–than–adequate defensive force, symbolizing the power of Christ and His all–conquering power in the final Judgment.

Verses 7 and 8 describe activities of “the remnant of Jacob,” which seems to be a figurative term for the Messianic kingdom, the church. She would be a blessing among the nations comparable to the dew and showers in a thirsty land (v. 7). Through Christ the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled that God would bless all the nations through his seed (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). She would walk among the nations as a powerful force, treading her spiritual enemies underfoot and defeating sin and Satan, cutting off all enemies (vv. 8–9).

Verses 10–15 compose a unit. *In that day* (v. 10) refers to the day when the Messiah reigns and when the “remnant of Jacob” (the church) prevails. There will be no dependence upon military might and fortresses (vv. 10–11; cf. 4:3), wizards (v. 12), or false gods (vv. 13–14).

Those who refuse to submit to the Christ will suffer His awful vengeance of the Judgment (v. 15). True saints will never use carnal weapons to advance the cause, consult astrologers and fortune-tellers, or worship any false god. Woe be unto those Christians who resort to such heathen practices!

The Lord's Controversy with His People (6:1–7:20)

Chapter 6:1–5: God challenged Israel to give explanation of her rebellion. He called upon the mountains and hills to witness his controversy with His people (vv. 1–2). He severely condemned Israel for her ingratitude, inviting her to produce any excuses she had for it (v. 3) and then reminded them of numerous times He had delivered and spared them, demonstrating His righteousness (vv. 4–5).

Chapter 6:6–8: These verses give the response of the people to God's judgment against them. Could they assuage His wrath by coming before Him with animal sacrifices, offerings of oil, or even their most prized possessions, a firstborn child (vv. 6–7)? No! Such outward manifestations of devotion by themselves were quite insufficient. God also demanded wholeness of character, demonstrated in just, merciful, and humble behavior (v. 8). As the following section will show, these were the very things of which they were bereft, leaving them a people whose corruptions could not be cleansed by mere empty, outward ritual. So it was when the Lord walked the earth, as seen in His denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees (Mat. 23:1–38; et al.). And so it remains to the present.

This passage must not be twisted to imply that God did (does) not desire, command, or accept outward manifestations of devotion to Him. Indeed, he has required these in every age. First, let us understand that this proposal was not made by a people intent on pleasing God. Rather, they were trying to "buy off" God through their sacrifices, so as to continue in their iniquities. Second, just as sacrifice can never be a substitute for obedience (1 Sam. 15:22), neither can man save himself by his own moral goodness apart from appropriating the blood of Christ, God's perfect sacrifice for sin (Rom. 5:9; Heb. 9:22; 1 Pet. 1:18–21; et al.). The main point of this passage is that outward acts of worship are vain and hypocritical if not joined with the power of a virtuous life. It is tragic to see some of God's people even now who have been deceived into believing they can live in worldliness through the week as long as they "go through the motions" of worship on the Lord's day.

Chapter 6:9–16: This paragraph consists of a statement God's charges against His people and the reward they will receive for their behavior. Micah depicted his message as the

voice of Jehovah, the rod of judgment, crying unto the city (Jerusalem)—a message to which wise men would give heed (v. 9). Through both questions and declarations, God set out His charges against the people. They gained and held their treasures by giving God–despised scant measures, wicked balances, and deceitful weights (vv. 10–11). They had enriched themselves by violence and fraud (v. 12).

Their deserved punishments would sicken them (v. 13). These would involve want, disaster, deprivation, and utter humiliation (vv. 14–15). Moses warned of these very curses some 800 years before the time of Micah as the rewards of rebellion against God’s law, including the fact that they would be led captive into a foreign land (Deu. 28:29–45).

The statutes of Omri and the works of the house of Ahab (v. 16) refer to the behavior of the people who still followed the wicked influence of those Godless monsters of 150 years before. Omri, king of Israel (cir. 894–876 B.C.) was a man of consummate iniquity (1 Kin. 16:25). He produced not only a wicked son, Ahab, who corrupted Israel with the worship of Baal (1 Kin. 16:30–33). Moreover, Ahab and his even more corrupt wife, Jezebel, produced Athalia, a daughter cut from her parents’ cloth, who hastened the corruption of Judah through her marriage to Jehoram, one of the worst of Judah’s monarchs (2 Chr. 21:5–6; 22:1–4). Thus the solemn charge and judgment of verse 16 is seen to apply to all of Jacob (both Israel and Judah). (Influence is a powerful thing, spanning generations, yea centuries!) The point of Micah 6:16 is that the people had rejected God by rejecting His law (John 12:48) and now they must pay the inevitable, awful price. This is typical of the even more severe eternal penalty that must be paid for rebellion against God and His Son (John 5:28–29; Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:10–11; 2 The. 1:8–9).

Chapter 7:1–20: Micah closed his prophetic message with a final description of the sins of his people, a statement of hope, and an outpouring of praise. Verses 1–6 summarize the widespread iniquity among God’s people. Micah was utterly depressed and disappointed at what he saw all about him (v. 1):

1. No righteous man could be found (Psa. 14:1–3; Rom. 3:10), but all sought how to victimize each other (v. 2).
2. They so lusted for evil that they wrought it with both hands; even their leaders openly sought bribes (v. 3).
3. Their finest man was no better than a hurtful brier or thorn hedge; the word of the prophets (watchmen), promising their doom, would come to pass (v. 4).
4. Dishonesty and greed so reigned that none could trust friend, wife, parent, or child (vv. 5–6).

Jesus quoted verse 6 (Mat. 10:35–36; Luke 12:52–53) to describe some of the persecution those who follow Him could expect. The picture painted by Micah is one in which all civil and social institutions had collapsed and anarchy reigned. Such is the sordid picture of man, wherever and whenever there is general rebellion against God!

Verses 7–17 constitute a message of hope, against the backdrop of the terrible trial and suffering they must experience. Micah would not reject God, but would look unto Him in faith for deliverance (v. 7). The rejoicing of God’s enemies would be brief, because God would raise His fallen people after they suffered the fruit of their sin (vv. 8–10). He would restore them, Zion’s walls would be rebuilt, and the nations would come to her for blessing (vv. 11–12). Those in the world who would reject God and His people would remain bereft of blessing as the fruit of their works (v. 13). God would give His remnant of faithful people the choice blessings of peace and security such as would cause the nations to be awe-struck (vv. 14–17).

One sees in this highly figurative language a reference to the literal return of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile. However, we dare not ignore the Messianic implications of the passage. These include:

1. The building of the church in Jerusalem (v. 11; cf. 4:1)
2. The universal appeal the church would have through the Gospel message (v. 12; cf. 4:1–2)
3. The peace and security that would reside in her (v. 14; cf. Eph. 2:15; Phi. 4:6; Heb. 13:5–6)
4. The marvelous signs and wonders of the Lord and His apostles that would accompany it (v. 15; cf. John 20:30–31; Acts 2:1–2; 5:12; I Cor. 12:8–11; et al.).

In verses 16 and 17 there may be a reference to the demonstration of God’s power in the resurrection of His Son and the way it would cause to pale in comparison all the power that Satan-inspired men could bring against Him (i.e., His crucifixion). Satan’s efforts would only “bruise His heel,” but He would “bruise Satan’s head” (Gen. 3:15). Even the “gates of Hades”—death itself—would not prevent the establishment of His church/kingdom (Mat. 16:18–19)! Others see in these verses the power of the Gospel to humble men⁷ or the abject submission of all men to God and His Son at the Judgment.⁸ Those who see in this section promises of a literal millennial kingdom on earth during which the nations shall submit to Israel with Christ on a throne in Jerusalem are guilty of grievous and fatal error.

Verses 18–20 contain a beautiful doxology, a natural progression from the preceding recital of God’s blessings upon His restored Israel. He is an incomparable God, able to forgive even the atrocious iniquities of which His people were guilty (vv. 18–19). Micah concluded by stating that God would fulfill the promises he had foresworn to Abraham and Jacob (Gen. 12:3;

22:18; 28:14). These promises required the preservation of Israel until their fulfillment. Since Micah knew that they had not yet been fulfilled, he knew beyond doubt that Israel would be preserved and returned from captivity. We have the light of the New Testament to show us that our Christ was the aim of those promises (Gal. 3:16), through Whom all men who will may be blessed by His saving Gospel!

Conclusion

The prophecy of Micah is a marvelous piece of inspired literature. It demonstrates the inspiration of its author by its otherwise totally inexplicable detailed prophecies of the literal destruction and captivity of both Israel and Judah, of the exile to Babylon, and of the return. It is even more remarkable in its detailed prophecies of the establishment of the church and of the birthplace of the Only Begotten Son of God. One must be an infidel of the rankest sort to deny the inspiration of this book.

Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. James Moffatt, *Holy Bible, A Translation* (New York, NY: Harper and Co., 1930).
3. For a fuller discussion of this reunification see the author's material in *Living Lessons from the Prophets* (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1985), pp. 202–03.
4. Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 200.
5. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., rep. 1982), 10:456.
6. James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. Co., 1981), 2:339–41.
7. Hailey, p. 220.
8. Coffman, pp. 375–76.

[**Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Power Lectures, hosted by the Southaven, MS, Church of Christ, August 9–13, 1998. It was published in the book of the lectures, *The Godhead: A Study of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*, ed. B.J. Clarke (Southaven, MS: Southaven Church of Christ, 1998).]

Attribution: From *TheScripturecache.com*, owned and administered by Dub McClish.