

STUDIES IN THE  
**OLD TESTAMENT**

Adult Bible Equipping Class  
Anchorage Grace Church  
2015

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**OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:**

**Micah**

**I. Introduction**

**A. *Date & Authorship***

The book's superscription identifies the author of these oracles as a man named "Micah of Moresheth" who lived and ministered during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah (1:1). This distinguishes him from the only other "Micah" in the OT, a man named Micaiah son of Imlah" who prophesied in northern Israel during the time of Ahab (1 Kgs 22:8-28; 2 Chron 18:3-27).

Our prophet lived in the latter half of the 8th century B.C., a younger contemporary of the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah. His name, which means "Who is like Yah[weh]?", functions as a concluding theme to the whole book—the grace and forgiveness of God (7:18). Thus, it forms a fitting book to follow the book of Jonah, which focused on God's compassion toward the nations.

Micah hailed from Moresheth-gath, a town roughly 21 miles southwest of Jerusalem and part of a network of fortified cities splayed along the edge of Judah's foothills to protect Jerusalem from invading armies traveling on the coastal highway between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Moresheth sat on an imposing hill (1,000 ft), and consisted mostly of farmers and laborers. This background doubtless influenced Micah's sympathy for the farmers and economically oppressed lower and middle classes who were being exploited by Judah and Israel's economic and religious elite.

Despite the book's clear assertion of Micah's authorship, modern historical-critical scholars have balked at any kind of coherent unity to the work. Beginning with Ewald in the mid-19th century A.D., liberal critics have posed that while chapters 1-3 represent the words of the prophet Micah, the remainder of the work belonged to a later period of Judah's history. Chapters 4-5, they contend, date to a time as late as the postexilic period, as does chapter 7, though some critics date chapters 6-7 to the time of Manasseh. These critics point to the book's lack of coherence between the judgment and salvation oracles in the book, the disjointed nature of its prophecies, and its apparent "assumption" of the fall

of Jerusalem (4:8), the exile and dispersion (4:6-7), and the collapse of the Davidic dynasty (5:2-4).<sup>1</sup>

In reality, the entirety of Israel's prophetic corpus consists of the tension between Israel's future hope and their current judgment. There is no theological or historical reason for relegating messages of hope to a future period by a different author. Additionally, as Waltke reminds us, abrupt transitions between sections reflects the fact that "Micah's prophecy contains once-independent announcements of judgment, oracles of salvation, controversy sayings, lawsuit speeches, instructions, laments, prayer, hymn, and a proclamation of the Lord's epiphany."<sup>2</sup> All of these, having specific historical contexts, were edited together into a coherent work.

This aspect of the prophets has frustrated even the greatest of biblical scholars. Luther wrote that the prophets "have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."<sup>3</sup> Yet even this fact does not warrant the kind of broad-sweeping assertions made by liberal scholars, who operate from a completely different set of hermeneutical and theological assumptions, not the least of which is their skepticism toward biblical inerrancy and the accuracy of predictive prophecy. As Waltke observes,

Many literary and historical critics commence their labours with a profound scepticism towards the Bible's own statements regarding its date and authorship and, also, so restrict the prophetic gift that predictions are dated to the time of their fulfillment. By observing abrupt transitions of themes, jerkiness of style, and thinking it improbable that a prophet would have weakened the effect of his messages of doom by introducing oracles of hope, they analyse the text into diverse literary sources. The isolated sources in turn are dated by means of historical conditions presupposed in them and by theological and literary typologies; that is, their religious ideas and language are correlated with the evolution of the Hebrew religion as drawn up by Wellhausen and dated accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

Yet none of the criteria raised by these scholars holds up to critical evaluation. Micah's grammar is decidedly pre-exilic, and the theological concepts, far from being postexilic, are all found in Jeremiah's writings. As Waltke summarizes, "If one rejects the posture of scepticism towards 1:1, there is no compelling reason to urge against the authenticity of any oracle in Micah."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark F. Rooker, "Micah," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 453.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "Micah," in *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 144.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 149.

## B. *Historical Background*

The superscription of the book identifies the recipients of Micah's oracles as "Samaria and Jerusalem" (1:1), the capital cities of northern and southern Israel. As was mentioned earlier, he delivered his messages during the reigns of three Judean kings: Jotham (742-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.). During this period, several key factors overlap to inform a careful reading of Micah's messages, both nationally and internationally.

### 1. *National Circumstances*

Micah prophesied in a period following a time of unprecedented prosperity in both northern and southern Israel. Both kingdoms had grown economically under the previous reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah. This growth had produced a horrible spiritual decline. Pagan idolatry continued to infiltrate religious activities, and Amos had done much to uncover these practices in the preceding generation in Israel and Samaria (Amos 2:6-7; 4:6-9; 5:10-12; 8:4-6). Hosea continued along a similar vein in the north, and Isaiah uncovered the same spiritual rot plaguing Judah and Jerusalem.

But Micah focuses his efforts almost entirely on the social injustice and inequity that accompanied this national affluence. "A shocking contrast between extreme wealth and poverty was exacerbated by egregious injustices on the part of the elite rich and ruling class against the stalwart landowners, who were driven off their land and into dependent economic status."<sup>6</sup> Judges had become corrupt, leaving the poor with no recourse for grievances (6:10-11; 7:1-4a). The religious leaders—the priests and prophets—had willingly entered the pockets of the upper class, and thus refused to address these ethical malpractices (2:6, 11; 3:5-7, 11). Nor did these false prophets see the connection between Israel's sins and the continually rising threat of the Assyrian armies.

Throughout the book, Micah demonstrates such a zeal for the socially oppressed that he has often been called the 'prophet of the poor', although Waltke points out that more accurately he was a 'prophet of the middle class', for they were the ones who were being dragged *into* poverty by the rich.<sup>7</sup> Since Israel and Judah's prophets did not see the treason of their nations' actions, Micah took it upon himself to uncover their covenant violations and warn them of the consequences that would befall them should they continue.

### 2. *International Circumstances*

Micah's oracles gain a great deal of clarity when understood within the context of the larger international scene. While Jeroboam II and Uzziah enjoyed a period of reprieve from Assyrian aggression during the reign of Assur-dan III, everything changed with

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

the rise of Tiglath-pileser III (i.e., Pul; cf. 1 Chron 5:26), who ascended the Assyrian throne just two years before Jotham became king in Judah. He dedicated his monarchy to regaining and extending Assyria's rule in the west, penetrating the coastal plain in 734 B.C., marching through Philistia, and ending in Sinai (2 Kgs 16; 2 Chron 28; Isa 7-8).

The Assyrians proved themselves to be a ruthless military powerhouse. Their troops were well-disciplined (Isa 5:26-29). They employed a standing army unlike the conscripted forces of the western states. And they also recruited paid mercenaries. The folly and the western kings lay in their determination to meet might with might—a match they could not win.

Under Tiglath-pileser's rule, Assyria had gained entrance to Palestine, signaling to God's people that the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 was perilously close to realization. It was during this time that Pekah in Israel allied with Rezin king of Damascus, and both tried politically and militarily to force Jotham and Ahaz in Judah to join them in defense against Assyria. Isaiah records that Ahaz, unable to embrace faith that Yahweh would protect them, turned of all places to Assyria for help, offering him a large sum of money in exchange for protection. In response, Tiglath-pileser destroyed Damascus and invaded Israel, placing Hoshea on the throne after he had assassinated Pekah (2 Kgs 15:29-30).

Yet when his son Shalmaneser V succeeded him, Hoshea saw an opportunity to rid Israel of Assyria's grasp and rebelled against the Assyrian king, allying himself with Egypt and withholding tribute. Thus, Shalmaneser besieged Samaria and Assyria finally took the city in 722 B.C. under Sargon II, who deported its upper classes, and imported foreigners to live in the land (2 Kgs 17:5-6). This harsh form of subjugation was Assyrian policy. "The Assyrians were content merely to accept tribute until a state withheld it and cherished ideas of rebellion. Then they would reduce the rebel, deport its leadership, appropriate the land and govern it."<sup>8</sup>

With their sister nation to the north now gone, huge pressure engulfed Judah's king Hezekiah. Sargon initiated a series of four campaigns to subjugate the western states, but whereas Ahaz only saw recourse in meeting might with might, Hezekiah was willing to listen to the counsel of Isaiah, and prudently refrained from participating in the rebellions that ultimately spelled the end of Ashdod and Egypt.

Perhaps in response to Micah's preaching, Hezekiah began sweeping spiritual reforms affecting the nation's religious and social ills. He even tried unsuccessfully to reconstruct a united northern and southern Israel (2 Chron 30:1-2).

In 705 B.C., Sargon was succeeded by his son Sennacherib, and it was at this time that Hezekiah attempted to withhold tribute from Assyria. His confidence had been bolstered by a seemingly propitious alliance with Merodach-Baladan, the re-established king of Babylon, who had encouraged the western states to rebel and had sent envoys to Jerusalem to speak to Hezekiah about this very purpose (2 Kgs 20:1-

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 140.

21; Isa 39). Hezekiah warmly received them and even showed them his armory and treasury (demonstrating his ability to join the revolt), despite Isaiah's condemnation of the act (Isa 30:1-2). Instead, Isaiah predicted that Hezekiah's arrogance and pride in his wealth and military power would eventually lead to Babylonian captivity.

Sennacherib responded ruthlessly, invading the land in 701 B.C., moving down the coastal plain, taking 46 fortified cities, including the nine listed in Micah 1:10-15. Of all these, the most important city captured was Lachish, a large and prominent fortress city that served as a final veil of protection for Jerusalem. During the Lachish siege, Sennacherib also sent a force to besiege Jerusalem. At the brink of Assyrian conquest, Hezekiah finally repented, joining Isaiah and Micah in prayer for the city (Mic 2:12-13; 7:8-10), who both predicted that Yahweh would miraculously deliver them. The Angel of Yahweh came that night and devastated the Assyrian army, and when Hezekiah awoke, the army lay in ruin outside the city walls (2 Kgs 18:17-19:34; 2 Chon 32:1-23).

## II. Major Themes

### A. *Israel's Covenant Violation*

From start to finish, Micah presents Israel's relationship to Yahweh in the context of their covenant responsibility. In fact, the prophet introduces his entire message in the form of a covenant lawsuit (1:2):

Hear, O peoples, all of you;  
Listen, O earth and all it contains,  
And let the sovereign Yahweh be a witness against you,  
The Sovereign One from his holy temple.

He then reveals that Yahweh is about to deal harshly with his people. He "is coming forth from his place. He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under him, and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place" (1:3-4). Why is this going to happen? He gives the reason in 1:5—"All this is for the rebellion of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel."

Again, in 6:1-8, the prophet takes the role of Yahweh's prosecutor, who calls the heavens and the earth—the original witnesses of the Mosaic Covenant (Deut 4:26)—to testify that God's charge against Israel and Judah is just (6:1-2):

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,  
And let the hills hear your voice.  
Listen, you mountains, to the indictment of Yahweh,  
And you enduring foundations of the earth,  
Because Yahweh has a case against his people;  
Even with Israel he will dispute.

He then proceeds to call the people's attention to how God had formed them as a nation, and the mighty acts he had done to rescue them (6:3):

My people, what have I done to you,  
And how have I wearied you? Answer me.

Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
 And ransomed you from the house of slavery,  
 And I set before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

This historical reminder was the backdrop to their formation as a nation. Before their exodus from Egypt, they were but a mass of people. But when God redeemed them from their slavery, they became a nation, and they entered into covenant with him (Exod 19:4; Deut 6:20-22). They had accepted the terms of the covenant under Aaron in Sinai, and reaffirmed their commitment to it in Moab. And so now Yahweh is calling them to "remember" God's covenant faithfulness, a term that goes beyond the mere recalling of historical facts. To "remember" is a covenant appeal, to "actualize the past into the present" and to "re-experience God's grace through memory and on that spiritual foundation to keep the Sinaitic covenant."<sup>9</sup>

Throughout Micah's oracles, he uncovered the horrors of Israel's covenant violations. They had transgressed against Yahweh (3:8) by fostered injustice against the underprivileged. He recounts how the rich "work out evil on their beds," how they "covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, a man and his inheritance." (2:1-2).

In chapter 3, Micah again portrays the horrific injustices of the people of Israel. Using the imagery of a chef preparing a stew, he describes the merciless injustice of the nation's leaders (3:1-3):

Hear now, heads of Jacob  
 And rulers of the house of Israel.  
 Is it not for you to know justice?  
 You who hate good and love evil,  
 Who tear off skin from them  
 And their flesh from their bones,  
 Who eat the flesh of my people,  
 Strip off their skin from them,  
 Break their bones  
 And chop them up as for the pot  
 And as meat in a kettle.

He describes the leaders of the nation as those who "abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice" (3:9-10). All the leaders had become corrupted by greed (3:10-11):

Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe,  
 Her priests instruct for a price  
 And her prophets divine for money.  
 Yet they lean on Yahweh saying,  
 "Is not Yahweh in our midst?  
 Calamity will not come upon us."

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "Theology of Micah," in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:938.

Indeed, Israel and Judah had a superficial spirituality. Waltke writes, "To be sure the nation looked religious as it thronged the Temple and offered lavish gifts, but the moral covenant, which mandated a loving spirit towards God and one's neighbour, had been replaced by a covenant between the powerful to spoil the poor (chs. 2-3)."<sup>10</sup> In Micah's own words he describes what God required. Anticipating the questions of the arrogant and greedy, he answers their question before they ask it (6:6-7):

With what shall I come to Yahweh  
And bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come to him with burnt offerings,  
With yearling calves?  
Does Yahweh take delight in thousands of rams,  
In ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,  
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Such questions had been asked and answered in Israel's Scriptures already. David had affirmed that Yahweh did not delight simply in sacrifices and burnt offerings. Instead, he wanted to witness a broken spirit (Ps 51:16-17). The prophet Samuel had uttered the same words to Saul on the occasion of his disobedience, once again affirming that what God seeks is not mere sacrifices but *obedience* (1 Sam 15:22).

Thus, Micah spells out for the people and the leaders what they should have already known. He calls them back to covenant obedience (6:8):

He has told you, O man, what is good;  
And what does Yahweh require of you  
But to do justice, to love kindness,  
And to walk humbly with your God?

Israel and Judah, however, would prove obstinate to Micah's message. Despite his pleading, the people continued to practice injustice, and so God must resort to bringing upon them the curses that he promised for covenant disobedience (6:13-16):

So also I will make you sick, striking you down,  
Desolating you because of your sins.  
You will eat, but you will not be satisfied,  
And your vileness will be in your midst.  
You will try to remove for safekeeping,  
But you will not preserve anything,  
And what you do preserve I will give to the sword.  
You will sow but you will not reap.  
You will tread the olive but will not anoint yourself with oil;  
And the grapes, but you will not drink wine.  
The statutes of Omri  
And all the works of the house of Ahab are observed;

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<sup>10</sup> Waltke, "Micah," 139.

And in their devices you walk.  
 Therefore I will give you up for destruction  
 And your inhabitants for derision,  
 And you will bear the reproach of my people.

In chapter 5, the prophet uses similar language to describe the God's judgment (5:10-15):

It will be in that day, declares Yahweh,  
 That I will cut off your horses from among you  
 And destroy your chariots.  
 I will also cut off the cities of your land  
 And tear down all your fortifications.  
 I will cut off sorceries from your hand,  
 And you will have fortune-tellers no more.  
 I will cut off your carved images  
 And your sacred pillars from among you,  
 So that you will no longer bow down  
 To the work of your hands.  
 I will root out your Asherim from among you  
 And destroy your cities.  
 And I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath  
 On the nations which have not obeyed.

The language Micah uses is intentionally covenantal. He is harkening back to the familiar terms of the covenant curses outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. There Yahweh had promised that disobedience would be met with curses of increased intensity until the people themselves would be extricated from their land and carted off by foreigners. Those important covenant texts became a code by which to interpret Micah's words, making it clear that the horrors described by the prophet are coming from Yahweh.<sup>11</sup>

#### B. *Israel's Promised Remnant*

While the oracles of judgment in Micah flow out of the Mosaic Covenant, the oracles of hope included in his messages are grounded in a different covenant—the everlasting covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7). In fact, the final verse of the book is a reminder that God remembers his covenant with Abraham (7:20):

You will give truth to Jacob  
 And unchanging love to Abraham,  
 Which you swore to our forefathers  
 From the days of old.

Integral to Micah's messages of hope is the doctrine of the remnant, an emphasis unique among the prophets, and perhaps one of the most significant contributes Micah makes to the Old Testament's theology of hope.<sup>12</sup> This is because it is the remnant theme that re-

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<sup>11</sup> Waltke, "Theology of Micah," 4:938.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Edward McComiskey, "Micah," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 7:399.

solves the tension that exists between the judgments of the Mosaic Covenant—which threatened the nation—and the promises of blessing in the Abrahamic Covenant—which guaranteed Israel everlasting status in God's program of redemption.

This theme comes out in each of the three series of oracles given by Micah. In 1:2-2:11, Israel will be sent into exile, losing the land. but in 2:12-13, God promises to regather the remnant in Jerusalem and become their king.

In 3:1-12, Jerusalem is overthrown because of its failed leadership. But in 4:1-5:15, Jerusalem will be exalted above the nations (4:1-5), the remnant will be reassembled (4:6-8), God's dominion over earth will be restored (4:9-10), and the nation will be protected after God has purged it of unrighteousness (5:10-15).

In 7:1-6, Micah breaks into song, describing the corruption of nations, who show no compassion on the poor, and who delight in evil and bloodshed. But in 7:7-20, he ends his oracle with a victory song. He celebrates worldwide salvation in the rebuilt Zion (7:11-12), though he foresees that the world will pay for its sins through desolation (7:13).

Micah concludes his book with a question: "Who is a God like you, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious acts of the remnant of his possession?" (7:18). Inserted into this question is a play on Micah's very name: "Who is like Yah[weh]", an emphasis that despite God's discipline of their rebellion, he will remember his covenant with Abraham and will show compassion and forgiveness to the people.

### C. *Israel's Coming King*

Part and parcel to Micah's theology of the remnant is the banner under which they assemble. They will be led by a ruler—a king (2:13). And the hope that Micah brings after his oracles of judgment is a hope that revolves around the Messiah. It is Messiah that will rule over the remnant (5:1-6). Just as Israel's famed king David had come from the seemingly insignificant town of Bethlehem, so this same hamlet will give Israel another king (5:2).

In Micah's portrayal of Messiah, he is not the redemptive individual as portrayed by Isaiah, suffering for the sins of his people (cf. Isa 53). Rather, Micah pictures him as an individual who will effect the future exaltation and glory of the remnant after their humiliation:

The nation will suffer the shame of defeat and exile. but that is not the end, for certain triumph and glory lay ahead, not for the whole nation, but only for the remnant. The people of God will be delivered from affliction and exile by their King and will return with him, secure in his power. Thus Micah's focus is on the kingdom of the Lord and its manifestation in the world.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Until the remnant gives him a birth, Israel will be abandoned without a king; but when he comes, the rest of his brothers will be converted and join in the remnant (5:3). Then Messiah will shepherd his flock and they will live securely (5:4).<sup>14</sup>

### III. Purpose

The themes of the book underscore the overall message of Micah:

*Righteous Yahweh would judge his unrighteous people, but the coming ruler would fulfill Yahweh's promise to David and Abraham.*

### IV. Literary Structure

The normal scheme of prophet oracles revolved around a rather predictable pattern. They would begin with oracles against Israel, followed usually by oracles against the nations, and then conclude with oracles of hope.

Micah, however, deviates from this expectation. The book contains 13 distinct and independent oracles delivered over a span of several decades, which have been bound together to form a cohesive whole. This explains the jerkiness and rather sudden shifts noted by many commentators.

These 13 oracles are arranged into 3 separate series, each beginning with a call for the people to "hear" or "listen" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1), and each move from a message of doom to a consolation of hope:

#### MICAH

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Yahweh's Judgment of Israel and Judah</b>	<b>Yahweh's Judgment of the Leaders</b>	<b>Yahweh's Indictment of the People</b>
Prophet Date Subjects	Judgment (1:2-2:11)	Judgment (3:1-12)	Judgment (6:1-7:6)
	Restoration (2:12-13)	Restoration (4:1-5:15)	Restoration (7:7-20)
1:1	1:2	3:1	6:1

<sup>14</sup> Waltke, "Theology of Micah," 4:939.