

# Introduction to Micah

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## Background

### Prophet's Name

The name *Micah* used in 1:1 is a shortened form of *Micaiah*, which in turn is a shortened form of *Micaiahu*. The following list shows the Hebrew, its transliteration into English letters, and the "normal" way of writing the name in English versions of the Old Testament.

מִיכָה or *Mīkāh* (*Micah*)

מִיכָיָה or *Mīkāyāh* (*Micaiah*)

מִיכָיָהוּ or *Mīkāyāhū* (*Micaiahu*)

Our prophet Micah is called by the middle form in Jer. 26:18. Whenever a name ends in "iah" in English versions of the Old Testament, that ending is the Anglicized form of *yah*, the first part of Yahweh, the personal name of God. However, in Hebrew there are two forms of this ending, though both are brought into English by "iah." The shorter form is *yāh*, as in Micah's name in Jer. 26:18. The longer form is *yāhū*, as in Isaiah's name (Isa. 1:1) and Jeremiah's name (Jer. 1:1). These two endings are two different ways to write the first part of Yahweh.

There is another prophet in Scripture with the same name as our prophet here. English versions of the Bible call him Micaiah. His name in Hebrew is written with the longer ending as with Isaiah and Jeremiah, but the Mesoretic pointing is slightly different, though the consonants are the same:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew alphabet has only consonants, no vowels. Earlier texts of the Hebrew Scriptures (before about A.D. 500), then, were written with only consonants. However, there is no way to determine from a written text how to pronounce words with no vowels. One simply had to know the language to know how the words should be pronounced. Once Hebrew was no longer the spoken language of the Jewish people, there was a danger that its correct pronunciation would be forever lost. So between A.D. 500 and 950 Jewish scholars called *Mesorettes* devised a system of "vowel points"--normally placed under the letters--that gave the correct pronunciation of each word.

מִיכָיָהוּ or *Mikāy<sup>e</sup>hū*

Read the exciting account of Micaiah in 1 Kgs. 22:1-39 where he stands before Ahab and Jehoshaphat and predicts Ahab's death.

Now concerning the meaning of the name Micah, this meaning is derived from the full version of his name. This version has three parts, regardless of which form of ending is used. In the following equation, remember that Hebrew reads right to left.

מִיכָה or מִיכָיָה = יְהִ + כִּ + מִי

Micah or Micaiah = Yah + like + who?

Therefore, Micah's name means *Who is like Yahweh?* Note the pun that Micah makes in 7:18 based on the meaning of his name.

### Identification

#### *Micah Himself*

Nothing is known about Micah apart from what is contained in his book. He was born in Moresheth near Gath about 20 miles SW of Jerusalem and was thus a citizen of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He ministered in the South, probably in a rural setting, but his messages were directed against the North (e.g., 6:16), the South (e.g., 3:9-12), and both at once (e.g., 1:1-5).

#### *His Writing Style*

There are similarities between Micah and Isaiah, but they are on the level of content, not style. Isaiah was a very polished writer; he was a prophet of the royal court in the capital city of Jerusalem. Micah was not very polished, but he was a powerful writer. His environment was a rural setting; his style was rough and rugged. Yet he was an artist in language and displayed a masterful use of paronomasia (puns), similes, and other figures of speech. Chapter 1:10-16 contains the most extended series of puns to be found anywhere in the Bible. Unfortunately, by their very nature, puns are generally lost in translation.

## Date

According to 1:1, Micah prophesied during the days of Jotham (751-736), Ahaz (736-728), and Hezekiah (728-697), kings of Judah. (Note that only prophets ministering in the Northern Kingdom ever mention kings of Israel.) He therefore ministered during the "golden age" of Hebrew prophecy, the last half of the 8th century, and was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. The years 740-690 represent the likely span of his public ministry. It is possible that both Micah and Isaiah met a martyr's death in the early years of the reign of Manasseh (697-642).

Note the similarity between Mic. 4:1-3 and Isa. 2:2-4. It is difficult to determine who is quoting from whom. However, the reference in Jer. 26:18-19 proves that the ministry of Micah was one of the stimuli used by the Lord for the great revival under Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 18; 2 Chron. 29-31; Isa. 36-39). Thus his most active period may have been around 730-710, and perhaps Isaiah quoted Micah.

## Basic Theme

"The basic theme of his message is that the necessary product of saving faith is social reform and practical holiness based upon the righteousness and sovereignty of God. Because of the general lack of such saving faith, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are destined to experience God's wrath. Yet after the punishment is over, the nation will be restored and the Messiah will eventually come. . . . It is significant that his preaching ministry was especially preoccupied with the sufferings of the common people and of the peasants in the agricultural areas who were exploited by rich and unscrupulous landed nobility" (Archer, *SOTI*, pp. 323-24).

## **Outline With Interpretive Comments**

The book clearly divides into three parts, each an oracle beginning with the summons "Hear!" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). Each oracle or message contains (1) the summons to hear, (2) a rebuke for sin, (3) an announcement of coming judgment, and (4) a promise of future blessing.

### I. First oracle (1:1-2:13)

#### A. Superscription (1:1)

B. The indictment against both nations: sins against God (1:2-7)

God is coming to judge both Samaria and Jerusalem for spiritual harlotry or idolatry (1:5). Assyria destroyed Samaria in 721 (1:6) and in 701 took all the walled cities of Judah, even besieging, though not taking, Jerusalem itself (1:9).

C. Lamentation over Judah (1:8-16)

The Assyrian invasion of Judah is described city-by-city using a series of puns.

D. Further indictments against Israel and Judah: sins against fellow men (2:1-11)

1. Woe pronounced upon the oppressive upper classes for exploiting the poor and taking their land (2:1-5)

2. Correction from the true prophets of God is refused (2:6-11)

E. Promised deliverance (2:12-13)

II. Second oracle (3:1-5:15)

A. Indictment against unjust rulers, false prophets, and corrupt priests (3:1-12)

1. Rulers (3:1-4)

The unjust rulers oppress the poor, but God will take away all their ill-gotten gains and will not answer their cry for help when judgment falls upon them.

2. False prophets (3:5-8)

The false prophets preach peace and future well-being for those who bribe them. God will take away all vision from them.

3. Rulers, prophets, and priests (3:9-12)

The priests teach for money and say that Jerusalem has nothing to worry about because the temple is there (3:11). But Jerusalem will be destroyed (3:12). Note that this

false hope is still believed in Jeremiah's day (Jer. 7:1-14). Nevertheless, Micah's experience when he preached this message of destruction for Jerusalem helped save Jeremiah's life when he later preached the same message (Jer. 26:18-19).

B. A vision of the future kingdom (4:1-8)

Israel is to be regathered to their land, restored, and established forever in the kingdom of Yahweh.

1. A general picture of Israel's glorious future (4:1-5; quoted by Isaiah in 2:1-4)

It includes:

- a. Instruction (4:2)
- b. Peace and security for the world (4:3-5)

Both of these things are effected by the presence of Yahweh.

Verse 5 has puzzled interpreters, and there have been several interpretations. This one by Feinberg is perhaps the best: "There is a contrast here between the transient worship of idols and the eternal worship of God. Micah is declaring that, although the heathen peoples worship their own gods now, Israel, in the time of peace and glory just described, will be in a state of spiritual blessing, because she will be worshiping the eternal God and walking in his power and strength" (*The Minor Prophets*, p. 169).

2. How is this glorious future begun? (4:6-8)

- a. By the regathering of scattered Jews back to their land (4:6-7)
- b. By the reestablishment of the *nation* of Israel (4:7-8)

Both of these events will be guaranteed because Yahweh himself will reign from Jerusalem.

C. The coming captivity in Babylon (4:9-13)

1. The Babylonian captivity and restoration (4:9-10)

"Now" -- the immediate future for Israel:

- a. Exile in Babylon
- b. Redemption from Babylon (under Persian king Cyrus)

Note the figure of a woman in childbirth: pains of childbirth--defeat and exile; the delivery of the child--restoration.

2. A picture of the future (4:11-13)

"Now" -- after the things of 4:9-10 and thus having the effect of "then", a legitimate translation of the Hebrew word.

The Babylonian threat is only a foretaste of the future great siege at Armageddon. Note this same chronology in Joel 3:1-3; 9-17:

- a. Israel is again in the land

The regathering from the Babylonian captivity was only partial. Even during the time of Christ and the Apostles, there remained a *diaspora*, a dispersion. But in the last days, a complete regathering will occur subsequent to which an exile will never again occur (cf. Amos 9:11-15).

- b. Many nations will gather against her.
- c. Israel will be victorious.

D. Chronology from the Babylonian exile to the reign of the coming Messiah (5:1-15)

1. The king to be taken (5:1)

"Now" -- same as in vv. 9 and 11, but a common connective in Hebrew used to change perspective. Micah seems at this point to revert back to the immediate future pictured in 4:9-10. In other words, as he did in 4:9-10, he brings them back to present realities.

In verse 1, then, Micah exhorts Israel to prepare for the fatal siege in which Israel will be defeated, the king

taken, and the nation carried into exile. The king upon whom this judgment fell was Zedekiah.

## 2. First advent of Messiah (5:2)

Why "Bethlehem" instead of Jerusalem? The birth of a Davidic ruler and king in insignificant Bethlehem rather than Jerusalem presupposes that the family of David will have lost the throne and fallen into poverty. This in turn implies that Israel is under Gentile domination, which began with the fall of Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon. This was the condition which prevailed when Jesus was born.

*Important point:* Israel has been in exile, beginning with the Babylonian exile, until the twentieth century. Only since 1948 has Israel again become a sovereign state, though even now the dispersion continues. The small returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah during the reign of the Persians did not establish an independent and sovereign state, nor was it complete. The condition of dispersion remained from the time of Babylon through the NT era. Rome in A.D. 70 simply redispersed those Jews who had returned to Palestine. Therefore, the "redemption" from Babylon described in 4:10 is not the complete regathering of 4:6-8; this final regathering back to the land will never be reversed, and the reign of Yahweh himself over Israel will guarantee it.

## 3. Summary statement: exile to the second advent (5:3)

- a. "Therefore" -- because the first advent of Messiah will be in Bethlehem and not Jerusalem --
- b. God will give them up from Micah's time until
- c. the complete regathering from exile at the second advent.
- d. "Then" God will reassemble both Israel and Judah back in the land.

## 4. The second advent and the work and reign of Messiah (5:4-9)

- a. The second advent (5:4)

Here is a general statement concerning the second

advent of the Messiah and his kingdom.

The ruler who had been born in Bethlehem, the "He" in v. 4, now enters the picture again. He "arises" at the time of a completely regathered Israel. At this point he begins his reign. Note the general statement: "He will be our peace." The conditions of 4:3-4 cannot be established without the presence of the Messiah reigning over a regathered Israel in their own land (promised them in the Abrahamic covenant) and also reigning over the entire earth. The chronology here eliminates *postmillennialism*.

b. Armageddon (5:5-6)

It will be this ruler, Israel's Messiah, who saves Israel when the "many nations" of 4:11-13, bent on Israel's destruction, invade the land of Palestine. "He" will deliver Israel and enable them to smite the land of "Assyria" and "Nimrod" (figures for nations hostile to Israel when the Messiah returns based on Israel's enemy of Micah's time) with the sword. They will be like a lion, and their enemies will be cut off. It is at this juncture in history that the power of Gentile dominion over Israel is finally and completely broken.

c. Israel's place among the nations under the reign of Messiah (5:7-9)

"Then" -- with her enemies finally defeated -- Israel will also be empowered --

(1) To minister a blessing among the nations (5:7)

(2) To administer judgment and justice among the nations (5:8-9)

5. The result of the work and reign of the Messiah (5:10-15)

Messiah will remove all instruments of war and all the artifacts of idolatry from Israel and the world, thus establishing the conditions of 4:3-4. He will also avenge Israel.

a. He will purge Israel of her trust in (5:10-14) --

(1) Military strength (5:10-11)

(2) Idolatry (5:12-14)

b. He will avenge Israel among the nations (5:15)

*Special note:* observe carefully the order of events here:

1. Birth of Messiah (5:2)
2. Interadvent period followed by the regathering of Israel (5:3)
3. Second advent and Armageddon (5:4-6)
4. Reign of Messiah and prosperity for Israel and the world (5:7-15)

Observe the order of events in Joel 3:

1. The regathering of Israel (3:1-3)
2. The nations assemble to fight Israel at Armageddon (3:9-13)
3. Yahweh himself in the person of Messiah defeats the nations (4:16)
4. Kingdom blessings for Jerusalem and Israel as Yahweh, again in the person of the Messiah, dwells in Jerusalem (3:17-21)

The order is the same. The order is also the same in Zech. 14, Matt. 24, and Rev. 4-21. There is a name for this order of events in theology: it is called *premillennialism*.

III. Third oracle (6:1-7:20)

A. God's "controversy" with Israel (6:1-5)

The word *controversy* or *case* is a legal term: the Lord is the plaintiff, Israel the defendant; nature itself will be the jury.

B. What God requires (6:6-9)

The essence of the true life of Godliness is found in 6:8. This is not salvation by works. Rather, these are the good works required in the lives of those whom the Lord has redeemed (cf.

Eph. 2:8-10, esp. v. 10).

C. Israel loses the case (6:10-16)

As for Israel, instead of giving God what he required of her, she gave him wickedness, dishonesty, and deceit (6:10-12); therefore she will be made desolate (6:13-16).

D. Micah confesses the truth of God's indictment against Israel (7:1-6)

E. Micah relates the promise of future restoration despite present judgment (7:7-17)

F. This restoration illustrates the great pardoning ways of Yahweh (7:18-20)

*Note 1:* Israel's future is secure because God is a covenant-keeping God; the important word *hesed* is used in both vv. 18 and 20. God will remain faithful to the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and this covenant promises the land of Palestine as an everlasting possession of the nation of Israel (Gen. 17:7-8).

*Note 2:* Verse 7:18 is a pun based on the meaning of Micah's name, "Who is like Yahweh?"

*Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?*

This verse is also the basis of the chorus to that majestic hymn, "Great God of Wonders."

## **Important Passages and Problems**

A. One of the most glorious descriptions of the millennial kingdom: 4:1-4 (cf. Isa. 2:1-5; 11:1-16; 19:16-25; 35:1-10; 52:1-6; 60:1-22; 65:17-25; 66:10-24).

B. The prediction of the very city where Messiah was to be born: 5:2 (cf. Matt. 2:4-6).

C. The essence of the Godly life: 6:8 (cf. Deut. 10:12; Matt. 23:23).

D. One of the greatest statements of the salvation of God anywhere

in the Bible: 7:18-20.

E. The fallacious argument in 3:11 rejected by Micah; cf. Jer. 7:1-16.

F. The puns of 1:10-16

### 1. Verse 10

*Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all. At Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself in the dust.*

**Gath**: name sounds like the word "tell" in Hebrew.

This pun was originally David's in 2 Sam. 1:20. Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities. The meaning then was, "Do not let our Philistine enemies know that the king of Israel is dead." This line from David's lament, however, caught the people's fancy, and it became an idiom meaning simply, "Do not let our enemies know." Here the idea is to not let our enemies know about the great calamity to fall upon Samaria.

**Beth-le-aphrah**: name means "house of dust".

Rolling in dust was a sign of great mourning and lamentation. The people in this town will live up to its name.

### 2. Verse 11

*Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir, in shameful nakedness. The inhabitant of Zaanan does not escape. The lamentation of Beth-ezel: "He will take from you its support."*

**Shaphir**: name means "pleasant" or "beautiful" city.

A striking contrast is drawn: the people of the city characterized by pleasantness and beauty will go their way into a shameful captivity.

**Zaanan**: name sounds like "go out" ("escape" in the NASB).

The inhabitants of Zaanan will not "go out" gloriously to battle; they will be crushed in their own city. (The translation in the NASB is also possible: the people of Zaanan will not "escape" destruction.)

**Beth-ezel**: name means "house of nearness."

A striking contrast is drawn: the Assyrian will take from the

inhabitants their "standing place" = "refuge" ("support" in the NASB), i.e., the city itself, and it will become a proverb how the city failed to live up to its name.

### 3. Verse 12

*For the inhabitant of Maroth becomes weak waiting for good, because a calamity has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem.*

**Maroth:** name means "bitterness."

Though the people of the city wait for good (which does not come), when the Assyrian comes, the city will certainly fulfill the meaning of its name.

### 4. Verse 13

*Harness the chariot to the team of horses, O inhabitant of Lachish-- she was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion--because in you were found the rebellious acts of Israel.*

**Lachish:** name sounds like "team [of horses]."

Solomon had kept his war horses at Lachish. Now that city is to prepare its horses for battle. Lachish was the strongest city in Judah except for Jerusalem. The Assyrians did not take it quickly.

### 5. Verse 14

*Therefore you will give parting gifts on behalf of Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib will become a deception to the kings of Israel.*

**Moresheth-gath:** name means "inheritance" or "possession."

The "parting gifts" (the word used to describe a father's gift to his daughter at her wedding) refer to the city itself. The city will become the inheritance and possession of the enemy.

**Achzib:** name means "lie" or "deception."

The city will live up to its name: it will be destroyed, and the kings of Israel (here standing for Judah) will not be able to count on it for help.

### 6. Verse 15-16

*Moreover, I will bring on you the one who takes possession, O*

*inhabitant of Mareshah. The glory of Israel will enter Adullam. Make yourself bald and cut off your hair, because of the children of your delight; extend your baldness like the eagle, for they will go from you into exile.*

**Mareshah:** name (a variation of Moresbeth) means "possession."

God will bring to the city which means "possession" the Assyrian who will take possession of it.

**Adullam:** name means "refuge."

This name was given to the cave where David hid while running from Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 22:1, 4; 2 Sam. 23:13). It was the place where David sought to escape and find refuge in his humbled condition. "Adullam" therefore speaks of a descent into poverty and humiliation. Israel's glory will follow in David's footsteps.

## **Bibliography**

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