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WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? MICAH'S MESSAGE OF  
YAHWEH'S JUSTICE AND MERCY FOR  
MCCARTHY BAPTIST CHURCH OF  
ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Jeremiah Matthew Bradford  
May 2018

## **APPROVAL SHEET**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
BDB	The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, ed. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, 1906 edition, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).
CEB	Contemporary English Bible
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
MT	Masoretic Text
NAC	New American Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986-2006).
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
THOTC	Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## PREFACE

Spending the last eighteen months with the prophet Micah as my constant companion has been thrilling and transformative. When I began this project, Micah seemed like a distant cousin; today, he feels like a best friend. I thank God for his precious word and his solemn trust to preach it. A special thank you goes to Miguel Echevarria, my faculty supervisor, for his support and guidance along the way. Also, I would like to thank my family for their support throughout my education. My wife, Kenan, has encouraged me and sacrificed along the way. I could not have done this without her. Our children also encouraged me as I finished “the book,” as they call it. My parents, Thomas and Kathy Bradford, have always encouraged my education, including generous financial support. Additionally, I would like to thank the wonderful people of McCarthy Baptist Church for treasuring God’s word and enabling me to grow as a minister of Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah Matthew Bradford

St. Joseph, MO

May 2018

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Tension is not something most people like to live with. In the arenas of family, work, and friendships, stress is generally to be avoided. To be pulled in two directions is unpleasant. Yet strain can also be a wonderful thing. For example, when one drives across a stay-cable bridge, tension is at work on their behalf.

In the arena of theology, pressure is also an uncomfortable reality most seek to avoid. Yet, again, pull can be a wonderful thing that brings balance, security, and beauty to our understanding of God and his dealings with man. The Bible is full of theological tensions, including that of divine justice and mercy. God is both just and merciful towards sinful people. His justice and mercy are displayed beautifully in the prophet Micah.

McCarthy Baptist Church in St. Joseph, Missouri is a congregation of people seeking to know God and share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world. Like most believers and churches, they wrestle with the theological tensions found in the Bible. They struggle to come to grips with the God who is both just and merciful. This project will seek to expound the prophet Micah for the people of McCarthy Baptist Church with an emphasis on biblical theology.

#### **Definition and Purpose of Biblical Theology**

Biblical theology faces many challenges.<sup>1</sup> Some deny that a theology of the

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<sup>1</sup>For a helpful overview, see Peter Balla, “Challenges to Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 20-27.

Bible is possible, instead contending that there are different “theologies” of the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

For example, Raisanen argues that the early Christian sources “contain divergent theological standpoints.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is no theological coherence across the Scriptures. Biblical theology is a fool’s errand if the Bible is not a unity.

However, in its more theologically conservative forms, biblical theology presupposes that the Bible is a unified, cohesive text and not just a collection of disparate texts. Such biblical theology is founded upon the Bible’s own internal witness concerning its inspiration, authorship, and unity. Concerning inspiration, the Bible claims to be the very words of God. As Frame has argued, “God’s intention is to give us *words*, personal words, not just thoughts or ideas.”<sup>4</sup> God twice wrote the words of the covenant on tablets of stone for Moses to give to Israel (Exod 32:16 and 34:1). At times, God instructed individuals to write down the words he spoke to them (see Rev 21:5). Very often, the word of God came to and through God’s messengers in ways that are not completely known to us. For example, Micah 1:1 states, “The word of the LORD that came to Micah, the Moreshite, what he saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the phrase, “Thus says the Lord” appears hundreds of times in the OT.<sup>6</sup> God’s word has come to his people in many ways but always faithfully as the inspired word of God. Paul summed it up well when he wrote, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16).

The above words of Paul bear on authorship as well. If all Scripture is inspired

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<sup>2</sup>James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 251.

<sup>3</sup>Heikki Raisanen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 137.

<sup>4</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 143.

<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010).

<sup>6</sup>E.g. Exod 5:1; Josh 7:13; 1 Kgs 20:13; Jer 15:19.

by God, though written by various human authors, then all Scripture has a shared divine authorship or origin. As seen earlier, there are a few occasions in Scripture where God does the writing himself or dictates what is to be written. The majority of Scripture, however, comes through the Holy Spirit's inspiration of human authors. Peter instructed, "First of all you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). The author of Hebrews agrees when he writes, "Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways" (Heb 1:1). Thus, the Bible asserts its own divine origin and authorship.

The Holy Spirit inspired and superintended the human authors of Scripture as they wrote so that they *each and all* wrote the very words of God. This divine inspiration and dual authorship of Scripture is the foundation for its unity. If the same Spirit inspired the different human authors to write, then it would follow that there is an interconnectedness and unity to the entire Bible.<sup>7</sup> This unified text has a metanarrative or overarching and progressing storyline, moving from creation to fall to redemption to restoration.<sup>8</sup> The parts are to be read in light of the whole and the whole in light of the parts.<sup>9</sup> To do this is to do biblical theology.

Within the evangelical field of biblical theology, definitions and methodologies vary greatly. It is a diverse and divided discipline. Klink and Lockett

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<sup>7</sup>For a persuasive presentation of the unity coherence of the OT, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 15-43.

<sup>8</sup>Scripture's metanarrative has been variously identified. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21, seek to show "how central the concept of 'covenant' is to the narrative plot structure of the Bible." In fact, the covenants are so central in their approach that they propose a biblical-theological system known as "kingdom through covenant." James M. Hamilton Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010) proposes a biblical theology whose center is God's glory in saving his people through judgment.

<sup>9</sup>For an extended discussion on reading texts "thickly" or canonically, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 85-87.

analyze major approaches to biblical theology and divide them into five distinct categories.<sup>10</sup> Geerhardus Vos defined biblical theology as “that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”<sup>11</sup> For Vos, biblical theology occupies a middle seat between exegetical theology and systematic theology.<sup>12</sup> As such, biblical theology is a “multidisciplinary endeavor,” as Rosner contends.<sup>13</sup> That is, biblical theology requires the exercise of several other biblical and theological disciplines. The biblical theologian must work narrowly and widely in the canon of Scripture, often spanning both testaments.

James Hamilton has defined biblical theology as “the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.”<sup>14</sup> Hamilton goes on to define that interpretive perspective as “the framework of assumptions and presuppositions, associations and identifications, truths and symbols that are taken for granted as an author or speaker describes the world and the events that take place in it.”<sup>15</sup> Discerning this framework is critical for reading and understanding the Bible correctly for several reasons. First, biblical theology serves as a guide through the progressive storyline of Scripture. In other words, biblical theology helps answer the question, “How does it all fit together?” Second, biblical theology guards against faulty interpretation and application. Each portion of Scripture must be understood as part of a larger whole rather than in isolation. It is easy to misunderstand

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<sup>10</sup>Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). The categories are “historical description,” “history of redemption,” “worldview-story,” “canonical approach,” and “theological construction.”

<sup>11</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 5.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., v.

<sup>13</sup>Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 4.

<sup>14</sup>James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 15.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

another person's meaning if you only listen to part of a conversation. Third, biblical theology brings the reader into the symbols, patterns, and imagery of Scripture. The authors of Scripture share a common worldview, linguistic stock, and symbolic universe. The more a reader understands and embraces the biblical authors' interpretive perspective, the more he correctly and richly reads Scripture.

### **Micah, Biblical Theology, and Preaching**

For most Christians, the New Testament is much more familiar than the Old. Within the Old Testament, the Latter Prophets are perhaps the most unfamiliar. Some exceptions to this are Jonah and the parts of Isaiah. This lack of attention applies not just to personal Bible reading and study, but also to preaching. The Latter Prophets receive far less exposition than other portions of Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

There are many reasons for this neglect. The genres found in the prophets are a challenge for modern, Western readers and preachers. Their recursive style, forms (lawsuit, woe oracle, lament, etc.), and abstractions make it difficult for today's church. Additionally, there is the challenge of history and culture. For example, what is the significance of the city gate and the things that happen there? The prophet seems to live in a different world. John's Gospel can seem like low-hanging application fruit compared to Obadiah! Then, there is the challenge of seeming irrelevance. How does the preacher apply the prophets' messages to the contemporary church and world?

Biblical theology, among other things, will aid the church's enjoyment of those yet-to-become-favorite parts of the Bible. Historical, cultural, and other insights will certainly help our understanding. Biblical theology is also invaluable in unlocking books like Micah for those unfamiliar with them.

James Hamilton writes, "To do biblical theology is to think about the whole

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<sup>16</sup>Walter McCord, "Preaching from the Prophets," in *The Moody Handbook of Preaching*, ed. John Koessler (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 179.

story of the Bible.”<sup>17</sup> Micah (and the other prophets) are part of that story. Reading, studying, and preaching that places Micah in the metanarrative of Scripture appreciates its beauty, worth, and relevance. As P. J. H. Adam notes, “Preachers need biblical theology in order to preach the text in context.”<sup>18</sup> Every text preached must be placed in its proper context, including its near context, literary context in that book of the Bible, its place in either the Old or the New Testament, its place in the canon, and its place in the storyline of the Bible. Adam adds that “preachers need biblical theology for application.”<sup>19</sup> How does a preacher apply Obadiah to the twenty-first century church? Biblical theology helps preacher and listener understand the text in context and then make correct application.

Micah brings its readers/hearers into the heart of Scripture’s story as they encounter the failure of God’s son (Israel), the judgment of sin, and the glorious promise of redemption through a Davidic Messiah.<sup>20</sup> Micah has a unique interpretive perspective by which he understands and communicates the present and future in light of God’s prior dealings with His people. Consider a few examples.

In 1:10 the prophet laments, “Don’t announce it in Gath, don’t weep at all.” Here Micah has quoted from David’s lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan when Israel was defeated by the Philistines (2 Sam 1). The coming defeat and exile of Israel and Judah “will be like death, like Saul’s suicide.”<sup>21</sup> The people are to understand what is about to come upon them in terms of God’s judgment on Israel’s first king and royal

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<sup>17</sup>Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?*, 12.

<sup>18</sup>P. J. H. Adam, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 107.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Stephen G. Dempster makes a compelling case for a narrative storyline running through the Hebrew Bible with a prophetic and poetic interlude in *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003).

<sup>21</sup>James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 248.

family. Like Saul, the family of Israel has turned from Yahweh, and, like Saul, they will be punished for their rebellion.

The counter to this allusion, however, is Micah 5:2. There God promises a ruler to come from little Bethlehem Ephrathah. This ruler's origin is ancient. He will shepherd the people with righteousness and rule over the nation. God raised Israel from the ashes of Saul's failure through the righteous rule of David. God will again raise Israel from her failure and defeat through a Davidic son.

Here one sees the escalation of the pattern of deliverance through the house of David. Hamilton notes, "The two key features of biblical typology are historical correspondence and escalation."<sup>22</sup> The Messiah's future appearing and deliverance are like David's, yet greater in every way.

This King will "pass through before them, the LORD as their leader" (Mic 2:13). The language here clearly echoes the exodus from Egypt. God will pass through (**עַבְרֵי**, also used in Exod 12:12) before them to lead them out. "[T]here will be a new exodus, a new return to the land. Through judgment comes salvation when Yahweh leads his people home by the agency of his king."<sup>23</sup> Micah envisions the return from exile as a new exodus.

Biblical theology opens the panorama of context to the reader/hearer of Scripture. Dan Brendsel has written, "[Scripture is] not just a just a bunch of pearls on a string; it's a chain strong enough to pull you out of any trial."<sup>24</sup> Reading and preaching Micah from a biblical-theological perspective will display the strong chain of God's salvation.

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<sup>22</sup>Hamilton, *What is Biblical Theology?*, 77.

<sup>23</sup>Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 249.

<sup>24</sup>Dan Brendsel, "Your Life Depends on Little Words," February 19, 2015, accessed January 4, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-life-depends-on-little-words>.

## Familiarity with Literature

Micah has received a moderate amount of scholarly attention. Significant commentaries and studies have appeared over the years and in recent decades on the prophet. Here is a survey those that feature prominently in this project.

### Old Testament Introductions

Introductions to the Old Testament generally and the prophets in particular are numerous. Three will be primarily utilized for this project. First, Longman and Dillard have produced a very helpful introduction to the entire Old Testament.<sup>25</sup> Second, C. Hassell Bullock's *Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*<sup>26</sup> provides great analysis of the book and a helpful history of interpretation. Finally, Gary V. Smith's *The Prophets as Preachers* provides a framework by which to understand Micah as a preacher and his messages.<sup>27</sup>

### Commentaries

Bruce Waltke's *A Commentary on Micah*<sup>28</sup> is a standard work. An excellent and thorough introduction is followed by a commentary comprised of translation, exegesis, and exposition. Waltke strikes a great balance between exegesis and exposition. The exegesis sections are chock-full of linguistic, rhetorical, historical, geographical, and other technical information. The exposition sections provide helpful synthesis.

Francis Anderson and David Freedman's *Micah*<sup>29</sup> is an extensive and academic

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<sup>25</sup>Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

<sup>26</sup>C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986).

<sup>27</sup>Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

<sup>28</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>29</sup>Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

treatment of Micah. Linguistic and literary analysis is the prominent and unique feature of this work. However, it is such a large work that it also offers excellent information on other features of Micah.

Dale Ralph Davis' commentary on Micah is original and refreshing, with a sense of humor commentaries generally lack.<sup>30</sup> Davis provides his own translation which emphasizes in English what is in the Hebrew text, most specifically word plays. This commentary has no shortage of scholarly insight, but its great strength is its ability to bridge the gap between the two worlds, as John Stott put it.<sup>31</sup> The world of the Bible is brought to bear upon the world of today by a very gifted scholar and expositor.

The unique strength of Gary V. Smith's work is its rhetorical analysis of Micah.<sup>32</sup> Smith delves into how the prophet communicated in order to persuade his audience to adopt certain beliefs, take certain actions, or feel certain feelings. Kenneth Barker's contribution is particularly helpful in making the step from exegesis to exposition.<sup>33</sup> Leslie Allen's volume has proven to be a well-rounded classic that ably addresses textual and linguistic issues, offers sound exegetical insight, and helpfully points towards faithful exposition.<sup>34</sup>

James Luther Mays' *Micah* is older and often marked by a higher critical bent.<sup>35</sup> For instance, he denies Mican authorship for the entirety of the book.<sup>36</sup> However,

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<sup>30</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013).

<sup>31</sup>John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

<sup>32</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>33</sup>Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1998).

<sup>34</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

<sup>35</sup>James Luther Mays, *Micah*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 21-22.

Mays provides excellent analysis of structure and content of the book. Stephen G. Dempster's volume on Micah is a very new addition to scholarship on Micah.<sup>37</sup> Its strength is its eye toward biblical theology. Paul House's *The Unity of the Twelve*<sup>38</sup> will help place the book in its canonical context, including its place in its most immediate context, the Twelve.

## Theological Works

This biblical-theological exposition of Micah will be enhanced by two quality Old Testament theologies. Paul's House's volume carefully places the prophets in their canonical context, aiding interpretation.<sup>39</sup> House's volume works through the Hebrew Bible book-by-book. Routledge has taken a thematic approach that yields interesting insights into the Old Testament text.<sup>40</sup>

## Expositions

There are some excellent expositions of Micah. John Mackay's treatment is a great example.<sup>41</sup> However, what seems to be lacking is a biblical-theological treatment of the prophet that pays particular attention to how Micah understood earlier Scripture and how he communicated his message in symbols, types/patterns, and metaphors from earlier authors of Scripture. Such an exposition would consider Micah from its canonical context, placing it in the larger story of Scripture. Included in this approach would be how later authors of Scripture interpreted and employed Micah in their own writings.

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<sup>37</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Micah: A Theological Commentary*, Two Horizons Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

<sup>38</sup>Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, JSOT Supplement (Sheffield: Almond, 1990).

<sup>39</sup>Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998).

<sup>40</sup>Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013).

<sup>41</sup>John L. Mackay, *Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, Focus on the Bible (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008).

## Local Context

This project will focus on the book of Micah. The prophet's message of Yahweh's justice and mercy is a needed antidote to theological imbalance and imprecision. Many people rightly affirm that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). However, in their thinking, God's loving character means he does not hold people accountable for their actions or judge people in righteousness. The theology *du jour* perceives God's justice and love as incompatible. It emphasizes one attribute of God while ignoring another. This theological imbalance is pervasive in the church as well as in the unbelieving world. Church members believe that God will overlook the sin of their children living an adulterous or homosexual lifestyle because God is love. Micah's beautiful picture of divine justice *and* mercy will help the church to gain theological accuracy and balance. Micah is particularly helpful since "the arrangement of doom and salvation oracles is intended to prevent readers from thinking of one theme without the other. God's judgment and his redemption are closely linked. They are both part of his single purpose."<sup>42</sup>

The prophet Micah preached messages of judgment and mercy to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah nearly three thousand years ago. His ministry spanned several kings (Mic 1:1) and lasted for three to four decades.<sup>43</sup> He preached in times of difficulty and excitement.<sup>44</sup> Micah's world was, in so many ways, very different from the United States and northwest Missouri of the twenty-first century. He preached in a different cultural setting. He preached in a different political context. Technology has certainly advanced.

Yet despite all these differences, Micah's words have not expired or become irrelevant. In fact, they remain as inspired, authoritative, and timely as ever. Today's world may differ from Micah's in so many ways, yet some things remain the same.

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<sup>42</sup>Ian Hart, "Micah," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 251.

<sup>43</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 18.

<sup>44</sup>Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 100.

Indeed, the most important things remain the same. The God who sent Micah remains the same. He has not grown more tolerant of sin and injustice. His demands for mankind to “act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly” with him are unchanged (Mic 6:8).

Human nature has also not changed. Mankind, apart from the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, is still enslaved to sin. Therefore, the world is still filled with sin and injustice. Of course, it may take different forms today, but the heart of it all is the same. The powerful prey upon the weak; the rich abuse the poor; justice is perverted. Today’s world, like Micah’s, is full of injustice.

The church, like the faithful remnant in Micah’s time, needs to hear the good news of God’s justice and mercy. The church needs to know how to respond to the injustice around us. God’s people need to know how to live pleasing to God in the midst of this world. For these reasons (and more) the people of McCarthy Baptist Church in St. Joseph, Missouri need to hear God’s word through the prophet Micah.

Additionally, the people of McCarthy Baptist Church need more exposure to the Old Testament and how its parts relate to one another and the larger corpus of Scripture. Past preaching series in the Old Testament (Judges, Jonah, Haggai, and Malachi) have elicited responses like, “I’ve never heard the book of Judges preached or taught,” and “I never knew what Haggai was about or how it fit in the Bible.”

Therefore, a biblical-theological exposition of Micah will be a tremendous blessing to the people of McCarthy Baptist Church. This project aims to increase the church’s knowledge and understanding of the book of Micah. Additionally, it seeks to enhance their love for and obedience to the Scriptures as the very word of God, foster greater theological understanding and accuracy, and demonstrate the unity and cohesion of the Bible as it unfolds from Genesis to Revelation through the example of Micah.

### **Key Texts**

Determining the structure of the biblical text is critical for preaching. This is

true on the level of the individual sermon. David Allen contends that the shape of the preacher's exposition should be molded by the shape of the text.<sup>45</sup> On a larger scale, the sermon series should also be shaped by the structure of the text.

Most commentators see Micah arranged in three cycles of sermons on the themes of sin, judgment, and mercy.<sup>46</sup> The beginning of each new cycle is marked by the call to "hear" (1:2, 3:1, 6:1). Alternatively, David Dorsey has presented a chiastic arrangement to the book which has shaped this project's approach to the structure of the book.<sup>47</sup> This chiastic structure is significant for two major reasons. First, it helps us to hear Micah's message more fully. For example, Micah 2:1-13 and 7:1-7 are parallel, both dealing with the corruption of the nation. Reading them together is like listening to music with stereo sound or with both head phones on at the same time. Second, the chiastic structure emphasizes Micah 4-5 as the heart of the book. This central section is a powerful vision of future salvation.

Micah 1:1-16 and 7:8-20 balance in chiasm. God's pronouncement of judgment on the people and Micah's lament over the coming calamity in 1:1-16 is mirrored by 7:8-20's announcement of forgiveness and Micah's jubilation in so great a God. Micah 2:1-13 and 7:1-17 are also chiastically related. Here, Micah's message turns to the greed and injustice of the people. In both of these sections, Micah chronicles the wickedness of God's people. Micah 3:1-12 and 6:1-16 are paired in chiasm. These sections graphically portray the injustice of the leadership, the judgment of false prophets, and corruption among the people.

Thus, in this chiastic arrangement, Micah 4:1-5:15 emerges as the center of the

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<sup>45</sup>David L. Allen, "Preparing a Text-Driven Sermon," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 113.

<sup>46</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, vii-ix. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 435. Davis, *Micah*, 14-15.

<sup>47</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 296-300.

book.<sup>48</sup> The structural centrality of this section highlights the hope of restoration and renewal for God’s covenant people. God will establish his rule over the nations, raise up a ruler like no other, and deliver His people.

Hamilton aptly summarizes the book, “In Micah, there is no God like Yahweh, who is glorified in the judgment of his people that results in their salvation.”<sup>49</sup> This project will exposit Micah in sequential order. Each of the book’s seven chapters is expounded with an eye to biblical theology where appropriate and edifying.

## **1:1-16**

The first chapter of Micah orients the reader to the context in which the prophet preached (1:1). He had a long ministry declaring “the word of the LORD” to both northern and southern kingdoms. Micah’s first message is a covenant lawsuit (1:2-7). God calls his people to court before the nations (1:2). God himself will be witness against Israel (1:2). He will also be their judge. God leaves his place to execute justice on his sinful people (1:3).

God’s judgment is just, for it is in response to “Jacob’s rebellion and the sins of the house of Israel” (1:5). The covenant people have broken the covenant and will receive the punishment detailed in that covenant (see Deut 28). Idolatry and injustice have brought judgment upon Israel.

Next comes a lament (1:8-16). Micah grieves over the coming destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem. He calls his hearers to join him. In 1:10-16 the prophet employs biting irony through paronomasia (wordplay) to emphasize the depth of God’s just wrath that will be experienced by his rebellious people. For instance, the residents of The House of Dust (Beth-leaphrah) are to roll around in the dust (1:10). The residents of Beauty

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<sup>48</sup>Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 297-98.

<sup>49</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 250.

(Shaphir) will depart in shameful nakedness (1:11).

## 2:1-13

A woe oracle comes next (2:1-5). God is dreaming up judgment for those who dream up injustice. Micah 2:1’s “dream up” and 2:3’s “planning” are the same Hebrew word (**בַּשְׁמָן**). God will repay Israel’s rebellion.

In 2:6-11 God condemns the false prophets who preach only good things. They are motivated by financial gain and ease in life. They are just the kind of preachers that the people want to hear (2:11).

The first mention of mercy in Micah is 2:12-13. God will gather a remnant of Israel and shepherd them. The flock will be “noisy with people” (2:12d), indicating a restoration of life and offspring after the death and desolation brought by judgment. The Lord will be their King who leads them back from exile (2:13).

## 3:1-12

Micah pronounces judgment on the unrighteous leaders and false prophets who have led the nation astray. The leaders have “hate[d] good and love[d] evil” (3:2). They have devoured God’s people instead of shepherding them (3:3-4). The false prophets have spoken their own messages, not God’s. Therefore, God will shut off his revelation to them (3:6-7). He will speak through his true prophets, who are empowered by the Spirit (3:8).

Micah 3:9-12 focuses on Jerusalem’s coming destruction. In 3:11 the people foolishly think that they are impervious to judgment or calamity, asking “Isn’t the LORD among us?” Trusting in the temple rather than the God of the temple is foolish (see Jer 7:1-11 and Luke 19:45-8).

## 4:1-13

Fresh on the heels of Jerusalem’s prophesied destruction, Micah proclaims

mercy and hope. Zion (Jerusalem) will be restored (4:1-8), but not just restored. Zion will be exalted above all the other mountains and hills of the earth (4:1). Not only will Israel return to the Lord and to Zion, the nations will “stream to it” (4:1). God will have mercy in saving his people and include many nations. Peace will reign in the land and on the earth (4:3-5). The return from exile will bring glory to God’s people (4:9-14).

### **5:1-15**

This great exodus and deliverance will come through a Davidic descendant (5:2). After their appointed judgment, this son of David will shepherd the people in justice (5:2-3). God will rescue his people (5:5). Micah 5:7-15 is a beautiful picture of God’s mercy towards his people. They will prosper and be blessed. They will be cleansed by God himself. God will exact justice upon the nations that have been disobedient.

### **6:1-16**

A covenant lawsuit like that in chapter 1 indicts Israel for her unfaithfulness to Yahweh. God pleads with Israel, appealing to his past goodness to her (6:3-5). God does not desire their external acts of worship while they neglect justice, faithfulness, and humility (6:6-8). Therefore, God will discipline his wayward son, Israel (6:9-16).

### **7:1-20**

Micah 7:1-7 further chronicles Israel’s depravity and rebellion. Yet the darkness of judgment is pierced by a bright light of mercy (7:7). God will raise up fallen Zion, make her great, and the world will be blessed through her (7:8-13). Micah 7:14-20 concludes the book with a prayer by Micah. He pleads for God to shepherd his people (7:14), accomplish a new exodus for them (7:15), and deliver them from their enemies (7:16-17).

The closing verses sum it all up well. There is no God like Yahweh, great in justice and mercy. He keeps covenant faithfully and perfectly. His anger burns for a time,

but he delights in faithful love. He will turn to his people, have compassion on them, and remove their sins forever. There is hope for Israel (and for the whole world) because God is faithful to his promise to Abraham.

### **Conclusion**

Indeed, there is no God like Yahweh, perfectly just and merciful. Micah vividly displays these wonderful attributes of our God. The people of McCarthy Baptist Church need a fresh vision of this incomparable God. They need a full-orbed, biblical vision of God that transcends the gods of our own making. The counterfeits will be revealed when the real thing is seen. They need to see the bright fury of his just wrath and the piercing brilliance of his loving mercy. The ultimate demonstration of God's justice and mercy is Christ and the cross. This forthcoming exposition aims to exposit Micah so that it points to Christ as the focus of all Scripture.

## CHAPTER 2

### HERE COMES THE JUDGE MICAH 1

“All rise for the honorable judge. Court is now in session.” These familiar words from a bailiff mark the beginning of a legal session in a courtroom. For many those words do not bring a sense of thunderstruck awe or anticipation. The pseudo-proceedings of television courtrooms are partly to blame. Yet if you have ever been involved in a real and meaningful courtroom situation, you know something of the gravity of an officer’s announcement that the judge has arrived. For those seeking justice, they can be words of hope. For those standing accused, they can be ominous words.

God is the true and ultimate judge of all creation, including every person. What is it like when the righteous, divine judge brings his case against sinful people? What will his righteous judgment entail? How should we respond to the revelation of his justice?

In Micah 1 we see Yahweh reveal his coming judgment against his sinful people. This causes the prophet to weep and wail over the people. God’s judgment will take the form of defeat and exile, described by allusions to both Saul and David. Micah is a book of justice and mercy. The “incurable wound” (1:9) of humanity’s rebellion against God will be met by inflexible justice. The only cure and the only hope is the pardoning, steadfast love of Yahweh (7:18-20).

The text is divided into three sections. In 1:2-7 we meet the melting manifestation of Yahweh’s judgment. In 1:8-9 we find a description of the mourning messenger of Yahweh’s judgment. Finally, in 1:10-16 we face the magnified misery of Yahweh’s judgment.

## **The Melting Manifestation of Yahweh's Judgment (Micah 1:2-7)**

The book of Micah opens with a terrifying theophany of Yahweh visiting the earth in judgment. Theophanies are common in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets. According to Leslie Allen, “The OT motif of theophany contains two strands, the coming of Yahweh from his residence, terrestrial or as here celestial, and the reaction of nature, which cringes and crumples at his coming.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1:2 Micah acts as a kind of cosmic bailiff, calling the whole world to the Lord’s courtroom. All the peoples of the earth are summoned because Yahweh is coming from heaven to bring a case against them. Here is a stark and needed reminder: Yahweh’s sovereignty and dominion are unlimited. Far from a regional deity, He is king and judge over all the peoples of the earth and over all of creation. All nations and all people are accountable to the Holy One of Israel.

Yahweh comes from “his holy temple” (1:2) and “his place” (1:3). Micah pictures Yahweh descending from his heavenly temple. The temple in Jerusalem (and tabernacle prior to it) are microcosms, scaled down versions of this heavenly temple.<sup>2</sup> Why does God proceed from his heavenly temple to judge the earth? Calvin answered, “It is for the benefit of men who think that God is confined to a certain place or that He is far away in the heavens above and so pays no attention to anything on earth.”<sup>3</sup> Yahweh is neither ignorant of nor indifferent to the affairs of man. This is a comforting and sobering reality.

The comfort is found in that there is no sin or injustice in the world to which God turns a blind eye or a deaf ear. Perhaps you have been or are the victim of injustice.

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 270.

<sup>2</sup>For a full treatment of this subject, see G. K. Beale’s *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004).

<sup>3</sup>Jean Calvin, *Sermons on Micah by Jean Calvin*, trans. Blair Reynolds (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 19.

God's knowledge and his judgment are perfect. David rejoiced, "But the LORD sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness" (Ps 9:7-8 ESV).

The church at Thessalonica suffered for their faith in Christ (2 Thess 1:4). Paul encouraged them with the truth that their trials are a "plain indication of God's righteous judgment that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering" (1:5). He then added, "For after all, it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you" (1:6). So, as you wait on his justice and your vindication, take heart. "The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble" (Ps 9:9 ESV).

Yahweh's commitment to justice is also sobering because we ourselves are not righteous, not one of us (Rom 3:10). God knows our thoughts, motives, desires, actions. The psalmist confessed, "You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence" (Ps 90:8). Let us seek God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Micah 1:3-4 God's coming in judgment is pictured as a melting manifestation. He treads on the "high places of the earth" (1:3). Yahweh stomps across the lofty geography as a message to mankind of the Creator's unparalleled and unlimited power and sovereignty. Everest and Kiliminjaro are mole hills to Yahweh.

Indeed, the mountains of the world "melt under Him and the valleys will be split, like wax before the fire, like water poured down a steep place" (1:4). "[T]he picture of mountains dissolving and plains splitting shows that the most permanent topography of the world cannot maintain itself when [Yahweh] appears. How much less men who oppose him!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>James Luther Mays, *Micah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 43.

When God's judgment is revealed, the world seems to come undone. The earth itself trembles and seeks to flee from his terrifying presence. What Micah describes here we see across the Bible. When God delivered Israel through the judgment of Egypt, creation was thrown into upheaval. Water was turned into blood. Locusts devoured the grain. Massive hail stones pounded the earth. The light of the sun was blotted out (Exod 7-10).

At the cross, God delivered his people through judgment. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, became sin for God's fallen people. The fullness of God's judgment against their rebellion was poured out on Jesus. As Jesus suffered on the cross, darkness fell over the whole land for about three hours "because the sun was obscured" (Luke 23:45). At his death, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom and the earth shook and the rocks were split" (Matt 27:51).

The mention of the temple curtain being ripped in two is particularly interesting in light of Micah's description of Yahweh coming in judgment from his heavenly temple. The popular interpretation has been a positive one: Jesus' cross-work has opened the way for banished sinners to return to the presence of God. Yet it is also possible to read the temple veil's rending along with the shaking of the earth and breaking up of rocks as manifestations of God's judgment. By this understanding, God is breaking forth in wrath from his earthly temple.<sup>5</sup>

Revelation 20:11-15 describes the final and ultimate theophany of God's judgment. Earth and heaven flee from the presence of God who is seated on his throne of judgment (v.11). Aune comments, "Here heaven and earth are personified fleeing in fear

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<sup>5</sup>John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1211-14, considers the possibility that God is coming from the temple in judgment in reaction to the execution of Jesus and/or as a portent of the coming destruction of the temple in AD 70. Yet it is also possible to read the narrative in a "thicker" fashion. In other words, the rending of the veil and other details can signify: (a) the "final blow" of God's justice upon Jesus as the substitute absorbing the wrath of God, (b) God's righteous indignation over the injustice of Jesus' execution, and (c) a demonstration of the saving accomplishment of Christ's death (which connects it with the resurrection of saints in the next few verses). That is to say, God is saving his people through judgment.

of the judgment of God.”<sup>6</sup> Then God judges the dead according to their deeds that are recorded in his books (vv. 12-13). Those who names are not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire along with death and Hades (vv. 14-15). No one and nothing is safe when “Yahweh roars from Zion” (Amos 1:2).

Micah’s first hearers were likely pleased at the thought that God was coming to judge the peoples of the earth (1:2). Their excitement can only last a few short verses, however. For in 1:5 the covenant people find themselves at the epicenter of God’s seismic judgment. Israel is at the heart of the problem. Her rebellion and sins have provoked her jealous God to judgment.

God tramples the “high places of the earth” (*בָּמֹתִי אֶרְצָה*) in 1:3 and indicts Judah for her “high place” (*בָּמָה*) in 1:5. Pagan cultic sites were typically situated on natural high places. Waltke calls this connection “a fine pun.”<sup>7</sup> Ralph Davis explains the significance of the word play, “By equating Jerusalem with the high places of Judah, Micah implies that Jerusalem itself is one huge high place where such illegitimate worship goes on.”<sup>8</sup> God will trample geographical high places of the earth as well as lay to waste the cultic high places of Judah.

Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out for idolatry and false worship here. These capital cities will undergo capital punishment because of their ruinous influence on the rest of God’s people. God will purge and wipe clean their rebellion. In 1:6 God pledges to make Samaria a “heap of ruins in the open country.” Later in 3:12 Jerusalem is given the same verdict. She too will become a heap of ruins. Micah is alluding to 1 Kings 9:8 where Yahweh warns Solomon that if he or his descendants turn from following him,

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<sup>6</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1101.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 51.

<sup>8</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2010), 23.

this place (the temple in Jerusalem) will become a heap of ruins. Israel’s failure to keep the covenant has brought upon her the curses of the covenant.

Yahweh will “pour Samaria’s stones down into the valley and will lay bare her foundations” (1:6). Samaria sat on a hill about 300 feet high. Yahweh will roll all her proud buildings and fortifications down the hill like a bunch of marbles. Note the linguistic connections between 1:6 and 1:4. Earlier in 1:4 Yahweh’s appearance in judgment causes the valleys to be split. The repetition of “valley” links the coming worldwide judgment with what is going to take place in Samaria. God’s judgment is both cosmic and personal, global and local, general and particular.

It’s far too easy for us to make the coming judgment of God impersonal. We can speak of it in such large, universal ways that we run the risk of ignoring that it comes to bear upon individuals. He will judge the world in righteousness and that includes you and me personally.

In 1:7 Samaria’s idolatry will be punished. The northern kingdom had a long history of idolatry, beginning with her first king. Jeroboam set up false gods, temples, priests, and even a knock-off feast. All of this was to keep the people from worshipping in Jerusalem and returning to the son of David (1 Kgs 12). In the rest of 1:7 poetic justice is on display. Idolatrous cults were supported and advanced by the money paid to cultic prostitutes.<sup>9</sup> The soldiers who conquer Samaria will carry off the treasures of Israel’s idolatrous cults and then use that money to visit cultic prostitutes and prop up their own idols and temples.

When Yahweh comes in judgment it is a melting manifestation. The earth quivers and quakes. The buildings and fortifications of man evaporate. Idols are demolished. Micah wants you to tremble. He wants to bring you face to face with the

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<sup>9</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 55.

God who is a consuming fire. He confronts us with a God we cannot tame and to whom we must give account.

### **The Mourning Messenger of Yahweh's Judgment (Micah 1:8-9)**

The prophet is moved to “weep and wail” over the coming judgment of Yahweh. He will go “stripped and naked” (1:8). These are all terms associated with the people’s exile from the land of promise.<sup>10</sup> In Isaiah 20 God tells the prophet to go naked and without sandals on his feet as a portent of the defeat and exile of Cush and Egypt at the hands of the Assyrians.

Micah’s people will soon go into exile for their rebellion against Yahweh. The prophet is so moved by the plight of his people that he joins in their suffering. How often and in how many stunning ways the prophets shared in the predicament of the people! Hosea married an unfaithful wife as an analogue to Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Jeremiah was bound, thrown in prison, and forcibly removed from the land. Ezekiel was commanded by Yahweh to do some very attention-grabbing things symbolic of the coming judgment on the people and land.

Micah makes “lamentation like the jackals, and mourning like the ostriches” (1:8). Grief in the ancient world was loudly expressed.<sup>11</sup> In our culture, we are more likely to mourn in reserved ways: silence, solitude, reserved emotions and expressions. However, Micah gets loud. His anguish is so profound he cannot be silent. He must raise his voice as the bitter tides of judgment wash over his people.

In 1:9 Micah identifies the cause of his mourning: his people have an incurable wound. Samaria’s wickedness is so deep-seated and pervasive that there is no remedy.

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<sup>10</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 54.

<sup>11</sup>John W. Drakeford, “Grief and Mourning,” in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 585.

She has rejected her covenant with God, despised his covenant messengers (the prophets), and played the harlot with other gods. She has hardened her heart and stiffened her neck to such an extent that all that remains is for her to be justly punished.

As Micah continues we find that this incurable wound is not confined to Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel. No, her cancerous depravity and its punishment has spread also to the southern kingdom. Judah and Jerusalem have joined in the folly of Jeroboam.

Now note that Micah says in 1:9 “even to the gate of *my* people, to Jerusalem” (italics added). The prophet is given a vision of the coming destruction of his own homeland. This all hits very close to home for Micah.<sup>12</sup> Later in 1:14 Micah’s own hometown of Moresheth-Gath is mentioned among places that will experience the devastating judgment of God. Imagine the pain that gripped the prophet’s heart. The world he knew, the place he called home would soon drink the undiluted cup of God’s righteous wrath. All of this broke Micah’s heart.

Here we have much to learn from this man of God. His bold speech was joined to a broken spirit. He preached bravely and wept bitterly. He decried sin and cried over sinners. Ralph Davis asks, “And can we not see in Micah one greater than Micah?”<sup>13</sup> Jesus blasted Jerusalem for her hardness of heart (Luke 13:34) and then wept over her coming judgment (Luke 19:41-44). He is the prophet greater than Moses, the prophet par excellence.

God’s people and God’s preachers today must be cut from this same prophetic cloth. Like Micah, and indeed like Jesus, our hearts need to break for those under the

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<sup>12</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Micah*, ABD 24 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 198, discuss the possibility of the speaker in 1:9 being Yahweh rather than Micah: “It is more appropriate for God to refer to Israel than for the prophet.” Yet the context of 1:8, which is clearly Micah speaking, is strong reason to believe Micah is the speaker here.

<sup>13</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 28.

judgment of God. We must weep over sinners as we boldly proclaim the truth to them.

Charles Spurgeon once said,

Brethren, if God intends to give us souls he will prepare us for the honour by causing us to feel the deep ruin of our fellow creatures, and the fearful doom which that ruin will involve unless they shall escape from it. We should hear praying of a mighty sort if believers sympathized with men in their ruin; then groans and tears would not be so scarce; then the soul pouring out itself in groanings which cannot be uttered would be but an ordinary thing.”<sup>14</sup>

I once read the story of an evangelist in India who kept meeting opposition in a particular village. Month after month he would show up and begin to evangelize the people. They would become angry, curse him, beat him, and drive him from town. This cycle continued until finally the people of the village asked him why he kept coming back to preach to them. The man said, “I will show you.” He piled up some grass and put a worm in the middle. Then he lit the dry grass and just before the flames engulfed the worm, he snatched the creature to safety. Then the evangelist began his sermon with the words, “God rescued me from the eternal fires of judgment. I am here because you too need to be rescued.”

Those who feel a deep sense of anguish and sympathy for sinners pray for and preach best to ruined, hell-bound people. In John 3:36 the Scripture says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” May the abiding, just wrath of God move us to weep over the lost and to plead with them to be saved through faith in Jesus. “Far too often divine judgement is a doctrine we affirm rather than a reality we abhor.”<sup>15</sup> Church, do we mourn over the lost condition and the terrifying judgment that awaits unregenerate humanity?

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<sup>14</sup>Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Dawn of Revival; or, Prayer Speedily Answered,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 13, no. 734 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1989), 85-96.

<sup>15</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 37.

### **The Magnified Misery of Yahweh's Judgment (Micah 1:10-16)**

This third and final section of Micah 1 is a sustained lament. The prophet weeps over the judgment that will pulverize his native land. Eleven towns or cities are marked for judgment. Each of them in the general region of the Shephelah, the foothills to the west of the hill country of Judah.

Micah employs paranomasia, or word play, as he wails over his homeland. Leslie Allen aptly comments, “[I]n his mind’s eye Micah can see only disaster looming, as he thinks nostalgically of the hills and dales of his home region. The very names of the communities leap out at him with new and sinister significance.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1:10 Micah begins with Gath. In 1:15 the last place he mentions is Adullam. These two references create an inclusio, or book-ends around the section. The lament is bracketed by allusions to the life of David.

“Tell it not in Gath” (1:10). Here Micah has referenced David’s lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan when Israel was defeated by the Philistines (2 Sam. 1). The coming defeat and exile of Israel and Judah “will be like death, like Saul’s suicide.”<sup>17</sup> The people are to understand what is about to come upon them in terms of God’s judgment on Israel’s first king and royal family. Like Saul, the family of Israel has turned from Yahweh, and, like Saul, they will be punished for their rebellion.

“The glory of Israel shall come to Adullam” (1:15). David took refuge in the cave of Adullam while fleeing from Saul (1 Sam 22:1ff.; 2 Sam 23:13). Micah’s phrase “the glory of Israel” most likely refers to the nobility and royalty of Israel. Just as David had to flee from Saul’s rage, the nation’s leadership will run and hide from their conquerors. Micah pictures the nation’s leaders and people running and hiding from their

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<sup>16</sup>Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 278.

<sup>17</sup>James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 248.

conquerors like David fled to the cave of Adullam. David's house is in a sort of "exile." David's dynasty is in jeopardy.

In the middle of these book-ends is a series of word-plays on place names. First, in 1:10, Beth-leaphrah is to "roll in the dust." Those who live in the House of Dust (**בֵּית־לְעִפָּרָה**) are to get down and wallow in the dust (**עַפָּר**), an expression of grief or misery. Micah is playing on the name of this town to highlight the magnified misery that will befall it when the Shephelah is trodden like grapes of wrath under the feet of Yahweh as he marches in judgment.

Then in 1:11 the people of Beautyburg<sup>18</sup> (**שְׁפִיר**) are commanded to leave their home in "shameful nakedness." When God comes to judge, Beautyburg will be Uglytown. The people will be stripped naked and led from home in shame. Deuteronomy 28:48 lists "nakedness" as one of the conditions Israel will experience in defeat and exile should they break Yahweh's covenant with them. Israel is about to be torn away from the beautiful land God gave them (Deut 28:63).

Next on Micah's list is Zaanan (**צָאנָן**). Waltke translates it as "Going Forth Town"<sup>19</sup> and Davis as "Marchville."<sup>20</sup> Yet the people do not go forth or march out (**אֹצֶן**) to battle. Terrified of their enemies, they hide behind their city walls with none to rescue.

The end of 1:11 is difficult. Commentators differ on the meaning of "Beth-ha-Ezel." Barker suggests "house of protection."<sup>21</sup> Others opt for something like "house of taking away."<sup>22</sup> The latter seems more likely if a word play is in view here since the town's "standing place" (**עַמְקַתּוֹ**) will be taken away. The "standing place" is either a

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<sup>18</sup>Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 31.

<sup>19</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 75.

<sup>20</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 31.

<sup>21</sup>Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 58.

<sup>22</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 57.

reference to the town’s defensive capabilities or the resolution of its inhabitants to defend the city. Their fortifications will be destroyed or the people’s courage to fight will vanish. Either way, this town is defenseless in the face of Yahweh’s coming judgment.

In 1:12 Maroth, or “Bitter Town,” is longing for something good. The “good” here is deliverance or rescue from their enemies. Yet no such help is coming since calamity has come down on Jerusalem from Yahweh himself. What hope is there for these outlying towns? In our context it might be like saying, “If Kansas City is overrun, there is no way St. Joseph can stand.”

Micah commands the people of Lachish (**לְבִישָׁה**) in 1:13 to harness their chariots to the “team of horses” (**לְרַכֶּשֶׁה**). This word for horses refers to “swift steeds” (1 Kgs 4:28) as opposed to **סֵיס**, the word typically used of horses harnessed to chariots. Lachish is not going to battle but being put to flight. Lachish was a chariot city built by Solomon and increasingly fortified because of its strategic position. The great city flees.<sup>23</sup> Lachish bears a special culpability. She is the “beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion” because in her “were found the rebellious acts of Israel.” Lachish was a pipeline of covenant unfaithfulness. Idolatry, immorality, injustice flowed from Samaria to Jerusalem *through Lachish*. Woe to her.

In 1:14 Lachish (“you”) will “give parting gifts” to Moresheth-Gath, Micah’s hometown. Unable to come to the smaller town’s defense, Lachish will have to give her up to the invading agents of Yahweh’s judgment. The second half of 1:14 is a play on the town name Achzib (**אַכְזִיב**) which will be a deception (**אַכְזֹב**) to Israel’s kings. Demsky has argued that “houses of Achzib” should be understood as “workshops of Achzib.”<sup>24</sup> So the

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<sup>23</sup>Sennacherib’s defeat of Lachish is vividly portrayed in stone relief. See James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 328-30, illustrations 101-2.

<sup>24</sup>Aharoni Demsky, “The Houses of Achzib: A Critical Note on Micah 1:14b,” *Israel Exploration Journal*, no. 16 (1966): 211-15.

deception seems to be that Israel's rulers would expect revenue from this locale but be sadly disappointed. Their every hope is cut off.

Then, in 1:15, comes Mareshah (**מִרְשָׁה**), upon whom Yahweh will bring a conqueror (**הַיּוֹשֵׁב**). Victoryville will be possessed by a victor. A tragic reversal is in store. God's people had once conquered and possessed Canaan. Now, due to their covenant breaking, they will be subdued and dragged from the land of promise.

Finally, in 1:16 the prophet calls his people to join his lament. They are to shave their heads in mourning over their coming defeat and exile. They will be expelled from the promised land as Adam and Eve were, banished to live in the unclean realm of the dead. That is something to mourn over. That is the magnified misery of being under the just judgment of God.

The devastation Micah foretells here possibly came upon his homeland during the Syro-Ephraimite war (735-715 BC) or perhaps when Sennacherib demolished the Shephelah in about 701 BC. Moreover, he could be foreseeing the Babylonian invasion more than a century later. Maybe he is speaking of all the above. Whatever the case may be, it is Yahweh who is behind it all. The Assyrian war machine, the Babylonian military juggernaut, and every other force is subject to the sovereignty of Yahweh.

This section paints a grave picture of what it's like to incur the judgment of God. The ungodly who think themselves beyond the reach of God's justice are mistaken. Their objects of trust will be brought to nothing, trampled in the dust under the feet of Yahweh. Their pride and arrogance will soon turn to shame and disgrace. Their so-called strength will fail. They won't march out to battle but flee. When Yahweh judges the world, "They will say to the mountains, 'Cover us!' and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'" (Hos 10:8; Luke 23:30; Rev 6:16).

## Conclusion

Micah's theophany, mourning, and lamentation are all intended to express the horror of what is coming on Israel for her rebellion. Magnified misery is on the horizon. Micah desires for his people to awaken to the approaching calamity and repent.

Our God is indeed a consuming fire (Heb 12:29), a horrifying and sobering reality for covenant breakers and rebels. You sinners who are without Christ, awaken to your peril. You have rebelled against God and made yourselves his enemy through your treason and disobedience. God has set a date on the calendar of the cosmos in which he will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). "The wages of sin is death," says Romans 3:23. Without Christ you will perish eternally.

But God, who is rich in mercy, has sent a savior for sinners. Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, endured the magnified misery of God's wrath on the cross. Bearing the sins of his people, taking their place, and paying the penalty of their sin, he has accomplished their deliverance. He resurrected alive from the dead after three days and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Though a rebel and enemy, you may have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1). Repent (turn from your sin) and trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. You need a savior and there is none but Jesus. Believe in him now and be saved.

Church, let our hearts be filled afresh with thanksgiving for the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Taking our place, Christ has endured the magnified misery of God for us. The fullness of God's righteous wrath against our rebellion and covenant breaking fell upon Jesus, resulting in our forgiveness and right standing with God. As Paul wrote, "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

Let us be mournful messengers like Micah. May God so impress upon our minds the despair of sinners. Let us not forget the death and judgment from which he

saved us and from which unbelievers need to be saved. May God send us into this world as brokenhearted heralds of the Gospel.

May Micah's words remind us to never take lightly the God with whom we have to do. He is the sovereign judge of creation. He is jealous for his people. Therefore, let us be holy for the Lord our God is holy.

## CHAPTER 3

### PUNISHMENT, PREACHERS, AND PROMISE MICAH 2

In his *City of God*, Augustine divides humanity into two cities “created by two loves: the earthly city was created by self-love, reaching the point of contempt for God; the heavenly city by the love of God, even to the contempt of self.”<sup>1</sup> Presently the city of man seems to prevail. Wickedness reigns and the righteous suffer. Yet, in the end, the city of man will perish, and the city of God will enjoy eternal life and blessing.<sup>2</sup> The second chapter of Micah addresses citizens of both the city of man and the city of God. Here Yahweh and his prophet announce profound judgment on the wicked oppressors and false prophets, while holding out hope for the faithful remnant of God’s people. Do you belong to the city of God or to the city of man?

Micah 1 began with a general announcement of judgment upon Samaria and Jerusalem for her sin. In this second chapter, the judgment becomes more particular, more personal. Two groups of wrongdoers are singled out: greedy land barons (2:1-5) and false prophets (2:6-11). The section ends with a brief but powerful word of promise for the people of God (2:12-13). This section is paralleled by 7:1-7 in the chiastic structure of Micah.<sup>3</sup> Both sections detail the corruption of the people and end with a note of confident hope in God.

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<sup>1</sup>Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 593.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 900-903.

<sup>3</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 299.

We shall consider the text under three headings. First, we will see The Wicked Dreamers' Nightmare (2:1-5). Second, we will encounter Just Your Kind of Preacher (2:6-11). Finally, we will hear the hope of The Shepherd-King and His Sheep (2:12-13).

### **The Wicked Dreamers' Nightmare (2:1-5)**

Micah's message begins with the cry of "Woe" (וָיַהֲ)! The woe oracle most likely had its origins in funeral rites.<sup>4</sup> The "woe" of 2:1 is an elaboration on the lament of 1:8ff. The judgment of death is coming and Micah's words "function as a warning of what will happen."<sup>5</sup> Micah is, in a sense, reading the obituary of his audience in order to persuade them to heed his message and respond appropriately. A notoriously rotten Texas man recently died. No funeral services were held for him. Instead, his family wrote a brutally honest and sad obituary, detailing his faults and concluding that his death proves "that evil does in fact die."<sup>6</sup> One would hope that had the man read such an obituary about himself he would have had a change of heart. This is Micah's hope as well. His searing words are meant to cut through their hard hearts and calloused souls, awakening them to the gravity of their sin and the ruinous judgment about to fall on them.

Therefore, he announces "woe" upon them for their evil thoughts and sinful actions. These greedy land barons "dream up wickedness and prepare evil plans on their beds!" Leslie Allen explains the significance of this imagery: "Here, as in the Psalms, one's bed is the place in which to indulge in private thoughts and aspirations for which the bustle of daily life leaves little opportunity."<sup>7</sup> What do these men think of when they

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<sup>4</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Amos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 177.

<sup>5</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 463.

<sup>6</sup>"Family of Deceased Man Pens Brutal Obituary, Writing His Death 'Proves that Evil Does in Fact Die,'" *Yahoo*, last modified February 11, 2017, accessed February 13, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/family-deceased-man-pens-brutal-202200279.html>.

<sup>7</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 287.

are lying in bed at night? They dream up wickedness and plan evil.<sup>8</sup> They fantasize about who they'll take advantage of the next day.

These dreamers of wickedness hatch their evil plans in the morning. As soon as the sun rises they are up to their elbows in injustice. Micah's contemporary Amos scolded the people for this same eagerness to oppress (Amos 8:4-6). They can't wait for the new moon or Sabbath to be over so they can get back to taking advantage of people. Micah's mention of the morning not only shows the thirst of these oppressors for evil, it also underlines the depth of their wickedness through irony. The morning is usually depicted as the time for vindication and justice in the Bible. And this justice is normally dispensed at the city gate, the "courthouse" of ancient Israel.<sup>9</sup> Yet the greedy land barons of Micah's day have perverted justice. Micah says the "power is in their hands" to oppress (2:1), that is they control the courts through bribery and manipulation. At morning's light, they are at the gate to make their wicked dreams a reality.

In so doing, they are breaking God's covenant with them. According to 2:2, they "covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance." Each of the verbs in this verse appear in the Mosaic law. The word "covet" here (**דִּמְחַז**) is the same as the last of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21). The word for "seize" is **לִזְבֹּח**, meaning a forceful or violent confiscation of another's property,<sup>10</sup> recalling the commandment to not steal. Micah's hearers "oppress" (**קָשַׁע**) others contrary to Leviticus 5:21 and Deuteronomy 24:14.

These greedy land barons covet and steal the land and homes of their countrymen. This is especially egregious given the significance of the land to Israel. The

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<sup>8</sup>See Prov 4:14-19 and Ps 36:4 for other references to the wicked scheming evil while on their beds.

<sup>9</sup>See Jer 21:12, Zeph 3:5; Ruth 4 for justice/vindication in the morning at the city gate.

<sup>10</sup>BDB, **לִזְבֹּח**, 159.

land belonged to God (Num 36) and was given by God as an inheritance to each family (Josh 1:6). The land was never to leave the family so that they would always have a portion in the inheritance of God (Lev 25). The land was a source of security and blessing for each family. Mays says, “In Israel’s social order a man’s identity and status in the community rested on his household or family, dwelling place, and land … Lose it, and he lost all the rights which were based on its possession; he had no ‘place’ in his community.”<sup>11</sup>

These greedy land barons have followed in the footsteps of Ahab, who coveted and seized the vineyard of Naboth (1 Kgs 21). Remarkably, the elders and leaders of Naboth’s city also perverted justice as did those in Micah’s time (21:8-14). They have stolen God’s good gift to his people and scorned God’s ownership of the land. The consequences for doing “all the works of the house of Ahab” (Mic 6:16) will be grave.

Yahweh has dreamed up a fitting punishment for these thieves. The same words appear in 2:1 and 2:3 (**עַשְׂבָּד**). (**ה**)**עַשְׂבָּד** can refer to either moral/spiritual evil, as in 2:1, as well as to calamity or destruction, as in 2:3. Their wicked scheming is matched by God’s just cogitations. They dreamed up oppression of their neighbors; now God has dreamed up the punishment that fits their crime. Or, as Allen puts it, “The two parts of the oracle are closely interlocked in order to express how inexorably the villains are to be paid back in their own coin.”<sup>12</sup> These wicked people left the poor and weak helpless. They oppressed them with a yoke they could not remove. Now God will turn the tables on them, oppressing them with a yoke they cannot remove (2:3b). They made the people their slaves through injustice. Yahweh will make them the slaves of the conquerors in the exile. What God has in store for these bandits is a nightmare.

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<sup>11</sup>James Luther Mays, *Micah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 64.

<sup>12</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 287.

In 2:4 Micah sings a taunt or sarcastic song over the wicked. At the time of judgment, “one will take up a taunt against you.” The verb here is impersonal,<sup>13</sup> leaving us to wonder who will sing this jeering tune against the wicked when they are judged. Perhaps their conquerors will be the ones to tease them. Or, maybe the poor they have oppressed will do the singing. The sarcasm drips from the lines of this song. The phrase “we are utterly ruined” (**נִשְׁׂרָפֶה נִשְׁׂרָפֶה**) sounds like the phrase “our fields” (**שָׂדֵינוּ שָׂדֵינוּ**). Waltke refers to this as another instance in Micah of “lex talionis by wordplay.”<sup>14</sup> Today it might sound like this: “Isn’t it too bad! It is so unfortunate, what these rich people had to go through. What they coveted and stole is now being coveted and taken from them. They’re going to end up with nothing. Doesn’t it just break your heart to see them get what they deserve!”<sup>15</sup> The ill-gotten gains of these oppressors will be seized from them and given by God himself (“How He removes it from me”) to pagans (“traitors” in HCSB, “apostate” in NASB). Again, the irony is thick. They acted like pagans in seizing the land from their countrymen. Now other pagans will come and seize the land they coveted and stole.

The final blow falls in 2:5: “Therefore, there will be no one in the assembly of Yahweh to divide the land by casting lots.” Not only will they lose the land they wrongfully took from others, they will also be excluded from sharing in the inheritance of the land when God restores the remnant of his people after the exile.<sup>16</sup> This is an allusion to the apportioning of the land in Joshua 18:1-10. There Joshua cast lots to determine the

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<sup>13</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013), 41.

<sup>14</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 108.

<sup>15</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 465.

<sup>16</sup>William McKane, “Micah 2.1-5: Text and Commentary,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 19, interprets this verse as a lament that none of the people of Judah will enjoy the redistribution of the land because they “shall have been carried off captive and the conquerors of Judah will share it among themselves.” While Judah will lament the loss of the land to their enemies, they will return to the land and enjoy it again (Mic 4:6-8). This is a promise, however, only for the remnant, not for the wicked oppressors.

inheritance of various tribes. The remnant's return will be like a new exodus and a new conquest. The land will be apportioned to the people at that time. These oppressive land barons, however, will have no share in that future blessing. They have forfeited their inheritance and lost their place among the people. In Amos 7:17 the prophet threatens the pseudo-priest Amaziah with loss of family and land as well as death on unclean soil. What a nightmare for wicked dreamers!

There is, in all of this, a "flicker of promise"<sup>17</sup> that must not go unnoticed. By excluding the wicked land barons from the future redistribution of land, Micah affirms the reality of a coming restoration. The day of judgment is coming but so is the day of redemption. The exile will be followed by a new exodus. God's covenant love and promise are more powerful than human evil.

Like Micah, we today live in a world filled with injustice. Wicked people abuse their power and position over the weak and poor. Greedy oppressors dream up evil plans by night and execute them in broad daylight. Every sunrise gives birth to sinister schemes of men. For example, there is no end to the scams that prey upon the elderly. They receive a phone call from someone pretending to be with the I.R.S., claiming that if they don't send them some money they will be in trouble. They receive a phone call from someone pretending to be their grandchildren, begging them to send money to help them, only to find out later they were deceivers. Each day we drive by title loan and "quick cash" extortioners who victimize the desperate and foolish. On a global scale, we hear and read of oppressive governments and groups that victimize the innocent. Micah 2:1-5 is an encouraging word for us. It assures that God is not unaware of the injustice in his world. He is filled with righteous indignation towards the perpetrators of such wickedness, and he has planned out a fitting punishment for their crimes. No, they will

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<sup>17</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 108.

not go on like this forever and get away with it. God will turn the tables on them in his time. Therefore, keep believing in and hoping in the God of justice (Mal 2:17).

This word of hope is also a penetrating word. You may think, “This is about the rich and powerful who oppress the poor. That’s not me. I’m off the hook.” Well, think again. Micah 2:2 gets right down to the heart of things: “They covet.” God can see right into your heart. He knows your schemes and intentions. The discontentment of your heart is laid bare before the Almighty. He knows the pang of envy you feel when you look on what belongs to your neighbor. He knows how you long to have what is not yours rather than to delight in his good gifts to you. May this drive you to repentance and to satisfaction in Christ.

### **Just Your Kind of Preacher (2:6-11)**

This second unit is a disputation speech. It is a back-and-forth between Micah and the false prophets along with the people who buy their twisted preaching.<sup>18</sup> “The main issue here is the audience’s unwillingness to accept the prophecies of God given through Micah but their openness to accept whatever useless drivel a drunken prophetic deceiver may have to say.”<sup>19</sup> Verse 6 is the false prophets’ order for Micah and other true prophets<sup>20</sup> to “Quit your preaching.” The word used for “preaching” here is נִזְבֵּן, and it has the root meaning of “drip, fall.”<sup>21</sup> In some contexts, like here, it has a negative connotation. Micah is accused of being “like a slobbering madman with his drool running down his beard like David in the court of Achish (1 Sam 21:14).”<sup>22</sup> Yet Micah’s

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<sup>18</sup>Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1984), 26, questions whether Micah’s partners in this dispute are the false prophets or the greedy land-grabbers who have allied with them.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 466.

<sup>20</sup>The plural forms of 1:6 indicate the false prophets’ opposition was to Micah and all other true prophets of Yahweh.

<sup>21</sup>BDB, נִזְבֵּן, 642-43.

<sup>22</sup>Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB24 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 303.

opponents are the ones who drive falsehood (“Thus they preach” also translates נִבְאָה). Therefore, it is the false prophets who are babbling nonsense, having rejected the truth of God’s revelation in favor of the popular sentiment.

The second half of 2:6 has divided translators and commentators over the centuries. Some see it as the continued words of Micah’s opponents: “They [Micah and other true prophets] should not preach these things; shame will not overtake us” (HCSB; see also NIV, ESV, CEB, NET). “These things” refer to the threats of God’s judgment in 2:3-5. By this line of interpretation and translation, the false prophets are saying something like, “Micah, be quiet! You have no reason to preach all this doom and gloom. Since we are God’s people, we will never suffer judgment like you are talking about.”

Others take 2:6b as Micah’s response to his critics: “But if they do not speak out concerning these things, reproaches will not be turned back” (NASB; see also ASV). Davis argues for the second option, identifying the verb as “a straightforward indicative” rather than a subjunctive.<sup>23</sup> By this line of translation and interpretation, Micah is saying to his critics, “Your failure to preach the truth and warn the people has sealed their judgment. There is no way they can escape what’s coming if you do not alert them.” This reading of the text is to be preferred. No emendation of the MT is required.<sup>24</sup> The false prophets are complicit in the wickedness of the rich oppressors, giving them theological cover for their sin.

In 2:7 Micah quotes the false prophets again, having done so in 2:6a. Here they ask two questions. Both questions expect a negative answer. First, they ask, “Is the Spirit of the LORD impatient?” Surely, they say, God is gracious and compassionate, always forgiving and forever patient. Yet Micah is announcing God’s coming judgment and they

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<sup>23</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 45.

<sup>24</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 292n40, emends the verb to get the meaning of “overtake.”

think that is out of character for God. Micah's opponents selectively highlight certain attributes of God's character to the exclusion of others. They have conveniently (for themselves) ignored or rejected the fullness of God's self-revelation. He is a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love (Exod 34:6). He is also a just God who will not leave the guilty unpunished (34:7).

Next, they ask, "Are these the things He does?" "Those asking [these] questions ignore the moral and religious dimensions of the covenant."<sup>25</sup> Having bought into a half-truth about who God is, the Israelite exploiters are unable to conceive of God carrying out the judgments threatened in 2:3-5. For them, God does good to Israel no matter how Israel behaves. Micah's response in 2:7 points out their error: "Don't My words bring good to the one who walks uprightly?" God's covenant blessings are received and enjoyed by Israel only when she walks in faithfulness. The covenant includes not just blessing for obedience, but also curse for disobedience (Deut 28).

"If God has promised to give good to the upright (2:7b), the key question is: Are the people in Micah's audience upright people, whom God will bless?"<sup>26</sup> In 2:8-9 Micah produces evidence that his listeners do not walk uprightly and therefore should expect the judgment of God to fall on them. Grammatically, these verses are challenging, yet their overall message is clear. God says, "But recently My people have risen up like an enemy" (2:8a). Waltke detects irony in the designation of Israel as "My people:" "these sinners audaciously claim to have a covenant relationship with God."<sup>27</sup> The irony is seen in how they behave unlike the covenant people of God. They "strip off the splendid robe from those who are passing through confidently, like those returning from

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<sup>25</sup>Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 125.

<sup>26</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 468.

<sup>27</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 117.

war” (2:8b). These wicked oppressors have gone to war against their own countrymen, pillaging them so that they are like a defeated army returning with nothing.

Moreover, in 2:9 the wicked are indicted for forcing the women of God’s people from their comfortable homes. The word for “force” is שָׁׁנֵן, “which primarily means ‘to chase away’ or ‘drive out (away),’ without implying anything other than an interrupting of an existing relationship.”<sup>28</sup> Interestingly the word is used in Genesis 3:24 of Adam and Eve being driven out of Eden. It also occurs in Genesis 4:14 of Cain being driven from the cultivated land to wander the earth. Additionally, it is used in God’s warning to Israel in Hosea 9:15 that he will drive them out of his land. Returning to Micah 2:9 with this in mind, the greedy land barons are guilty of an extremely heinous crime. They are, in a very real sense, exiling the women (perhaps widows) of Israel from the land by stealing their homes. Therefore, Micah continues, “you take My blessing from their children forever.” The “blessing” (רְדִין) is a reference to the land as God’s gift to Israel’s families.<sup>29</sup> This is certainly not walking uprightly.

Micah speaks again in 2:10. In a scathing example of retributive justice,<sup>30</sup> he orders them to “Get up and leave, for this is not your place of rest.” These land barons had essentially exiled the poor and helpless from their inheritance. Soon Yahweh will exile them from the resting place he acquired for Israel through the conquest.<sup>31</sup> This exile is coming “because defilement brings destruction—a grievous destruction!” The land and people have become unclean due to the idolatry and injustice perpetrated by the wicked in Israel. Just as a person became ceremonially unclean through a skin disease or bodily

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<sup>28</sup>Helmer Ringgren, “שָׁׁנֵן,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 68-69.

<sup>29</sup>See Ezek 16:9-14 where שָׁׁנֵן is used of the riches (including land) that God gave to Israel when he betrothed himself to them in covenant.

<sup>30</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 120.

<sup>31</sup>See Exod 33:14 and Josh 1:15 for connection between land and rest.

discharge and had to leave the camp (Num 5:1-4), so the morally impure covenant breakers must leave the land.

Finally, in 2:11, Micah returns to the complicity of the false prophets in the oppression the wicked wreak on their countrymen. Micah “mixes prophecy with sarcasm as he sketches what it takes to be a ‘popular preacher’ in Judah.”<sup>32</sup> The Hebrew רוח means both “wind” and “Spirit/spirit.”<sup>33</sup> The false prophets claim to be “men of the Spirit”, when in fact they are “men of wind.” To put it in today’s vernacular, they are a bunch of windbags who “invent lies.” They are not led by the Spirit but by their own corrupt hearts. They do not speak for God but for their own gain, comfort, and security. They say to the people, “I will preach to you about wine and beer.” In Leviticus 26:3-5 God promised Israel abundant blessing if she followed his statutes and observed his commands. Included in those blessings are wonderful grape harvests. The false prophets’ preaching of wine and beer seems to be a prosperity gospel wherein the blessings of the covenant are promised but the requirements of the covenant are ignored. Micah says they are just the kind of preacher the wicked in Israel want to hear. “[W]hen these windbags preach their positive message, their hearers drink it up.”<sup>34</sup> They think prophets should tell them what they want to hear not what they need to hear.

Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun! Paul told Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires” (2 Tim 4:3, NASB). Fallen human nature longs to make God in its own image and to reshape his truth to its liking. Fallen human nature desires a half-truth about God, affirming his goodness while denying his justice. Fallen human nature wants to receive

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<sup>32</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 48.

<sup>33</sup>BDB, רוח, 924-26.

<sup>34</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 49.

God's blessing without walking in God's ways. Fallen human nature gladly receives "preachers" who cowardly shy away from confronting sin or demanding righteousness. Unregenerate humanity longs for a prosperity gospel and runs from the whole counsel of God.

Today, thousands flock to hear windbags who bear a remarkable resemblance to those in Micah's day. Their message is not that of Christ and him crucified but of "wine and beer." That is, they tell the people just what they want to hear. They do not speak of sin, repentance, or judgment. They speak only of material gain and blessings. Tragically, their failure to speak the truth of God does great harm to their hearers. They fail to warn them of God's judgment and announce true salvation and blessing (2:6). For this they bear a grave responsibility.

Believers and churches must value the faithful preaching of God's word. You are not in authority *over* the word of God; you are to be *under* the authority of God's word. Strive, by God's grace, to receive his word, in all of its honesty, warnings, threats, comforts, promises, and truth. Proverbs 27:6 declares, "The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive." The word of God (often through your pastor) may wound you, but it is faithful and for your good. Receive it as such. Beware of those whose words are like the excessive kisses of an enemy. Choose your preacher wisely!

Pastors and those who preach the word do well to hear the ancient words of Micah as well. How tempting it may be to shrink away from faithfully proclaiming the word of God. Ralph Davis tells the story of Helmut Thielicke, a German professor of theology dismissed from his post by the Nazis. When he appeared before the "National Head of Lecturers," the man told him, "As long as theology faculties exist ... I will make sure that only sucking pigs and no wild boars are appointed to professorships."<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 49.

same desire to control the message of God and its messenger persists today. Pressure to compromise the word of God can come from both outside and inside the church. For instance, the prevailing wind of culture would have preachers compromise on the truth of same-sex marriage. An influential member and large financial supporter in one's congregation may want the pastor to toe that line as well. "Ah, the life of a wild boar is hard!"<sup>36</sup>

### The Shepherd and His Sheep (2:12-13)

The outlook for the future seems shockingly bleak as we enter the last section of this chapter. The wicked are busy "exiling" their own countrymen from the land of promise. Yahweh has dreamed up a fitting punishment: the wicked will be exiled for defiling the land and will have no one to give them a portion in the future. It is now that Micah returns to that "flicker of promise" implied back in 2:5. Nogalski comments on the seemingly sudden insertion of a salvation oracles after an extended judgment message when he writes, "This juxtaposition creates a paradox: judgment and salvation alike come from God."<sup>37</sup> The exile is coming but it will be followed by a new exodus.<sup>38</sup>

Yahweh speaks in 2:12 as indicated using the first person: "I will indeed gather all of you, Jacob; I will collect the remnant of Israel." Israel and Judah will be scattered among the nations in exile for their covenant breaking (see Deut 28:64). They will be afflicted and laid low, but Yahweh will not forget them. According to his promise in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, God will turn their hearts back to him, gather them from where they have been scattered, restore them to the land, and circumcise their hearts. "I will

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<sup>36</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 49.

<sup>37</sup>James D. Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Micah-Malachi* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2011), 543.

<sup>38</sup>Most interpreters understand 2:12-13 to be positive, i.e., a return from exile and new exodus. A minority have argued for a negative meaning, i.e. the verses speak of God leading the people off into the judgment of exile (Mays, *Micah*, 73-76). See also Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 342-43, for structural, stylistic, and theological arguments in favor of reading 2:12-13 positively.

bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in the middle of its fold. It will be noisy with people” (Mic 2:12b). Isaiah echoes this comforting message: “[Yahweh] protects His flock like a shepherd; He gathers his lambs in His arms and carries them in the fold of His garment. He gently leads those who are nursing” (Isa 40:11). Just as Yahweh shepherded his people in the exodus from Egypt (Ps 74:1-2), so he shall shepherd them in the new exodus. Just as Israel went down a few people (70, to be precise) and came up out of Egypt a great multitude, so the remnant of the decimated nation shall become many (“It will be noisy with people”) as God accomplishes this new exodus for his people.

Micah elaborates in 2:13 on how God will bring this new exodus about. “One who breaks open the way will advance before them; they will break out, pass through the gate, and leave by it.” This text connects to 2 Samuel 5 where God grants David victory over the Philistines. In 5:1-2 the tribes of Israel come to David at Hebron and pledge their fealty to him, recounting Yahweh’s choice of David: “The LORD also said, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel and be ruler over Israel’” (5:2). David captures Jerusalem and makes it his capital. The Philistines muster their forces against David. After seeking God’s guidance, David went out with his forces. He defeated the Philistines at Baal-perazim (“Lord of burstings out”) and said, “Like a bursting flood, the LORD has burst out against my enemies before me” (5:20). Four times the root צָרַפּ occurs in 2 Samuel 5:20. This is the same word used twice in Micah 2:13 (“One who breaks open the way” and “they will break out”). The same God who broke out like a tidal wave of deliverance for David will break out like a tsunami for the deliverance of his people in the new exodus.

The connection with David is further strengthened in the second half of 2:13. “Their King will pass through before them, the LORD as their leader.” Micah 2:12-13 pictures the deliverance of the new exodus being accomplished by a shepherd-king, who is clearly Yahweh himself. At the same time, the connections to David are unmistakable.

He is also the shepherd-king of Israel, a man after God's own heart. Later in 5:2 God promises through Micah that a new David will arise from Bethlehem "to be ruler over Israel for Me. His origin is from antiquity, from eternity." This new exodus will be accomplished through a new David and at the same time by Yahweh himself. Micah's contemporary Isaiah also foretold that "a virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel" (7:14) and that a "child will be born for us, a son will be given to us ... He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace ... He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom" (9:6-7). The NT presents Jesus as the fulfillment of all these great promises. He is Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23). He is David's son and David's lord (Mark 12:35-37). In John 8:58 Jesus claims, "Before Abraham was, I am." The Jews understood what Jesus was claiming, namely to be equal with God. Therefore, Jesus is how Micah 2:13's "One who breaks open the way" is both Yahweh himself and David's descendant. He is the fully divine, fully human savior of the world.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus is the new David who accomplishes the new exodus for his people. He has "burst open the way" and "advanced before them" through his death and resurrection. Therefore, they too "will pass through the gate and leave by it," sharing in his death and resurrection by faith. Jesus has "passed through before" (*עָבָר*) his people. This same word is used in Joshua 3:17 for Israel's crossing of the Jordan into the land of promise. Jesus is the new Joshua who leads us into the promised land of the new creation (Heb 4).

Be encouraged that our God is "One who breaks open the way." Our deliverer is strong to save. He has "burst forth" in mighty deeds of deliverance, chief of which is the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus has broken open the way for our redemption through his cross and empty grave. Now by faith-union with him we share in his life and

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<sup>39</sup>For more on the messiah's divinity in the Bible and in the rabbinic literature, see Colin Barnes, "In What Sense was the First Coming of Jesus Messianic? An Examination of Micah 2:12-13," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38 no. 2 (2014): 214-230.

victory. We pass through the gate and journey with our king to the new Eden. We await his second coming, when he will lead us into the fullness of our redemption.

O Savior, rend the heavens wide,  
Come down, come down with mighty stride,  
Unlock the gates, the doors break down,  
Unbar the way to heaven's crown.  
Sin's dreadful doom upon us lies;  
Grim death looms fierce before our eyes.  
Oh, come, lead us with mighty hand,  
From exile to our promised land.<sup>40</sup>

### Conclusion

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne (Ps 89:14). He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity. That is terrifying news for those who dream up and execute wickedness. The reign and judgment of God is a death sentence for the city of man. Do not listen to the false prophets who proclaim a false peace. Sinful rebellion against the rule and truth of God will not go on forever. Therefore, if you belong to the city of man, repent; turn from your wicked ways, seek the Lord while he may be found. Choose life so that you may live (Deut 30:19). Trust in the "One who bursts forth" in salvation for his sheep. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be "rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son" (Col 1:13). There is peace, blessing, and life only in God's righteous deliverer, Jesus.

God's righteousness and justice are an encouragement to us who belong to the city of God. "This world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever" (1 John 2:17). God will judge the world in righteousness and vindicate his faithful people. Let us not lose heart but continue to follow our good shepherd as he leads us to the land of promise. Let us cling to his word, faithfully proclaimed and rightly

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<sup>40</sup>Friedrich von Spee, "O Savior, rend the heavens wide," trans. Martin L. Seltz, accessed February 14, 2017, [http://www.hymnary.org/text/o\\_savior\\_rend\\_the\\_heavens\\_wide](http://www.hymnary.org/text/o_savior_rend_the_heavens_wide).

divided. Let us love good and hate evil. May there be no envious heart or covetous person among us. As citizens of God's city, let us shine as the light of the world to those in darkness (Matt 5:14-16).

## CHAPTER 4

### THE REIGN OF INJUSTICE AND ITS END MICAH 3

Between 1958 and 1962 an estimated 45 million Chinese people died during what is ironically called “The Great Leap Forward.”<sup>1</sup> Communist leader Mao Zedong and his party starved, tortured, imprisoned, and killed their own people in an attempt to “socialize” the nation and catch up with the industrialized West. Many of the horrors of The Great Leap Forward are chronicled in official communist party records. Children caught stealing a potato were tied up and thrown into a pond, people were branded with hot metal, and farmers forced to work naked in the winter.<sup>2</sup> The injustice of Mao and the communists wreaked havoc on the people of China. Wicked leadership has disastrous consequences for the people under that leadership.

The importance of good leadership is as critical today as it always has been. When a nation has good leadership, it tends to thrive. When a church has good leadership, it tends to thrive. When a family has good leadership, it tends to thrive. Micah’s third chapter addresses the injustice of Judah’s leadership after the detailing of the people’s corruption in chapter 2. The corrupt sheep have corrupt shepherds. Additionally, this third chapter is chiastically parallel to 6:1-6, which also deals with the

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<sup>1</sup>Arifa Akbar, “Mao’s Great Leap Forward “killed 45 million in four years,” UK Independent, September 17, 2010, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/maos-great-leap-forward-killed-45-million-in-four-years-2081630.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

injustice of the nation’s leadership.<sup>3</sup> It falls nicely into three sections, the first and third dealing with political and civil leadership and the middle section with the religious leadership. The first section concerns the brutal butchery of injustice. The second addresses the bribed blindness of injustice. Finally, the third section exposes the barren boast of injustice.

### **The Brutal Butchery of Injustice (3:1-4)**

Micah begins with a call to the “leaders of Jacob” and “rulers of the house of Israel” to listen to his message (3:1). He addresses the political and civil leadership who “were responsible to ensure that justice governs all human relationships.”<sup>4</sup> Earlier in chapter 2, the prophet indicted the injustice of the greedy land barons. Now, he turns his ire towards the nation’s leaders who are complicit in their evil. These leaders bear an extra responsibility for they are “supposed to know what is just” (3:1). They should have known justice because “Yahweh was the archetypal lawgiver: it was the terms of his covenant that the custodians of law and order were meant to enforce.”<sup>5</sup> Justice is based on the revealed character and word of God. Yet these unjust leaders have ignored or rejected justice altogether. “To know justice” is to know God and be thoroughly acquainted with his righteous word. At the same time, knowledge of justice is more than a mere intellectual comprehension; it is a sharing of God’s sense of justice and acting upon it. Ralph Davis puts a fine point on it: “To ‘know justice’ means its ‘in your blood’ to see it done and established.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 299.

<sup>4</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 489.

<sup>5</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 306.

<sup>6</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013), 59.

Judah's leadership, however, lacks the heart required to "do justice" (6:8). They "hate good and love evil" (3:2a). It is not in their blood, to use Davis' language. Jenson notes that "good and evil" in the present context could also be understood as "right and wrong."<sup>7</sup> Through their unjust actions, these leaders show their contempt for what is right in God's eyes and their delight in what the Lord detests. They are not like David. They are not men after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). They are not righteous shepherds, but wolves in shepherds' clothes. Micah graphically describes how these wolves are devouring God's people in 3:2b-3. They "tear off people's skin and strip their flesh from their bones" (3:2b). The word translated "tear off" is the Hebrew לְגַזֵּעַ, which appeared earlier in 2:2 as "seize." Unjust seizure of land and property by the wicked is pictured as brutal butchery.

As Micah's depiction continues, he reveals that there are cannibals in the court of Judah. They "eat the flesh of my people," "strip their skin from them," and "break their bones." To these wicked rulers and their accomplices, other people are "flesh for the cooking pot, like meat in a cauldron." It is arresting language, for sure. Injustice among the covenant people is a form of cannibalism. Oppression is depicted as eating in other texts (Ps 14:4; 27:2; Zeph 3:3). The wicked rich are making themselves fat by consuming their own countrymen. Their land holdings increase only by stealing and swindling from their neighbor. Their pockets grow heavy and deep with silver by preying upon others. They leave in their wake of injustice people consumed and stripped bare by their greed.

In 1729 Jonathan Swift wrote *A Modest Proposal* to critique the state of things in Ireland at the time, including English attitudes and policies. He satirically proposes that poor Irish children become part of the kingdom's food supply. His proposal, in short, reads,

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<sup>7</sup>Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 132.

I do therefore humbly offer it to publick consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males; which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is, that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages, therefore, one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt, will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.<sup>8</sup>

Swift goes on to offer “rational” arguments for this absurd proposal. Everyone will benefit, is his satirical reasoning. The poor parents will be relieved of their burden in providing for their children. The rich will enjoy the meat. The government and society will not be encumbered with the juvenile wretches. Swift even offers recipes and tips for cooking the children.

It is this kind of biting satire and metaphor that Micah employed in his own day. Micah’s vivid depiction of injustice as butchery and cannibalism is meant to pierce the hearts of the wicked oppressors. Perhaps if they see their attitudes and actions in these terms they will repent. If they will not, God will turn the tables on the wicked. “Then they will cry out to the LORD, but He will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because of the crimes they have committed” (3:4). In yet another instance of lex talionis, the punishment will fit the crime. The unjust leadership of Judah ignored the pleas of the oppressed for justice and deliverance. Therefore, when their day of reckoning comes, God will not take up their cause. There will be no one to plead their case. Justice will be served.

Jesus blasted the scribes for taking advantage of the poor and vulnerable. “They devour widows’ houses,” he said (Mark 12:40). Leaders and those in positions of power or influence are to exercise their authority for the good of those they serve. This

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<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden on Their Parents or Country and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick*, ed. David Widger (2013), accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1080/1080-h/1080-h.htm>.

perversion of position and power is a perennial problem with mankind. We see it today in politicians who cater to the interests of those who make them rich and powerful rather than the people they are elected to serve. We see it in the former superintendent of our local school board who stole those many millions of dollars.<sup>9</sup> We see this perversion in dictators and warlords who inflict brutal butchery on the masses. In 2014, terrorist group Boko Haram kidnapped over 200 girls from a Nigerian village.<sup>10</sup> Injustice is alive and well in the world. Therefore, it remains a comfort to know that the God of justice is still enthroned above the earth.

### **The Bribed Blindness of Injustice (3:5-8)**

In this second section, we encounter for-profit preachers. It is linked to the first section by eating language. In 3:3 the wicked civil leaders “eat the flesh” of God’s people. In 3:5 the mercenary messengers “proclaim peace when they have food to sink their teeth into.” These prophets “lead [God’s] people astray.” Smith rightly identifies the fundamental issue at hand as the “prostitution of the prophetic office.”<sup>11</sup> When someone came to the prophets for a word from God, the prophet would give them what they paid for. If the person gave them a fee they felt was satisfactory, then a good word would be the result. They proclaim peace “when they have food to sink their teeth into.” This phrase can literally be translated as, “When they bite with their teeth, they preach peace.” The word translated “bite” (**לִשְׁבַּךְ**) is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible exclusively for a snake’s bite.<sup>12</sup> Micah may have in mind that these prophets are giving a lethal false hope

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<sup>9</sup>Sam Zeff, “Former St. Joseph School Superintendent to Spend a Year in Federal Prison,” KCUR, June 23, 2016, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://kcur.org/post/former-st-joseph-school-superintendent-spend-year-federal-prison#stream/0>.

<sup>10</sup>“Chibok Abductions in Africa: ‘More than 230 seized,’” BBC, April 21, 2014, accessed April 6, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27101714>.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 491.

<sup>12</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 61.

to those who pay them large fees. This would be similar to 2:6 (see earlier exposition of chapter 3 on page 37).

While there are good things in store for good tippers, the prophets “declare war against the one who puts nothing in their mouths” (3:5). Here the HCSB struggles to capture the force and flavor of the original Hebrew. The word translated “declare” is **וְתִּפְרֹחַ**, “to consecrate.” In a sense, they declare holy war on those who do not pay what they expect. These pretentious prophets audaciously proclaim the vengeance of God on those who do not line their pockets. Those who cannot or do not give what the prophets expect will receive a hostile word. So, as Allen nicely summarizes, “Selfish expediency had become their criterion for the content of their oracles, on the principle that he who pays the piper calls the tune.”<sup>13</sup>

Neither truth nor preachers of truth should be for sale. Certainly, God’s messengers are entitled to fair compensation for their work (1 Cor 9). However, instruction should be unbiased and faithful. Those who deliver God’s word are to do so in faithfulness, free from the love of money that is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10). On August 8, 2004, I was ordained to the Gospel ministry. My father gave me some advice on that special day that I will never forget: “Watch yourself when it comes to women, money, and pride.” My father had the wisdom to know something I had not yet learned as a young man, namely the three things that most often trip up pastors. Those who are entrusted with God’s word must be careful to declare it without bias or improper regard for compensation (see Mal 2:8-9). What might this temptation look like for God’s messengers today? A pastor could be tempted to ignore or water down certain biblical truths because a member of the church whose giving is significant or crucial will be offended. Modern preachers are tempted to emphasize things the crowds want to hear rather than what they need to hear. “You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar” is,

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<sup>13</sup>Allen, *Jonah, Obadiah, Micah*, 311.

after all, the wisdom of the world. Some prosperity gospel preachers today prey upon the sick and disabled, promising that if the people will “sow a seed of faith” in the form of a gift to the preacher’s ministry, then God will heal or bless them. In these, and many other ways, the temptation to prostitute the prophetic office is alive and well today.

God’s response to this wickedness is found in Micah 3:6-7. “Therefore, it will be night for you,” he begins. Misuse of the prophetic calling and gift will result in its loss. Again, the punishment will fit the crime. They will lose the light they suppressed or perverted. Those whom God favored by speaking to them will hear his voice no longer. Those who could see will now be blind. God will no longer speak to them or reveal anything through them. There will be no visions, no divination, nothing. Micah does not wade into the waters of the legitimacy of divination. His point is simple: every one of these prophets’ means of or attempts to receive revelation from God will prove futile. Hence, we see the bribed blindness of injustice. J. L. Mays nicely summarizes: “Their profession will become as empty of reality as the oracles they gave.”<sup>14</sup> This judgment will bring great shame (3:7). They will “all cover their mouths because there will be no answer from God.” Covering one’s lip/mustache has a threefold meaning according to Waltke: “a symbol of their mourning (Ezek 24:17, 22), their uncleanness like that of a leper barred from the worshipping community (Lev 13:45), and that they have nothing more to say.”<sup>15</sup>

Divine judgment in the form of withdrawing prophetic activity is seen elsewhere in the Bible. For instance, Yahweh declares through the prophet Amos that he will “send a famine through the land: not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). When we abuse the word of God we are in

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<sup>14</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 84.

<sup>15</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 173.

real danger of losing the word of God.<sup>16</sup> This tragedy can be seen in our own day. Prosperity gospel preachers and others can so manipulate the Bible that they become numb to its truth and true power. The Bible becomes something to be used for our own selfish purposes rather than the word of God that changes us into the image of Christ. The Bible becomes nothing more than a self-help manual or positive thinking handbook. Then they cannot see its peculiar glory.

Moreover, there is the abuse of neglect. Despite the abundant access today's Western world enjoys, biblical illiteracy is a growing epidemic in our culture.<sup>17</sup> Shall we expect to hear from God when we will not bother to listen? We would be foolish to think this is a warning only for those outside the church. We in the church presume upon God's grace if we neglect the Scriptures but expect to hear from God. Do you give more attention to the Bible than the television? Do you know more about the upcoming professional football draft than you do about the book of Psalms? If so, I do not praise you in this. I urge you to repent, seek the Lord, and foster a love for and devotion to his precious written word. Therein he speaks to us. Let us listen.

In 3:8 Micah contrasts himself with the rent-a-preachers. A strong adversative (וְאַוְלָם) and explicit personal pronoun (אֵن כִּי) emphasize the contrast. Micah, and all true prophets of God, are different than these sell-outs. The for-profit prophets are filled with a selfish, man-pleasing spirit. Micah is filled with "power, by the Spirit of the Lord, with justice and courage." Waltke identifies a hendiadys: three words that refer to one total concept—a Spirit-energized power that victoriously establishes justice.<sup>18</sup> The leaders of Judah "abhor justice" (3:9) but Micah is filled with zeal for making wrongs right. True

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<sup>16</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 64.

<sup>17</sup>Ed Stetzer, "Biblical Illiteracy by the Numbers. Part I: The Challenge," *Christianity Today*, October 17, 2014, accessed April 25, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/october/biblical-illiteracy-by-numbers.html>.

<sup>18</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 174.

prophets are filled with the Spirit of God *and* share Yahweh's commitment to righteousness and justice. True messengers of God share God's character. True messengers of God have the courage, or "guts" as Davis calls it,<sup>19</sup> to speak out for and see to the doing of justice.

The rest of 3:8 reveals the task for which Micah has been enabled by the Spirit of Yahweh. He is to "proclaim to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin." תְּגַנֵּן is translated as "proclaim" here by the HCSB, but in the context may be better understood as "confront."<sup>20</sup> Micah's commission is to expose the sin of his people and call them to repentance. Faithful proclamation will always contain an element of confrontation, bringing the unexposed sin of people into the light of God's word and calling for a righteous response. Those who preach the word today must not be afraid to proclaim the word that wounds; for it is only the wounding word that is also the healing word. It is only the word that cuts that also comforts. It is only the word that confronts that also encourages. It is only the word that lays us low that raises us up. As Spurgeon once said, "Little is that ministry worth that never chides you. If God never uses his minister as a rod, depend upon it he will never use him as a pot of manna, for the rod of Aaron and the pot of manna always go together, and he who is God's true servant will be both to your soul."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Barren Boast of Injustice (3:9-12)**

This third section of Micah 3 returns to the injustice of Judah's civil leaders. In 3:9, he calls them to account because they "abhor justice" and "pervert everything that is right." Isaiah, Micah's contemporary, addressed the rampant injustice this way: "Woe to

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<sup>19</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 65.

<sup>20</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 105.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Spurgeon, "Criticism of Preachers," accessed April 26, 2017, [http://www.spurgeon.us/mind\\_and\\_heart/quotes/p4.htm#criticism](http://www.spurgeon.us/mind_and_heart/quotes/p4.htm#criticism).

those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isa 5:20). It is through injustice that the leadership of Jerusalem has built up the city (3:10). Amos announced judgement on the wealthy and powerful of Samaria for living in the lap of luxury by exploiting the poor and helpless (3:15; 5:11). Now, Micah indicts Jerusalem’s rich and influential for the same sin. During this period of history, Jerusalem grew significantly, expanding from 37 to 150 acres.<sup>22</sup> Hezekiah undertook massive building projects (2 Chr 32:27-29). From one perspective (unconcerned with justice), Jerusalem was a marvelous sight to behold. However, from Micah’s perspective, the capital is a tragedy he can barely stomach to look at. Zion has not been built in righteousness and justice but “with bloodshed.” Jenson comments, “No doubt the builders defended their architectural masterpieces by the way they expressed the capital’s wealth and status, enhanced national pride and provided international respectability. What matters to Micah is the living stones of the city, its people (1 Pet 2:5).”<sup>23</sup> Mays puts a fine point on it: “It was urban renewal with a vengeance, a new Jerusalem that cost the lives of men.”<sup>24</sup> When the disciples marveled at the grandeur of the Jerusalem temple, Jesus had a different perspective on it (Mark 13:1-2). He saw how the leaders had corrupted the temple and forgotten its true purpose. It had become a “den of thieves” rather than a “house of prayer for all nations” (11:17). Thus, it stood condemned.

Back in Micah 3:11, there is further explication of the injustice perpetrated by the leadership of Jerusalem. In this single verse, the whole gamut of leadership is denounced. First, the leaders “issue rulings for a bribe.” Justice is for sale. Second, “her

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<sup>22</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 66.

<sup>23</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 138.

<sup>24</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 88.

priests teach for payment.” Truth is for sale. Third, “her prophets practice divination for money.” Access to God is for sale. They have all prostituted their public offices.

Yet, as the second half of 3:12 reveals, these corrupt leaders have the audacity to claim that they trust in Yahweh, that he is among them, and so they are safe from calamity or judgment. “They lean on the LORD” (3:12b). “Lean” translates *לֹעֵד* and is used figuratively for trusting in a person when the preposition *לְ* is prefixed to the person/object.<sup>25</sup> Here it is used in an ironic sense. The unjust leadership have a false sense of security. They mistakenly believe that because Yahweh dwells in the temple at Jerusalem that they are impervious. Roughly a century later, Judah fell prey again to this same warped “Zion theology.” Yahweh sent Jeremiah to the gate of the temple to declare repentance to the people coming to worship there (Jer 7:1-3). He declared, “Do not trust deceitful words, chanting: This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” (7:4) The temple’s presence in Jerusalem does not unconditionally guarantee the inviolability of the city or its inhabitants (7:5-15). At the dedication of the temple, Yahweh had told Solomon and all Israel that if they turn from following him and keeping his commands then he would “reject the temple” (1 Kgs 9:6-7). It is only when the king and people walk with Yahweh and in his ways that the protecting and preserving presence of God is active among them. The temple is not a rabbit’s foot or talisman and God cannot be manipulated to serve our purposes. The hypocrisy of Judah’s leaders in Micah’s day is astounding. They withhold justice and oppress the poor but expect God to protect them. They despise his righteousness while presuming upon his benevolence.

However, their boast is barren. Their security is false. Their hope is hollow. God will be true to his covenant word and reject this place and discipline his people if they do not turn from their injustice, immorality, and idolatry. In Micah 3:12 the prophet describes the coming desolation. “Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will

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<sup>25</sup>BDB, *לֹעֵד*, 1043.

become ruins, and the hill of the temple mount will be a thicket.” This language echoes the earlier prophecy of Samaria’s destruction in 1:5-7. Samaria was destroyed early in Micah’s ministry. Therefore the prophet points to Samaria’s downfalls as a sign “that Judah had better pay attention if it hopes to avoid the same fate.”<sup>26</sup> Allen detects in the passive verbs of this verse “a silent, sinister allusion to the agency of God, present indeed, but only to punish.”<sup>27</sup> The first section of this chapter (3:1-4) likened the rapacious leaders of Judah to butchers and cannibalistic animals. In retributive justice, Yahweh will make the scene of their evil deeds like a forest for wild animals. Zion, once the boast of the people, will become utterly barren.

This scathing word pierced the heart of king Hezekiah, causing him to turn towards Yahweh. Therefore, Yahweh relented concerning the disaster he threatened through Micah (Jer 26:16-19). Sadly, Judah returned to her unrighteousness and did not heed the words of God’s prophets, resulting in their eventual defeat to the Babylonians in 587/6 BC. Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and its temple. Those Judeans who did not die in the siege were exiled to other lands (2 Kgs 24-25). Asaph lamented, “God, the nations have invaded your inheritance, desecrated Your holy temple, and turned Jerusalem into ruins” (Ps 79:1).

Like the ancient Judeans, we can easily pervert both God’s justice and God’s promise. Beware of clinging to a false security. Some today may think that because they made a profession of faith and/or were baptized at some point in life that they are ensured of God’s protection and blessing no matter how they believe or live now. The author of Hebrews warns us of the danger of apostasy (Heb 6:1-12). John teaches us that it is those who persevere in genuine faith, love, and obedience that are true believers (1 John 2:3-6;

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<sup>26</sup>James D. Nogalski, “Recurring Themes in the Book of the Twelve: Creating Points of Contact for a Theological Reading,” *Interpretation* 61, no. 2 (April 2007): 131.

<sup>27</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 320.

2:7-11; 2:18-24). Let him who boasts boast in knowing the Lord. When we walk humbly with our God (Mic 6:8) then our boast is not barren and our security is certain.

We may be tempted to think that all of Micah's threats regarding judgment leading to desolation are past tense. Certainly, they had an immediate and specific referent in ancient Judah. Yet, we would be foolish to think they have no applicability to us today. Waltke proposes one contemporary application: "A similar sort of judgment can be observed in closed churches that once housed the holy Word of God and the holy sacraments; on account of apostasy they now house profane theaters, or museums, or even false religions."<sup>28</sup>

### Conclusion

The Chinese people have suffered greatly at the hands of communist injustice. The people of Judah in Micah's time suffered greatly under ungodly leaders. The road of human history is sadly pockmarked by unjust leadership like we have been confronted with in our text. Today, women and children suffer from the absenteeism or (even worse) abuse of a man who thinks only of himself, rather than thriving under the servant-leadership of a righteous man. Nations suffer from the injustice inflicted by their leadership.

In such a world, it is supremely comforting to know that God is aware. He knows and he cares. He will bring all injustice to account. This God of justice is also patient. When Hezekiah and Judah responded rightly to this threat of judgment, God relented. Perhaps today you are failing to be a godly leader in the role entrusted to you. You have not been the husband, father, employer, or otherwise that you are supposed to be. Repent. Turn from your wicked way and commit yourself to the Lord. By his grace, you can be a godly leader and those you lead will thrive as you shepherd them.

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<sup>28</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 190.

In such an unjust world, it is heartening to remember that God has given us the perfect good shepherd, Jesus Christ (John 10:1-18). He knows his own, brings them in and out securely, protects them, provides for them, and even lays down his life for them. Without Christ, we are all wandering sheep. We are all corrupt like the people described in Micah 2. Yet, the good shepherd seeks and saves lost sheep (Luke 15). If you are without Christ, come to him in repentance and faith. Believe in him and be saved.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXTREME MAKOVER MICAH 4

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* was a popular television show that featured families living with some hardship in a house that needed major repairs. While the family was sent off on vacation, a team of benevolent designers and craftsmen would swoop in and completely transform the home. Each episode ended with the “big reveal” as the family was dramatically introduced to their renovated home. Before and after footage of the home was remarkable, sometimes even making the viewer wonder, “Is that even the same house?” We love a good before and after, don’t we? Our fascination with transformation is not limited to homes. We are also intrigued by physical makeovers. Why else are shows like *The Biggest Loser* such hits?

Why are we so interested in change? Is it not because we long for a transformation that transcends the bricks and mortar of houses and the trimming of waistlines and numbers on a scale? Is it not that we long for an extreme makeover of a cosmic proportion? Is it not that we long for God to make us and the whole world new, right, and very good?

In Micah 4 we encounter an extreme makeover that makes those on television look like child’s play. The prophet announces that Yahweh will so powerfully intervene that the future will be a stark contrast to the present. God will accomplish a new exodus for his people that will transform everything. Micah 4 and 5 comprise a literary unit, marked out by its chiastic structure. Dorsey and Renaud, among others, have shown the

lexical and conceptual symmetry of the two chapters.<sup>1</sup> Renaud's outline is helpful in gaining a map of the passage:

- A 4:1-5 In last days: Pilgrimage of nations
- B 4:6-7 The remnant transformed into a strong nation
- C 4:8-13 To Jerusalem: Promise of Victory
- C' 5:1-3 To Bethlehem: Establishment of messianic era
- B' 5:4-9 The remnant supreme in messianic era
- A' 5:10-15 In last days: Purification of nations and destruction of idols<sup>2</sup>

Thus far, Micah's messages have emphasized coming judgment, although several rays of future hope have shone through the dark clouds (2:5, 12-13). Now, in chapters 4 and 5, Micah's focus is on God's future mercy and salvation. Judgment is not the final word. Although the sun is about to set on Judah, the morning will once again dawn bright and strong. In 4:1-5, God's ruling presence is established as Zion is transformed. In 4:6-7, God's remnant people are restored as God gathers them and brings them back from exile. In 4:8-13, God's redeeming power is exercised as he defeats his enemies.

### **God's Ruling Presence Reestablished (4:1-5)**

Micah 3 ended with bleak prospects for Jerusalem. Because of the leaders' and people's sin, Zion will be "plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become ruins, and the hill of the temple mount will be a thicket" (3:12). Then in 4:1ff comes a word of hope. The HCSB, among other translations, unfortunately omits the conjunction that begins 4:1. The conjunction, either conjunctive (NASB) or adversative (AV), shows the connection between the two oracles: "And/but in the last days the mountain of Yahweh's house will be established at the top of the mountains." The near future holds doom and gloom for Judah, but the far future holds light and glory for God's people. The old Zion, built upon

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<sup>1</sup>See David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 298, and B. Renaud, *La Formation du livre de Michee* (Paris: Gabalda, 1977), 281, quoted in Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 142.

<sup>2</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 142.

bloody injustice, will be torn down. In its place, God will establish a new Zion, founded upon righteousness and justice. What a transformation!

Micah specifies the exaltation of “the mountain of Yahweh’s house” (4:1).<sup>3</sup>

The temple at Jerusalem will be razed to the ground because the people have polluted it (3:12), but in the future God is going to exalt it above all the earth. Waltke has identified four things symbolized by ancient near eastern temple mountains: “(1) a deity’s presence with his people, (2) his abiding victory over chaos, (3) a gateway into heaven, and (4) the mountain deity’s rule over the territory it dominates.”<sup>4</sup> God will establish his presence and dominion over the earth. As a result, the peoples and nations will be drawn to Yahweh. As House says, “This sacred space will draw a holy, saved, international group of believers.”<sup>5</sup> Micah pictures the peoples as a river flowing up (*גְּרָא*) to the Jerusalem temple (“peoples will stream to it”), something decidedly supernatural, given the fact that water does not naturally go against gravity up a mountain. Here is yet another reminder in Scripture that it is God who draws sinners to himself to receive life and blessing (John 6:44). They are drawn by the magnetic pull of his word (Mic 4:2). The nations will embrace God’s righteous instruction and “walk in his paths” (4:2b).

The parallels between the future Zion pictured here and Sinai of old are worth noting. The covenant word (Torah) proceeds from both. Moses went up on Sinai to get the Torah for Israel. Here in Micah’s vision of the future, the many nations go up on Zion to receive the Torah. Israel entered into covenant with Yahweh and received the covenant instruction as a result of the exodus from Egypt. Therefore, it is strongly implied here that there will be a new exodus that brings about a new covenant. God will do a work of

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<sup>3</sup>Mic 4:1-5 and Isa 2:1-5 are nearly identical. For a survey of the possible relationships between the two texts, see Francis L. Anderson and David N. Freedman, *Micah*, AB24 (New York: Random House, 2000), 413-25.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 209.

<sup>5</sup>Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 370.

salvation like that of the exodus from Egypt, only greater. This saving work of God will bring about a new covenant that includes Gentiles, bringing them into the people of God who love and embrace his righteous word.

This new exodus will result in the reign of God's justice among the nations (4:3). From Jerusalem, Yahweh will govern the people in equity. The place from which injustice reigned will now be transformed to the source of international justice. Allen comments, "How fitting that Jerusalem should become renowned for justice after the travesty that Micah had known within the contemporary courts!"<sup>6</sup> The peoples of the earth will be at peace when God reigns in Zion. He will "settle disputes among many peoples" (4:3a). Therefore, war will become a thing of the past. Swords will be refashioned into plows and spears into pruning knives. All the human effort put into war will now be directed towards cultivating land. Under the rule of God, mankind will return to his original purpose of stewarding creation (Gen 2:15).

Micah 4:4 is an allusion to 1 Kings 4:25,<sup>7</sup> a summary statement of the security and tranquility of Solomon's reign. The two verses share the phrase "each man under his own vine and under his fig tree." In Solomon's day, God's people were dwelling safely in the land of promise, enjoying the blessing and presence of God among them. It was a high point in the life of Israel. Micah's allusion is meant to recall this idyllic time and take it even further. First Kings 4:25 says that the people enjoyed this blessing "all the days of Solomon." Yet Micah envisions the reign of Yahweh over his people that will be "from this time on and forever" (4:7b). The future peace will be an enduring peace. Additionally, Micah predicts that Yahweh will raise up a Davidic monarch whose "coming forth is from of old, from eternity" (5:2). As Wolff puts it, "God's royal rule in

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<sup>6</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 326.

<sup>7</sup>Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 408, go so far as to say, "Verse 4 contains a phrase that could be a direct quotation from 1 Kgs 5:5 [Eng. 4:25]."

Zion (4:8) comes to its fulfillment through the shepherd-king from Bethlehem.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, Micah tells of a coming eschatological, eternal reign of a son of David that is like Solomon’s reign but greater in every way. David’s son, Solomon, brought a period of security and blessing. David’s greater son, the Messiah, will bring an unending age of peace. It is through the Davidic son that Yahweh will provide that Yahweh will bring his kingdom and exercise his rule over creation. Therefore, Micah alludes to Solomon in order to plug his reader into the grand metanarrative of Scripture. From Genesis forward, the goal of God’s people dwelling securely in his special place knowing his blessing as they worship and serve him has been central. It has also been elusive. However, God promises that he will bring it about despite the waywardness of his people.

The reign of Yahweh and his Messiah is what accomplishes the peace foretold here. Davis aptly states, “Divine intervention brings about international pacification.”<sup>9</sup> Here is the true hope for world peace. John Lennon called his listeners to imagine a world at total peace, yet that global peace will not come through human efforts, means, or wisdom. Mays explains, “The longing for peace cannot exist as hope if it is separated from the expectation of the coming divine kingdom.”<sup>10</sup> Through Jesus Christ, God is bringing his worldwide rule. It is only through the power and triumph of the gospel that the warring peoples of the world will be at peace. When Jesus Christ returns to reign fully over the earth this promise will find its ultimate fulfillment. Imagine a world with no tears, no violence, no sickness, no sin, and no death. That world is coming (Rev 21-22). Wait in hope.

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<sup>8</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 93.

<sup>9</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2010), 77.

<sup>10</sup>James L. Mays, *Micah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 93.

Concerning 4:5, Jenson writes, “After travelling from immanent future (3:12) to distant future (4:1-4), the appendix brings us back to the abiding present.”<sup>11</sup> Here Micah voices the confession and commitment of God’s people as they await the realization of his eschatological promise. The day will come when the nations will walk in Yahweh’s paths (4:2), but that time is not yet. Currently, they “each walk in the name of their gods” (4:5). Therefore, God’s believing people resolve to walk in the name of Yahweh their God now and forever. They have determined to live as God’s covenant people even as they wait on the fullness of his promise.

This is the same position the church is in today. With Christ’s coming, the kingdom of God has broken in. We experience a measure of this promise now. God is drawing believers from all nations into the heavenly Mount Zion. We know a measure of the peace and security spoken of here, but we do not know it in its fullness. We wait for our blessed hope. We long for the return of our eternal king and the establishment of his kingdom over all of creation in all of its fullness. We are in the already but not yet. Like the believing remnant of Micah’s day, we too must resolve to walk in the name of Yahweh our God even as we await the consummation of all things. We must live our lives in light of what is to come. Let us live an end-times lifestyle in these, our times.

### **God’s Remnant People Restored (4:6-7)**

After describing the glory of the eschatological Jerusalem, Micah reiterates Yahweh’s promise of 2:12-13. He will gather the remnant of his people, return them to the land, and dwell among them. The section begins with the words, “On that day,” connecting it to 4:1’s “In the last days.” A remarkable future awaits the many nations of the world and Judah will not be left out. In fact, Israel will be right at the heart of it all: “Then the LORD will rule over them in mount Zion from this time on and forever”

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<sup>11</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 148.

(4:7b). Despite the chosen people’s unfaithfulness, the one who chose them remains faithful. God has not discarded them or his covenant with them. His plan and purpose to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham’s seed stands firm.

He “will assemble the lame” (4:6b). This is a possible allusion to Jacob in Genesis 32:31-32 given that the participial form of **יָלַץ** only occurs outside of these two texts in Zephaniah 3:19, which is of a similar theme. In Genesis 28, Jacob is forced to leave the promised land after swindling the birthright from his brother, Esau. He goes into a sort of exile, staying in Paddan-Aram with his uncle Laban.<sup>12</sup> On his way back home in Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with God, who touches his hip and makes him lame. Jacob then limps back into the promise land, bearing the memorial of his exile which also serves as a testimony of the triumph of God’s grace. Back in Micah 4, this same pattern emerges. God has injured his wayward, covenant people. He has sent them into exile for their rebellion. However, in time he will turn to them again, bind up their wounds, and bring them back into the land of life and blessing. He will once again dwell among and reign over them.

Yahweh will make the “lame into a remnant, those far removed into a strong nation” (4:7a). Judah will be reduced to weakness when they suffer the judgment of God against their sin. Their military will be wiped out. Their cities will be burnt to the ground. Relatively few will survive. Yet, “in that day” God will make them into a strong nation. This is another remarkable transformation. The people of God are not destined to make it by the skin of their teeth. They will not simply survive. They will thrive. They will become numerous just as they did in Egypt (Exod 1:7). God’s covenant with Abraham to make him a great nation and bless the world through him (Gen 12:1-3) will prevail despite the people’s sin.

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<sup>12</sup>Iain Duguid, *In the Grip of Relentless Grace: The Gospel in the Lives of Isaac and Jacob* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 48.

This was very good news for God's people in Micah's day and it is very good news for us as God's people today. Why should we, as a largely Gentile church, care if God kept a faithful remnant in Israel and remained true to his promise to Abraham? We should care because our salvation has been brought about through God's faithfulness to his promise to Abraham. We should care because it shows us that the God who has bound himself to us in the new covenant through Jesus Christ is faithful and true. He will not abandon his promise or discard his people. We falter and fail in our obedience and loyalty to our great covenant God, but he remains unalterably committed to us. Furthermore, we should care about this promise because it finds its great fulfillment in Christ and the church. God did indeed bring Judah back from Babylonian exile and established them in the land, yet the greater fulfillment is in Jesus, who is the true Israel.<sup>13</sup> As Jews and Gentiles are united to him as the people of God, this great promise is coming to pass (Eph 2). Through the gospel, God is assembling them lame, gathering the scattered, and healing injured sinners. He is making them into a remnant and strong nation. Once exiled from his presence (Gen 3), they are now being brought back to God through Christ (1 Pet 3:18).

### **God's Redeeming Power Exercised (4:8-13)**

In the first section (4:1-5), God's presence is restored to Zion and he transforms the nations. In the second section (4:6-7), God's people are restored to Zion and he transforms the remnant of Judah. In this third section (4:8-14), God's power is restored to Zion and he transforms the dominion of the world.

Micah 4:8 is transitional, linking the second and third sections. It addresses a personified Jerusalem with three vocatives: "watchtower for the flock" (*מִגְדָּל־עֵדָה*), "fortified hill" (*לֹאָיָה*), and "Daughter Jerusalem." Some understand the first to be a

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<sup>13</sup>For more on Jesus Christ as the true Israel, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 172-73.

reference to the place near Bethlehem mentioned in Genesis 35:19-21. The main argument against this understanding is its immediate context near two terms that clearly refer to Jerusalem. In favor of such an understanding is its possible chiastic parallel with 5:1. Both lines begin with “and you” (*הַתִּשְׁאַל*), followed by a place name. The linking of Migdol-Eder with Bethlehem would create a chiastic emphasis on a new David raised up by God. In the final analysis, it is best to understand the term as a reference to Jerusalem, given its immediate context alongside “fortified hill/Ophel” and “daughter Jerusalem.” Yet, the chiasm and the emphasis on a new David are not lost. In a similar but greater way than the first David, God will raise up the Messiah who will come from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, restoring the kingdom and dominion.

“The former rule” and “sovereignty” will come to Jerusalem when God exercises his redeeming power on behalf of his people (4:8). As 5:2 explains, this restoration of God’s dominion will come through a ruler from Bethlehem “whose origin is from antiquity, from eternity.” God’s promises to David (2 Sam 7) will not fail to come to pass. Despite the failures of David’s descendants, God will raise up a son of David who will bring the kingdom of God, sit on the throne forever, and bring order, life, and blessing to all the world. This son of David is Jesus Christ (Matt 1).

The remainder of this section is structured in a three-fold pattern of judgment followed by deliverance. This structure is discernible by the repetition of “now” (*הַתֵּן*) at the beginning of 4:9, 4:11, and 5:1. Before the promised deliverance and restoration of the kingdom through the exercise of God’s redeeming power in the Messiah, the people must face God’s judgment for breaking the covenant. In 4:9, Yahweh and Micah inquire of Judah as to why they are in such distress. “Now, why are you shouting loudly?” they ask first. This is a “cry of alarm.”<sup>14</sup> The questions continue: “Is there no king with you? Has your counselor perished so that anguish grips you like a woman in labor?”

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<sup>14</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 90.

Commentators are divided on the identity of the king and counselor mentioned here as well as on the tone of the verse. Some believe the king and counselor to refer to Yahweh himself.<sup>15</sup> As such, this would be an “inquiry about why the people do not call on God, their King.”<sup>16</sup> Smith argues that the historical context of the prophecy is Sennacherib’s invasion of 701.<sup>17</sup> If so, Micah intends to encourage the people’s trust in Hezekiah by focusing their attention on Yahweh. It would be like saying, “Hey Jerusalem, why are you in such despair and hopelessness? You have a great God who can rescue you from this present distress. Trust in him and follow the good king he has given you.”

Other scholars maintain that the questions are sarcastic in nature and aimed at the feckless human leadership of Judah’s unfaithful kings.<sup>18</sup> If so, the historical context is likely not the reign of Hezekiah but speaks of the later rules of Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. The people had put their hope in the king and his policies despite his deviance from God and his instruction. Why turn back from following him now? “So, Micah satirizes the failure of human leadership and implicitly accuses his hearers of lack of faith in God.”<sup>19</sup>

This second understanding of 4:9 fits better with the verse that follows. In 4:10 Daughter Zion is exhorted to “Writhe and cry out … like a woman in labor, for now you will leave the city and camp in the open fields.” The failed leadership of a human king will lead to the terrors of exile. They will “go to Babylon.” At this point, the picture is not pretty. However, it is then and there that God’s people will be rescued and that “Yahweh will redeem you from the power of your enemies.” Earlier in Israel’s history,

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<sup>15</sup>David W. Baker, T. Desmond Alexander, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 195. Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 522.

<sup>16</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 522.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 90-91.

<sup>19</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 333.

God redeemed his people from their enemies in Egypt; now he will rescue them from captivity in Babylon. What a word of hope! God will accomplish a new exodus.

The next instance of judgment followed by deliverance is found in 4:11–13. The nations will assemble against Zion and lick their lips as they ponder how they will pillage and desecrate her (4:11). Mays comments, “When nations see themselves as the centre of history and seek a destiny that fulfils their power, they can tolerate no Zion.”<sup>20</sup> Here is yet another instance of the wicked nations raging against Yahweh and his anointed (see also Ps 2).

The great twist comes in 4:12. The nations who have gathered to destroy Zion have, in fact, been gathered for destruction. Yahweh is the sovereign schemer who has orchestrated this great battle to crush his enemies beneath his feet and deliver his people. The wicked nations, of course, have no inkling of what is going on: “But they do not know the LORD’s intentions or understand His plan” (4:12a). They are mere pawns in his cosmic, eternal plan of redemption. God has lured his enemies into a trap. They are “like sheaves to the threshing floor” (4:12b), and the people of God are to “rise and thresh” (4:13a). Yahweh will make his people mighty and strong so they can “crush many peoples” (4:13b). Here is yet another remarkable before and after. God’s decimated, down-trodden people will be transformed into a mighty people who tread down their enemies. Or, as Davis puts it, “Hopeless Zion has become invincible Zion.”<sup>21</sup>

What to do with all the plunder from this great victory? It shall be devoted to Yahweh by destroying it completely (4:13b; see also the destruction of Jericho in Josh 6). The people of God and city of God shall not be polluted by the pagan hordes or by their riches. Here, again, is another breathtaking before and after. The land and temple were

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<sup>20</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 109.

<sup>21</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 97.

once made unclean by the idolatry, immorality, and injustice of God's people. However, when Yahweh exerts his redeeming power the land and temple will remain holy and pure.

Many commentators point to the Assyrian invasion of Judah, siege of Jerusalem, and God's miraculous deliverance of Zion in 701 BC as the fulfillment of this prophecy (2 Kgs 18-19). While those events are certainly an instance in what is clearly a biblical pattern (hostility from wicked nations followed by triumph over them), it is not the culmination of the pattern. The culmination is to be found in that final, eschatological defeat of the unbelieving nations who have arrayed themselves against the people of God (Rev 19:17-21).

### Conclusion

Death Valley, California is the lowest point of elevation in the United States at -282 feet below sea level.<sup>22</sup> A mere 90 miles away stands Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the continental U.S. at 14,505 feet.<sup>23</sup> The difference (14,787 ft.) is staggering and breathtaking. The difference in Mount Zion pictured by Micah in our text is even more remarkable. Once a hornet's nest of injustice, it will be transformed into the global center of righteousness. Once a den of thieves, it shall become a house of prayer for all nations (see also Matt 21:12-13). Once ransacked by evil peoples, it shall become the means by which God executes his just judgment on the nations. Once demolished by God's wrath against sin, it shall be raised up above all the mountains of the earth.

God himself will accomplish this extreme makeover through the Messiah. In Christ, God's ruling presence is (re)established, God's remnant people are restored, and God's redeeming power is exercised. As God's revelation progresses into the New

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<sup>22</sup>"Lowest Places on Earth," National Park Service, last updated February 28, 2015, accessed June 20, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/deva/learn/nature/lowest-places-on-earth.htm>.

<sup>23</sup>"Seeing and Climbing Mt. Whitney," National Park Service, last updated February 16, 2017, accessed June 20, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/whitney.htm>.

Testament, Jesus fulfills the Jerusalem temple. He is the presence of God among people. Moreover, the church that is united to him becomes the new temple and Jerusalem of God for he dwells in them and among them.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it is in Christ, in the new covenant, and in the church that this remarkable fourth chapter of Micah finds its ultimate fulfillment. In Isaiah 65:17–18 the New Jerusalem is pictured as coextensive or synonymous with the new creation. As Gentry and Wellum comment, “The new creation is the new Jerusalem and vice versa. The conclusion is clear from Isaiah 65:25, where the new creation is described as God’s holy mountain-Mount Zion has become the new Eden.”<sup>25</sup> The promises of our text await their final fulfillment at the consummation of the ages, when “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem [will come] down out of heaven from God” (Rev 21:2). Therefore, as we await the new heaven and earth to be revealed at Jesus’ return, let us live even now as new creation in him (2 Cor 5:17). Let us “walk in the name of Yahweh our God forever and ever” (Mic 4:5).

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<sup>24</sup>For a book-length treatment of the relationship between the Jerusalem temple, Jesus, and the church, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006).

<sup>25</sup>Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 467.

## CHAPTER 6

### HIS KINGDOM COME MICAH 5

“Humanity had deserted us, civilization had failed us, but we never lost faith in a better world to come,” reflects Holocaust survivor Susan Taube.<sup>1</sup> Many Jewish Holocaust victims held on to this hope of a better world to come. It can be seen in their artwork. For example, there is a beautiful painting from the Gurs camp of southern France. It shows a bright yellow butterfly perched on twisted barbed wire.<sup>2</sup> The background is the dark scene of the concentration camp against the silhouette of the Spanish mountains. The imagery is hard to miss. The Jewish people, represented by the yellow butterfly, hope to escape to a better world.

Agnieszka Sieradzka, an art historian at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, comments: "The art was a hope for a better future. The art was escape from the brutal reality of the camp to another, better world."<sup>3</sup> A better world to come: this hope is what sustained those brave souls in the face of indescribable suffering and death. A vision of a better world to come can sustain the human soul in persevering hope through the worst of sufferings.

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<sup>1</sup>“Holocaust Survivors’ Reflections and Hopes for the Future,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last updated September 29, 2010, accessed August 24, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/information/visit-the-museum/programs-activities/first-person-program/first-person-podcast/holocaust-survivors-reflections-and-hopes-for-the-future>.

<sup>2</sup>Allen Hall, “Art Created in Hell of Nazi Germany,” Daily Mail, last updated January 26, 2016, Accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3415925/Art-created-hell-Nazi-Germany-Jewish-victims-burned-Astonishing-works-mankind-s-survival-revealed-world-remembers-holocaust.html>.

<sup>3</sup>Chris Boyette, “Auschwitz’s Forbidden Art,” CNN, last updated January 26, 2015, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/23/world/art-auschwitz/index.html>.

Although the causes and circumstances differed greatly from the Holocaust, the people of Israel and Judah in the prophet Micah's time were also facing great suffering. Yahweh will soon pour out the curses of the covenant upon them for their disobedience and rebellion (Micah 1:2-5). Their enemies will triumph over them (1:10-14). Their land will be conquered and defiled (2:4). Their visions and revelation from God will be cut off (3:5-7). Their temple will be destroyed (3:12). They will be dragged off into exile (1:16). In the face of such a grim reality, God's people need hope. In Micah chapters 4 and 5, Yahweh gives his people a vision of the better world to come. God will remain faithful to his people and his covenant with them. He will send the messiah, who will usher in a different world as he brings the kingdom of God.

The church of Jesus Christ today needs a vision of the better world that is to come. As she pilgrimages through a sin-ruined world full of suffering, the church must never lose sight of her blessed hope (Titus 2:13) so that she may endure and inherit the promise. Our text in Micah gives us a vision of the better world to come brought about by our savior, Jesus Christ.

What will it be like when the messiah comes? What will the messianic kingdom and age look like? Micah chapters 4 and 5 answer these questions. The two chapters constitute the central section of the book's chiastic structure.<sup>4</sup> Renaud's outline is helpful in seeing the structure:

- A 4:1-5 In last days: Pilgrimage of nations
  - B 4:6-7 The remnant transformed into a strong nation
  - C 4:8-13 To Jerusalem: Promise of Victory
  - C' 5:1-3 To Bethlehem: Establishment of messianic era
  - B' 5:4-9 The remnant supreme in messianic era
  - A' 5:10-15 In last days: Purification of nations and destruction of idols<sup>5</sup>
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<sup>4</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis to Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 297.

<sup>5</sup>Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 142.

In chapter 4 we saw that God's ruling presence will be restored among his people on Zion, God's remnant people will be restored to Zion, and God's redeeming power will be exercised on behalf of Zion. Here, in chapter 5, we see that in the better world to come Zion's king will return to her from Bethlehem, Zion's people will be restored to strength, and Zion's sin will be removed.

### The Return of Zion's King (5:1-5a)

As chapter 5 opens, the prophet resumes his three-fold series of before-and-after scenarios. "Micah moves back and forth between how the present needs reformation and how God will guarantee a bright future for the remnant."<sup>6</sup> The first, found in 4:9-10, lamented Judah's coming exile followed by a new exodus in which Yahweh will redeem them from Babylon. The second, found in 4:11-13, pictured a coming reversal of fortunes. The enemy nations that surround the people of God to ravage them will in turn be decimated by an empowered Israel.

Micah 5:1 states that in the near future (*הַיּוֹם*, translated "now") Judah will be besieged and her ruler will be humiliated. There is some uncertainty in translating the beginning of 5:1. It can be rendered, as HCSB, "Now, daughter who is under attack, you slash yourself in grief." The other possible translation is seen in the ESV's "Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops." The Hebrew *תְּבִלָּה* has two meanings, "to cut oneself" and "to gather in troops or bands."<sup>7</sup> The verb always appears in the hithpolel stem, "which corresponds to the reflexive Hithpael."<sup>8</sup> Further, this nonperfective form seems to be linked to the imperatives of 4:13, giving it an imperatival force.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the addressed audience is summoned to do something to itself.

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<sup>6</sup>Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 368.

<sup>7</sup>BDB, *TBILAH*, 151.

<sup>8</sup>Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 297.

<sup>9</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 263.

Thus, Jerusalem is commanded to either slash herself in a presumable act of mourning or she is urged to rally her remaining troops to counter the enemy invaders. Either of these translations and interpretations is possible. The reference to Jerusalem as “daughter of troops” makes the second understanding more likely. Micah’s command is, therefore, sarcastic in nature. Jerusalem has trusted in her earthly king and military prowess to this point. Now it will be shown that their faith is misplaced. Jenson explains, “The city is now defined by its military character rather than by the presence of Yhwh (contrast 4:1-3).”<sup>10</sup> Jerusalem has trusted in its own strength and not depended on the Lord. Now it’s time to see how misplaced her faith has been.

The second half of 5:1 pictures Jerusalem under siege and her judge being struck on the cheek with a rod. A wordplay is present in the Hebrew. The judge (**שָׁפֵט**, *show-fate*) will be struck with a rod (**שָׁפֵת**, *shay-vet*). Davis attempts to bring the paranomasia into English with “a beater for the leader!”<sup>11</sup> In 1 Kings 22:24 the false prophet Zedekiah strikes the true prophet Micaiah on the cheek as a sign of disregard and humiliation. Here, the judge of Israel is struck on the cheek with a rod as a metaphor for the powerlessness and subjection of Israel’s king. Waltke comments, “The buffet on his cheek represents a climactic insult that all power of resistance was gone.”<sup>12</sup> The success and dominance of David has seemingly dead-ended in an impotent and failed dynasty. Some interpreters see this as a reference to the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. with Hezekiah as the judge being struck on the cheek metaphorically.<sup>13</sup> However, it better fits the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. As detailed in 2 Kings 24-25, Jehoiachin was captured and taken to Babylon. His successor, Zedekiah, watched

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<sup>10</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 156.

<sup>11</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Darlington, England: EP, 2010), 100.

<sup>12</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 263.

<sup>13</sup>Mays, *Micah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 115.

his sons be killed before having his own eyes gouged out. Indeed, the flame of the Davidic hope is barely flickering as 2 Kings closes, yet it is flickering. Jehoiachin is freed from prison and brought to the king's table (2 Kgs 25:27-30).

As Micah continues in 5:2, he looks forward to the time when God will fulfill his promises to David in 2 Samuel 7. There, God had promised David to establish his throne and kingdom forever (7:16). In keeping that promise, God will go back to Bethlehem in order to raise up a new David, the Messiah, who will reign forever over God's people. "Now the monarchy is an embarrassment, but from Bethlehem will arise a new beginning that will result in the extension of God's kingdom through <sup>t</sup><sup>14</sup>the earth."

Micah 5:2 identifies Bethlehem Ephrathah as the Messiah's place of origin. Ephrathah is synonymous with Bethlehem. In 1 Samuel 17:12 Jesse is called an "Ephrathite." It is possible that Ephrathah was the name of a district or clan in the area of Bethlehem. The significance of Bethlehem Ephrathah is obvious: the great king David originated there. "The purpose of the double name, Bethlehem Ephratha, seems clear. Both are associated with the origin of David before he became king in Hebron and Jerusalem."<sup>15</sup> The names are a promise in and of themselves. Bethlehem ("house of bread") and Ephrathah ("fruitfulness") are the future for God's people. There is a flame of hope that not even Israel's suffering can extinguish. Despite the failure of David's sons, God has not cast away the Davidic covenant.

Like his ancestor David, the Messiah will rise from inconspicuous and humble origins to reign as God's exalted king. The significance of Bethlehem is its insignificance.<sup>16</sup> The future king will be the man of God's own choosing, empowered by his Spirit, and faithful in all things. Moreover, the rise of this future king of Zion from

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<sup>14</sup>House, *Old Testament Theology*, 370.

<sup>15</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 115.

<sup>16</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 101.

Bethlehem invokes the promises of the Davidic covenant as recorded in 2 Samuel 7.

Davis explains, “For Micah, ‘Bethlehem’ means not only ‘birthplace’ but ‘firm promise’ as well.”<sup>17</sup> Micah’s point, therefore, is not only that the Messiah will arise from humble origins, but also that the rise of the Messiah is an act of God’s promise-keeping faithfulness.

The connection to the Davidic covenant is strengthened by the mention that the Messiah’s “comings forth will be from of old, from ancient days.” The phrase “from long ago” (**מִזְרָחַת**) is used by Micah in 7:20 to speak of God’s faithful covenant dealings with Abraham and Jacob. The phrase “from days of antiquity/eternity” (**מִימֵן עֹזֶל**) appears in Micah 7:14 in reference to the times of the conquest and settlement. Therefore, this is not a reference to the eternal existence of the Messiah,<sup>18</sup> but rather roots his coming in the soil of God’s faithful promise to David.

God promises in 5:2 to raise up for himself a “ruler” (**מְשֻׁלָּח**) in Israel. The same root is used in 4:8, suggesting that “5:1-4 describes the rise of a new David who will accomplish for Zion the great things promised in chapter 4.”<sup>19</sup> Zion will be transformed, renewed, and exalted when her king returns. Matthew records the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as the fulfillment of this promise and prophecy (Matt 1:18-2:12). Indeed, Matthew places a massive emphasis on Jesus as the “son of David.” The phrase occurs at least nine times in his Gospel.

Until the Messiah’s advent, God “will give them up” (5:3). In other words, they will be scattered and dominated by their enemies. Only when “she who is in labor has given birth” will “the rest of his brothers return to the people Israel” (5:3). The

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<sup>17</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 104.

<sup>18</sup>Scripture does elsewhere indicate that the Messiah is the eternally existent son of God who comes into the world, taking on humanity. See Isa 9:6-7, John 1:1-18.

<sup>19</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 471.

identity of the woman giving birth to the future ruler has been much debated. In light of the fuller picture of redemptive history, it can only ultimately refer to Mary's giving birth to Jesus. The future David will bring about the return of his brothers to the people Israel. The Messiah will gather and unite God's scattered people into his kingdom. Jenson says it well, "It was David who finally succeeded in uniting the different tribes after the death of Saul (2 Sam 2:26; 19:12), and here the new David will accomplish the same miracle."<sup>20</sup>

The New Testament depicts the fulfillment of this great promise. Jesus gathers twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-19), the beginning of a new Israel.<sup>21</sup> He calls people into the kingdom of God through repentance and faith (Luke 4:42-44). He enters Jerusalem as the king of Israel (Matt 21:1-10). He dies to gather into one flock all of God's sheep, both Jew and Gentile (John 10:14-18). Many Samaritans hear and believe the gospel of the Messiah, David's son (Acts 8:1-25), bringing about the reunification of God's people as promised here and in Ezekiel 37.<sup>22</sup> Revelation 5:9-10 sings the praise of Christ who has redeemed people from all nations through his sacrifice.

"And he shall stand and shepherd the flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God" (5:4a). There will be a strength and permanence to this coming David's rule. He will "stand." The mention of shepherding the flock and Yahweh being his God again evokes the Davidic covenant, given the consistent shepherding motif associated with David. "[The flock] shall dwell secure, for now he

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<sup>20</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 158. See also Ezek 37.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 680-81.

<sup>22</sup>For an excellent treatment of this passage and theme in Acts, see Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 109-124.

shall be great to the ends of the earth” (5:4b). The strength of the Messiah’s rule ensures the security of the Messiah’s people.<sup>23</sup>

In Micah’s vision of a better world to come, Yahweh promises to raise up David’s fallen booth (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16). The king will return as David’s greater son comes to Zion. He will restore and reunite God’s afflicted and scattered people. He will reign over the earth as the mighty shepherd-king, bringing security and peace to his people. In Christ, God is bringing this great promise to fulfillment. Jesus declared, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). As a result of laying down and taking his life back up again, Jesus says of his sheep, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Indeed, this one is “their peace” (Mic 5:5a).<sup>24</sup>

### The Renewal of Zion’s Strength (5:5b-9)

This second unit continues to describe the coming messianic age. With Zion’s king back on the throne, her strength will be renewed. In fact, she will have dominion like never before. “When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men” (5:5b). Assyria was the dominant power at this time and the greatest threat to Judean security.<sup>25</sup>

The mention of Assyria here and in the next verse are often taken as strictly referring to Assyria, sometimes narrowly to Sennacherib’s invasion of 701 B.C. However, it is best to read Assyria here metaphorically, as Waltke does: “Micah projects Israel’s archenemy of his own time into the future Messianic Age in accord with the

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<sup>23</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 106.

<sup>24</sup>Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 476, insightfully connect “peace” here (*שלום*) with the allusion to Solomon’s (*מלך* in Hebrew) peaceful reign found in 4:4.

<sup>25</sup>For a comprehensive picture of Assyria, including its power and influence during Micah’s time, see William C. Gwaltney Jr., “Assyrians,” in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M Yamauchi (Grand Rapids, Baker: 1994),77-106.

principle that prophets represent the future under the imagery and traits of their own historical situation.”<sup>26</sup> Like “Babylon”<sup>27</sup> and other names of enemies, “Assyria” becomes a designation for the enemy of God’s people in other times and contexts. In the messianic age, God’s people will have the required leadership (“seven shepherds and eight princes of men”) to overcome the enemy.<sup>28</sup>

The next verse pictures Zion led by the Messiah and his shepherd-princes on the offensive: “they shall shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances” (5:6a). This signifies that “the Messiah will conquer through his people.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, by the Spirit and through the church, Jesus Christ is conquering. The gospel is pushing into the darkness of this sin-ruined world. Though they suffer greatly, the church of Jesus Christ is “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37).

Micah 5:7-8 envisions the people of the Messiah in the midst of the peoples of the world. They are portrayed as having both a positive and negative impact on the peoples. Positively, they will be “like dew from Yahweh, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man nor wait for the children of men” (5:7). The metaphor of dew is rich with significance. In the first place, like dew, the people of God’s presence among the nations is owing completely to God. Wolff says, “[F]or people of antiquity dew had a thoroughly puzzling origin.”<sup>30</sup> Second, dew is hardly noticed; it is unobtrusive, yet very effective. This is how the Messiah’s people will be among the nations. They will rarely be flashy or in the world’s spotlight. Yet, they will be extremely effective as they bring

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<sup>26</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 287. See Ezra 6:22 where Darius (a Persian) is called “the Assyrian.” Also, see Isa 52:4.

<sup>27</sup>See Rev 14:8, 16:19.

<sup>28</sup>Contra Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 525-26, who argues that these are the arrogant words of Jerusalemites who foolishly rely on their military might to overcome Assyria.

<sup>29</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 202.

<sup>30</sup>Hans W. Wolff, *Micah the Prophet*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 95.

life-giving water to the nations. Recently we have seen this play out in the response to Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. Southern Baptist disaster relief is the second largest relief organization in the country and often first on the scene, but rarely gets any publicity. Unsung, the church ministers to the world and brings good news.

Micah 5:8 pictures the remnant of Jacob as “a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep.” It tears to pieces and there is none to deliver from its attack. The lion of Judah’s people will be lions among the nations, bringing judgment and death that is as unavoidable as a sheep’s fate when a lion attacks it. What is meant here? Will the Messiah’s people take up arms and kill the nations? Certainly not. This negative effect upon the nations must be the result of how they relate to the remnant. If they oppose and reject the Messiah’s kingdom rule as announced by and mediated through his people, they are as doomed as sheep in the clutches of a young, strong lion.

Therefore, the remnant’s role among the nations is “portrayed first positively as dew and then negatively as a lion.”<sup>31</sup> Some commentators have a hard time seeing how the remnant can have both a positive and negative role among the nations.<sup>32</sup> Yet, God’s people have always had a positive-negative effect on the nations. In Genesis 12:2 God promises to bless those who bless Abram and curse those who curse him. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Paul describes the apostolic ministry as the “aroma of Christ.” For those who are perishing it is the aroma of death to death. To those who are being saved it is the smell of life to life.

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<sup>31</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 161.

<sup>32</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 527, argues that the two parallel lines communicate that both Judah and the nations are not in control of their destiny.

This section ends with a declaration that the people of God will be victorious (Mic 5:9).<sup>33</sup> Their “hand will be lifted up against [their] enemies” and “all [their] enemies will be destroyed.” Messiah’s people are to join him in accomplishing victory over his enemies. Believers are called to the Gospel battle. We put on the armor of God (Eph 6) and wage spiritual warfare in confidence that we will prevail through Christ. To a modern church “that often feels powerless in a pagan environment, a dwindling minority attacked by hostile forces on every hand, is given this prophetic word of encouragement and stimulus.”<sup>34</sup> In the better world to come, God’s people are not defeated but victorious. In Christ, we are victorious over our enemies. Christ has defeated sin, death, and Satan. We share in his victory. Our earthly enemies will also be conquered. We will either take them captive through the gospel or they will be defeated in judgment on the last day. Even now the gospel is sovereignly advancing through the earth.

### **The Removal of Zion’s Sin (5:10-15)**

This third and final section mirrors 4:1-5 which described the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion. Here Zion is prepared to be the city described earlier. She must be made ready as a bride for her bridegroom. Her uncleanness must be removed. The section is marked by the repeated use of “cut off” (**תַּכְרִיכָּה** appears four times in somewhat staccato fashion). Her wickedness and false sources of security must be expunged. She must be purified so that in her all the nations of the earth may find blessing. Micah details the removal of her military securities, idolatrous substitutes, and rebellious nations.

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<sup>33</sup>It is possible to read the imperfect verb here as a jussive form, making it a prayer that Yahweh will accomplish this victory. See Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 527, for an argument in favor of the jussive.

<sup>34</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 355.

## **Removal of Military Securities (5:10-11)**

Israel and Judah were prone to trust in military strength. Yahweh must destroy their false sources of security. Verse 10 describes the removal of offensive military securities. Horses and chariots were formidable weapons in the days of Micah. God will remove that which the people have come to trust in for security. In 4:3 it is said that the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. They will no longer learn war or engage in war. God will bring this about through an Israel that can honestly declare, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of Yahweh our God” (Ps 20:7).

Verse 11 describes God’s removal of defensive military securities. Cities and strongholds will be done away with. Canaanites built massive walled cities like Jericho (Josh 6:1) for protection. The Israelites followed suit. Solomon especially increased fortifications (1 Kgs 9:15-23). Lachish was a heavily fortified, walled city that the Assyrians conquered with great difficulty. While these defensive measures were not inherently sinful (they were often wise), the people’s sinful hearts all too often put their confidence in their defenses rather than in the God who is their shield, stronghold, and rock of refuge (Ps 91). Waltke comments, “[W]hen people obey God’s moral laws they can throw away the paraphernalia of war, but when they disobey they arm themselves to the hilt to protect their evil ways.”<sup>35</sup> In so doing, they were foolish. “Although such massive buildings and huge walls appear to provide hope to the nation, God’s removal of them will leave the people with nothing to depend on but God.”<sup>36</sup>

Trusting in the military power of a nation is no wiser today than it was in Micah’s time. As Christians in America, we can be tempted to put our hope in the power

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<sup>35</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 335.

<sup>36</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 536.

or prosperity of our nation. While we can be supportive of our country and military, our faith and hope should be in God alone.

### **Removal of Idolatrous Substitutes (5:12-14)**

Israel's fondness for Canaanite ways extended beyond military things into the realm of religion. Idolatry was a constant snare that tripped up Israel. Moses warned them of the dangers of breaking the covenant with Yahweh by going after other gods as they prepared to enter the promised land (Deut 28:14). Joshua called them to exclusive commitment to Yahweh as they settled in the land (Josh 24:14ff). The prophets, including Micah, called them to put away their false gods and worship Yahweh alone. In this section, Yahweh announces that the better world to come will be marked by the removal of idolatrous substitutes.

To begin with, Yahweh will cut off sorceries and fortune-tellers (5:12). “Sorcery tried to control the future; divination sought to discern the future ahead of time in order to gain advantage by such knowledge.”<sup>37</sup> Fallen humans are control-freaks of the worst kind. They want to manipulate the spiritual realm for their own twisted purposes. Israel had become “full of divination from the East and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines” (Isaiah 2:6). However, when Messiah comes, God will root such arrogant ambition from the hearts of his people. Instead of seeking to control the gods, they will gladly submit to the rule of the creator.

Additionally, Yahweh will cut off the man-made gods that pollute his people and his land (5:13). The “carved images” and “sacred pillars” will be exterminated. Yahweh prohibited the making of carved images in the Ten Words (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8). The “sacred pillars” were standing stones often found in cultic high places (1 Kgs 14:23)

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<sup>37</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 115.

and in some way represented the deity's presence.<sup>38</sup> Deuteronomy 7:5 links idolatrous altars, pillars, Asherah poles, and carved images. Israel is to rid the land of such unclean things. Sadly, Israel defiled the land with them, but Yahweh is going to change that. He will crush all substitutes so that "you will no longer bow down again to the work of your hands" (Mic 5:13b).

Wolff comments, "The nations will only be overcome by an Israel that itself has been purged."<sup>39</sup> Before the covenant people can fulfill their chosen role among the nations of the world, they must be made holy to the Lord. A worldly church is unfit to fulfill God's kingdom purpose in the world. Their salt will become flavorless and only good for the world to trample upon (Matt 5:13). A church that is no different than the world will be of no good to the world. The state of the church can be a discouragement at times. As Davis laments, "The church often seems more like a shriveled prune than a radiant bride."<sup>40</sup> However, we do not lose heart. God is at work, doing all he must to transform us. He is cutting, pruning, tearing down, cleansing, strengthening, and forming his church in to the image of his son. Be of good hope for Christ gave himself for the church "to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word" (Eph 5:25-26). Therefore, let us be holy to the Lord. Let us be devoted-body, soul, and spirit-to God. Put away your idols and hypocrisy. Put away your injustice and immorality. Put on Christ and the newness of life.

### **Removal of Rebellious Nations (5:15)**

The promised land will soon be overrun by pagan hordes. The land will be defiled by their presence and actions. In his sovereignty, Yahweh will punish the

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<sup>38</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 126.

<sup>39</sup>Wolff, *The Prophet Micah*, 97.

<sup>40</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 119.

wickedness of his people through unbelieving nations. Those nations, however, will be responsible for their sinful actions in afflicting God’s people. Therefore, when messiah comes, God will judge the enemies of his people. He will “take vengeance in anger and wrath against the nations that have not obeyed [him]” (Mic 5:15). Their assault on God’s people and God’s land is an assault upon God’s dominion. Therefore, Yahweh’s vengeance “is a function of his rule as exclusive King in Israel and the world.”<sup>41</sup> Waltke goes so far as to render the first part of 5:15 as “I will avenge my sovereignty.”<sup>42</sup> God’s vengeance is not spiteful or vindictive. It is not the irrational soothing of a wounded ego. Rather, it is “the exercise of legitimate sovereignty...which must occur if the rule of God is to be maintained against the self-seeking power and lusts of men.”<sup>43</sup>

Smith perceptively notes that 5:15’s reference to nations (דְּגָנִים) extends to disobedient Israel, citing Ezekiel 2:3, 36:13-15, and 37:22 as evidence.<sup>44</sup> The rebellious among the people have joined the nations in rejecting God’s kingship and honoring his dominion. People in all nations, including Judah, will face the vengeance of God for failing to obey him. Therefore, this verse stands as both warning and hope. The people of Judah should beware lest they be numbered among God’s enemies by failing to submit to his righteous rule. The people of Judah can also have great hope because the enemies of God and his people will one day be eliminated.

Many people believe that a loving God would not establish his rule by punishing people who fail to obey him. Such wrong thinking fails to grasp the biblical record. Humans are not autonomous, self-governing masters of their own destiny. Rather, they are creatures made in the image and likeness of God and responsible to God for their

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<sup>41</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 127.

<sup>42</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 320.

<sup>43</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 127.

<sup>44</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 537. See also Trent C. Butler, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 339.

actions (Gen 1-2). The Creator-King demands obedience from his creatures. Those who spurn his ruling word will suffer the punishment that attends their disobedience. People should not expect to reject God's rule and get away with it. For example, those who reject his truth about human sexuality can expect to suffer the consequences for doing so. Those who reject God's truth about justice and wrong others will not get away with it.

All humans have sinned against God (Rom 3:23) and deserve divine punishment as rebels against the Creator-King. The good news is that God, being rich in mercy, has provided a savior for sinners. God sent his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to rescue rebels and traitors. In Jesus Christ, the fully divine son of God took on full humanity, yet he was without sin. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God, fulfilling all righteousness. He died as a sin-atoning sacrifice on the cross, taking upon himself the vengeance of God in anger and wrath against sin. Indeed, in punishing Christ in the place of sinners, God has exercised his legitimate sovereignty to establish the rule of God against the self-seeking power and lusts of men. Jesus was buried and three days later God raised him in life, glory, and authority. Everyone who turns from their sin and places their faith in Christ shares in his life, death and resurrection. His perfect righteousness is considered their own by faith. His sacrificial death is the atonement for their sins. His resurrection is their guarantee of eternal life. Therefore, if you are still without Christ, repent and believe the Gospel. Turn from sin and trust in Jesus and you will receive forgiveness and eternal life.

The church today can rest assured that those "who do not know God or obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" will be brought to account by God (2 Thess 1:5ff). Just as God promises here in our text to rid the land of false securities, idols, and rebellious nations, so God has promised that the better world to come (new creation) will be rid of all these wrongs as well (Rev 21-22).

## Conclusion

A new and better world has broken into this one with the first advent of Christ. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem has begun the messianic age. Let us wonder and worship as we ponder his coming into this world. Let us sing:

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light,  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.<sup>45</sup>

Yes, indeed, in that meager manger the hopes and fears of centuries were met. The eternal plan of God was being brought to pass in Christ. He rose from the humble hometown of his father David to be ruler over God's people. He came to redeem them from the power of their enemies (Mic 4:10). He came to remove their sin and rebellion. He came to bring God's kingdom. On the cross, he was crowned the king of Israel. Through his death and resurrection, he is restoring God's exiled people and renewing creation. He is bringing a better world.

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to the God's right hand where he reigns and is gathering his scattered sheep from among the nations (John 11:49-52). He will return and his second advent will bring about the consummation of the messianic age. Then all the promises of these two chapters will be fully and finally realized. Then we will receive our blessed hope. Then we will live in a better world-no, a perfect world. Until then, we wait in confident hope. Until then, we say, "Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!"

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<sup>45</sup>Philip P. Brooks, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 86.

## CHAPTER 7

### YAHWEH VS JERUSALEM MICAH 6

We live in a litigious day. Some contemporary court cases are absurd. For instance, in 2016 coffee giant Starbucks was the defendant in two ridiculous cases. In the first case, multiple plaintiffs sued because their lattes had a quarter inch of steamed milk at the top instead of coffee. In the second case, the plaintiff sued Starbucks for putting too much ice in their iced coffee.<sup>1</sup> In such a legal climate we can become indifferent to the real injustices in our midst. All plaintiffs become exploiters of the system. All prosecutors become ambulance chasers. The petty and fraudulent callous us to the genuine cases of wrong.

Most legal disputes are not so outlandish as those mentioned above. In fact, most cases are complex and involve some measure of culpability on either side of the plaintiff-defendant line. Yet, what if there was a case in which the plaintiff was completely innocent and the defendant was thoroughly guilty? This is what we encounter in Micah 6, where Yahweh brings a lawsuit against his covenant people. The covenant crisis has been boiling throughout the book and now erupts in a passionate plea from Yahweh. As Andersen and Freedman note, “[This] confrontation between Yahweh and Israel is a climax in the book of Micah.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sean Rossman, “Sue Me! 10 Most Ridiculous Lawsuits of the Year,” USA Today, last updated December 21, 2016, accessed October 24, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/12/21/latte-litigation-starbucks-lawsuit-most-ridiculous/95706020>.

<sup>2</sup>Francis I. Andersen and David N. Freedman, *Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 24 (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 504.

The form and structure of the passage has been understood in a variety of ways. Most see two major divisions, 6:1-8 and 6:9-16. John Dorsey argues that the chapter is arranged as a chiasm with the famous 6:8 at the center.<sup>3</sup> Following Dorsey's insight, we will consider the passage under three headings: God's covenant vindication (6:1-5), God's covenant values (6:6-12), and God's covenant verdict (6:13-16).

### **God's Covenant Vindication (6:1-5)**

The section begins with a summons: "Now listen to what Yahweh is saying" (6:1a). Then God summons "his prophet to arise as a plaintiff in the court (Deut 19:15) and plead this case before the mountains."<sup>4</sup> God is the plaintiff in this case. Micah will be the prosecutor. The defendant is not yet identified. The mountains and enduring foundations of the earth are to serve as witnesses (Mic 6:1-2). Taken together, these two natural elements stand as a merism, referring to the whole earth.<sup>5</sup> In Deuteronomy different elements of creation are called upon to witness the making and renewing of the Sinai covenant (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28). Here they are called upon to "Listen to Yahweh's lawsuit" (Mic 6:2a). These "sober and silent witnesses" have seen both the faithfulness of Yahweh and the disloyalty of Israel over the centuries.<sup>6</sup> This is no ordinary lawsuit; it is a covenant confrontation.<sup>7</sup> The high places mentioned here also remind Israel of what will happen to her for breaking the covenant. As Dempster writes, "When

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<sup>3</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis to Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 298.

<sup>4</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 549. Contra James L. Mays, *Micah* OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 128, who identifies the addressee of the second person plural as Israel.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 374.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 375.

<sup>7</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 374, notes that the Hebrew word (גִּבְעָה) is "a technical term here to accuse the people of having broken the covenant."

God will emerge from his throne—the ultimate high place—he will tread upon the other high places and the mountains will melt and the hills will collapse in his path (1:3-4).<sup>8</sup>

The earth is called to witness “because Yahweh has a case against his people, and he will argue it against Israel” (6:2b). Now the defendant is named as Israel, God’s own covenant people. Yahweh subpoenas Israel to his divine court where he will contend with them. The reflexive Hithpael form of the verb translated as “he will argue it” (**יכח**) suggests a “dialogical dispute in which they will argue with each other.”<sup>9</sup> God wants to have it out with his people. “You show me where I have failed in our covenant and I will show you where you have failed!”

Yahweh’s words in 6:3 have the feel of grief, exasperation, and frustration. He addresses Judah: “My people, what have I done to you?” It is like a father pleading with his wayward child, “My son, my daughter, what have I done that you would act like this?” Can Israel point to any fault or failure on Yahweh’s part? God posed similar questions to Israel in Isaiah 5:4: “What more could have I done for my vineyard than I did? Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes?” The people’s silence speaks volumes.

Yahweh also asks, “How have I wearied you?” God wants to know “how he has worn them out, how he has been such a drag, or proven so boring.”<sup>10</sup> Tragically, knowing, loving, and serving Yahweh have become a burden to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The priests in Malachi’s time also regarded their service and worship in the temple as a “nuisance” (Mal 1:13). Yahweh’s people are in sad shape when the things of God are wearisome and boring.

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<sup>8</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Micah*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 154.

<sup>9</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 550. See also Amos 5:10 and Isa 29:21.

<sup>10</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Darlington, England: EP, 2010), 122.

God's faithfulness to his covenant people is evidenced by a succinct review of salvation history in 6:3-5. Allen ably summarizes the point: "The history of Israel is a history of covenant grace."<sup>11</sup> Yahweh appeals first to the grace of redemption, citing the exodus from Egypt in 6:4a. Israel was a slave in a foreign land (Exod 1). Yahweh was mindful of their affliction (Exod 3) and delivered them by his mighty arm, afflicting their enemies (Exod 7-14). The Lord redeemed them in the Passover, purchasing the people as his very own (Exod 12). Yahweh brought them safely through the Red Sea but destroyed the Egyptians in watery judgment (Exod 14). Then, God led them through the wilderness to Sinai, where he entered into covenant with the nation (Exod 19ff). The people were willing covenant partners: "We will do all that the LORD has spoken" (Exod 19:8). This amazing grace of redemption was supposed to result in a people loyal to Yahweh. Allen correctly observes, "As the focal point of every worshipper, the Exodus symbolizes not only the covenant love of God but also his claim upon the covenant loyalty of his people."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Micah recalls Yahweh's Exodus redemption to rebuke Israel's faithlessness."<sup>13</sup>

After the exodus, Joshua led the people to enter the promised land. At the end of his life, he reviewed the history of the nation to that point (Josh 24:1-13). In light of this history of covenant grace, he tells them: "Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth" (Josh 24:14a). The people responded by renewing the covenant (Josh 24:16ff). Back to Micah 6:4, Yahweh's recollection of the exodus (like Joshua's) is meant both to remind the people of God's faithfulness and of their

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<sup>11</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 365.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 366.

<sup>13</sup>Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 482.

responsibility. Yahweh has the right to expect the covenant loyalty that is woefully absent in Micah's audience.

Second, Yahweh appeals to the grace of leadership. God did not redeem them from the house of slavery only to let them perish in the wilderness as sheep without a shepherd. He sent before them Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (6:4b). Moses and Aaron appear together in a number of places recalling God's provision of good leadership.<sup>14</sup> Micah adds Miriam to the list. Jenson suggests that "Moses stands for the law, Aaron for the cult, and Miriam for prophecy."<sup>15</sup> Certainly God is making the case that he has been a loyal covenant partner to his people.

Third, Yahweh appeals to the grace of protection. Once again, he addresses them as "my people," his pleading tone still in full force. They are to "remember" (*זכור*) what God has done for them (6:5). This command or exhortation is to more than mere recollection or nostalgia. Micah's audience is to consider the gracious actions of Yahweh in order to trust in him again and renew their resolve to walk as his people. Waltke explains: "[M]emory entails faith and actualizes the past into the present."<sup>16</sup> Or, as Mays puts it, "[T]o live and think by events whose force continues from the past into the present."<sup>17</sup> God's people need to "remember what Balak king of Moab devised and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him" (6:5a). Numbers 22-24 records the account of how Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam, however, was subject to Yahweh's sovereignty and could only bless Israel, much to Balak's chagrin. Micah presses this righteous act of Yahweh upon the people, as if to say, "Did Yahweh wrong you when he

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<sup>14</sup>Josh 24:5; 1 Sam 12:6, 8; Ps 77:20, 99:6, 105:26, 106:16.

<sup>15</sup>Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 170.

<sup>16</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 373.

<sup>17</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 135.

guarded you from evil in the wilderness? Did Yahweh fail you when he turned curse into blessing for you?”

Finally, Yahweh appeals to the grace of perseverance. Israel must also remember “what happened from Shittim to Gilgal” (6:5b). Joshua sent spies from Shittim to scout out the land, particularly Jericho (Josh 2:1). Israel set out from Shittim to cross the Jordan (Josh 3:1).<sup>18</sup> Gilgal is where Israel first camped after crossing the Jordan (Josh 4:19). At Gilgal, Joshua set up twelve stones as a memorial of how God brought them across the Jordan just as he brought them through the Red Sea “so that you may always fear the LORD your God” (Josh 4:24). Gilgal and her stones stand as a powerful reminder to Israel that her God is faithful and true. Yahweh stuck with his hard-hearted and stiff-necked people through the wilderness. He kept them and brought them through. Their entrance to the promised land is completely God’s grace.

Remember all of this, Micah says, so that you may “acknowledge Yahweh’s righteous acts” (6:5b). Micah, the prosecutor in this covenant confrontation, has presented powerful evidence in vindication of God’s covenant faithfulness. He rests his case. Will Israel respond in repentance and obedience?

Micah’s message is a good and needed word for us today as God’s people, the church. We must remember the grace of God lest we, like the people of the prophet’s day, become bored with or burdened by living in a right relationship with God. Ralph Davis says, “Christian believers can update the list of Yahweh’s ‘righteous acts.’”<sup>19</sup> In Christ, God has accomplished a new and greater exodus. Jesus, our perfect Passover lamb, has died for our redemption (1 Cor 5:7). He has risen from the dead, abolishing death (2 Tim

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<sup>18</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 158, also notes Shittim’s significance as the place where many Israelites “broke the covenant and succumbed to the temptation of Moabite idolatry (Num 25:1). Nevertheless, Yahweh was faithful and successfully brought his people into the promised land.”

<sup>19</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 129.

1:10). He rules over all, guarding us and guiding us to the promised land of the new creation. How could we ever grow weary of loving and serving such a God?

We gather to worship regularly so that we might remember Yahweh's righteous acts on our behalf. We sing and preach the old, old story so that we might be shaped by those events in our present thinking, believing, and behaving. We take the Lord's Supper regularly as the Lord commanded us: "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24), so that we will not forget what God has done for us, so that our love for Jesus might not grow cold, and so that our faith in him might not grow weak. O, what a blessed means of grace God has given us in this ordinance.

### **God's Covenant Values (6:6-12)**

Micah's case for the vindication of Yahweh is iron-clad. He has been gracious and loyal to Israel who has proven herself an unfaithful covenant partner, as detailed throughout the book thus far. How will Israel respond to this covenant crisis? In 6:6-7 a representative or collective Israel, indicated by the use of the first person singular, asks a series of questions intended to match Yahweh's earlier questions in 6:3.<sup>20</sup> This representative worshipper "seeks to establish the price that will win God's favour by raising the bid ever higher."<sup>21</sup> Each successive question ratchets up the cost of a sacrifice in hopes of pleasing God.<sup>22</sup> First, how about burnt offerings and year-old calves (6:6b)? Both sacrifices were costly to the worshipper. Unlike other sacrifices, the burnt offering was given totally to God (Lev 1:9). The worshipper did not enjoy any of it. The year-old

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<sup>20</sup>Ronald T. Hyman, "Questions and Response in Micah 6:6-8," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (July-September 2005):159, rightly identifies the speaker as "Man," or the nation collectively. See also Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 552.

<sup>21</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 213.

<sup>22</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 155-56, notes escalation even within the lines of the questions. "Year-old calves" intensifies "burnt offerings," as does "ten thousand streams of oil" from "thousands of rams" and "child of my body" from "my firstborn."

calf was a costly sacrifice because the animal had been fed for an entire year when it could have been sacrificed as early as seven days after birth (Lev 22:27).

Are those not costly enough to placate Yahweh? How about the extravagance of “thousands of rams or ten thousand streams of oil” (Mic 6:7a)? “He turns from quality of offering to quantity.”<sup>23</sup> On several momentous occasions, Israel offered huge amounts of sacrifice. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon and the nation offered so many sacrifices they could not be counted (1 Kgs 8:5). Surely if we replicate that it will smooth things over with Yahweh, the people think.

The last question is a “ghastly crescendo.”<sup>24</sup> In 6:7b the worshipper asks, “Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the child of my body for my own sin?”<sup>25</sup> Davis rightly notes, “The suggestion nearly takes one’s breath away.”<sup>26</sup> This is not, however, mere rhetorical flash.<sup>27</sup> Ahaz, a king of Judah in Micah’s own day, had already committed this unthinkable act (2 Kgs 16:2-3), and Manasseh would later follow suit (2 Kgs 23:10). How Canaanite Israel has become! They do not know the difference between Yahweh and Molech, the Ammonite god to whom child sacrifices were made (Lev 18:21). Further, it is ludicrous for Israel to speak of offering their firstborn in response to Yahweh’s recounting of the exodus from Egypt where he redeemed Israel as his firstborn. They have been redeemed with a price and now they seek to buy God’s favor.

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<sup>23</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 370.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>The grammar of 6:7b is remarkable. There are no prepositions between the nouns in Hebrew. It would literally read, “Shall I give my firstborn, my rebellion, fruit of my body, sin of my soul/life?” Davis, *Micah*, 127, remarks, “It’s as if the prophet wants to force the hearer/reader to think through the relationship between these separate items.”

<sup>26</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 127.

<sup>27</sup>Contra Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 370, who agrees with Wellhausen that it is offered “hypothetically.”

Yahweh responds in Micah 6:8, dispelling the ignorance and idolatry of his people. He tells them plainly what he wants of them, what his covenant values are. He is not after their money or material things. He does not want elaborate, expensive, or severe sacrifices. In fact, Yahweh does not want any of their sacrifices that are devoid of devotion to him. What does this great God want? This great God wants justice, loyalty, and humility (6:8). This righteous God wants a righteous people. This faithful God wants a faithful people. As Hyman notes, the people should be asking themselves, “What kind of person should I be when I approach the Lord?”<sup>28</sup>

Yahweh addresses them as “Mankind” (6:8a). The Hebrew word here is **מ֨נָה**, suggesting that what Yahweh requires specifically of his covenant people he also requires of all people as creator.<sup>29</sup> What does God want of Adam’s race, made as his image and likeness? It is no secret: “Mankind, he has told you what is good and what it is Yahweh requires of you” (6:8). God has made known what he requires of people through the self-revelation of his character and instruction.<sup>30</sup> Mankind generally and Israel specifically cannot plead innocence.

What God requires of people is simple. Yahweh’s covenant values are succinct yet all-encompassing. First, the people are to “do justice.” All of one’s relationships and dealings are to be characterized by equity and fairness. Yet, the doing of justice extends beyond our own affairs to the larger level of society. In other words, we are to establish justice for those who are powerless, vulnerable, and/or oppressed.<sup>31</sup> Israel’s leaders in Micah’s day “abhor justice and pervert everything that is right” (3:9b).

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<sup>28</sup>Hyman, “Questions and Responses in Micah 6:6-8,” 163.

<sup>29</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 159.

<sup>30</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 173.

<sup>31</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 159. See also Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 528.

Justice was not being done as the Torah instructed. Fields were being coveted and seized and ancestral inheritances taken away (2:2).

The second of God's covenant demands or values is "to love faithfulness (**תְּדַבֵּר**)."<sup>32</sup> This word can also be translated as "loyalty," "mercy," and "steadfast love." Dempster notes, "this combination of verb and noun is unique in the Old Testament since one usually *does* kindness."<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Yahweh is ratcheting up his covenant values. God wants people not just to do justice but also to love what is good and true. John Mackay rightly notes that to love faithfulness "is not an irksome performance of an imposed duty, but a glad and spontaneous action."<sup>34</sup>

The third covenant value of Yahweh is "to walk humbly with your God" (6:8), which "describes a life walk that is not proud (Prov 11:2) but is attentive, careful, and prudent to follow God's will."<sup>35</sup> God is not interested in vain sacrifices meant to paper over covenant neglect. He wants "a life of ongoing communion and fellowship rather than sporadic visits to a divine emergency room."<sup>36</sup>

This mini-constellation of covenant values is undoubtedly interrelated and inseparable. The person who walks humbly with God has a heart that loves faithfulness and does justice. Micah, therefore, gets right at the heart of the matter which is a matter of the heart. God's people have clearly wandered away from walking with him and it shows in how they are mistreating each other. In Micah 6:8 Yahweh responds to Israel's questions about sacrifices with a call to be a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2). Earlier, the prophet Hosea similarly called the northern kingdom to "return to your God. Maintain love and justice, and always put your hope in God" (Hos 12:6).

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<sup>32</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 161.

<sup>33</sup>John L. Mackay, *Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: God's Just Demands* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 120.

<sup>34</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 554.

<sup>35</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 129.

This middle section ends with a series of statements and questions from Yahweh that evaluate Judah and Jerusalem in light of 6:8. Through his prophets, “the voice of Yahweh calls out to the city” (6:9a), followed by the parenthetical statement, “And it is wise to fear Your name.” Smith comments, “Micah advises that if the people are wise, they will fear God’s name, implying that they should take the following words that God speaks seriously.”<sup>36</sup> After such good advice comes the instruction: “Pay attention to the rod and the One who ordained it” (6:9b).<sup>37</sup> The “rod” spoken of could refer to any number of God’s disciplinary measures: Assyrian invasion, crop failures, drought, etc.

Then Yahweh asks questions in 6:10-11 that show Judah has not been faithful to the covenant. He inquires in 6:10: “Are there still the treasures of wickedness and the accursed short measure in the house of the wicked?” The markets of Jerusalem and Judah are filled with corruption (see also Amos 8:4-6). The use of false scales was expressly forbidden by the Torah (Lev 19:35; Deut 25:14). Can God excuse such injustice (6:11)? Israel’s God “is no Olympian, remote from everyday living. He is the Lord of the shopping center, whose claims over his people extend to the most mundane of life’s duties.”<sup>38</sup> Jerusalem has clearly gone the way of her sister Samaria to the north. The “wealthy of the city are full of violence, and its residents speak lies; the tongues in their mouths are deceitful” (6:12). She is in clear violation of the covenant. The consequences will be detailed in the next section.

This middle section of Micah 6 begs important questions of us in our own day. First, what should be our response to the “righteous acts of Yahweh” on our behalf?

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<sup>36</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 555.

<sup>37</sup>There is some textual uncertainty here concerning the word “rod.” See NASB; Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 555; and Waltke, *Micah*, 397.

<sup>38</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 378.

Judah here responds to God's amazing grace with a flurry of cultic activity. They sought to prove their devotion to God through a suffocating amount of religious duty. If we are honest with ourselves, do we not do the same at times? We plunge ourselves into countless ministries, studies, conferences, trips, and all manner of Christian activities. They are usually good things, and it is good to be "busy about the Lord's work." Yet, sometimes it is right to ask ourselves, "Why all this activity? Why this frantic pace? Am I trying to prove something to God or earn something from him?"

Second, what is that God really wants of his people? As Smith notes, "Micah's sermon was a lawsuit for not coming to God in God's way."<sup>39</sup> "God is not impressed with the size or number of our gifts but by the quality of our relationship with him. If you do not love God, nothing else counts."<sup>40</sup> We must pursue a humble, loving walk with God. Such a relationship will shape our relationships with other people. We will love faithfulness and do justice.

### **God's Covenant Verdict (6:13-16)**

The Torah clearly expressed the requirements of the covenant. Additionally, it detailed blessings for keeping the covenant and punishments for breaking it (Deut 28). Therefore, Yahweh is faithful to the covenant as he pronounces the verdict for Judah's rebellion. He begins with a general statement of punishment in 6:13. What God is about to bring on his people is a result of their unfaithfulness. He will "strike [them] severely, bringing desolation because of [their] sins" (6:13).

Then, in 6:14-15, comes a futility curse. Smith explains, "The divine frustration of the natural order is what is called a 'futility curse.'"<sup>41</sup> Deuteronomy 28:15-

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<sup>39</sup>Gary V. Smith, *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 112.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 559.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 557. See Hag 2:15-19 and Mal 3:7-12 for other examples of futility curses.

68 contains a lengthy list of curses, verses 38-40 providing specific background to the futility curse here in Micah. Frustration oozes from this passage. They will eat but not be satisfied, for there will be hunger among them (6:14a). Dempster notes that the word translated as “hunger” here could possibly refer to dysentery,<sup>42</sup> making for a very vivid word picture. What they acquire, they won’t be able to save, and what they do save God will give it to destruction (the “sword” of 6:14b).

Continuing on in 6:15, the people will “sow but not reap” (see Lev 26:16). They will “press olives but not anoint [themselves] with oil” (Mic 6:15b). Olive oil was “an indispensable commodity in the Ancient Near East for food, medicine, fuel, and ritual.”<sup>43</sup> Oil was used commonly as a cosmetic. It was applied to the hair and to beards to soften and strengthen.<sup>44</sup> Oil was also used in religious ritual and to dedicate leaders.<sup>45</sup> In sum, Deuteronomy 11:14 lists oil as one of the blessings God will bestow on a faithful Israel in the land. Micah tells Jerusalem that a time is coming when God’s blessing will be withdrawn as he punishes their sin. The futility curse ends with “you will tread grapes but not drink the wine” (Mic 6:15c). The point is identical to the rest of the verse: Israel will not enjoy Yahweh’s covenant blessings in the land. Exile is coming.

The passage ends with a sort of exclamation mark on the guilty verdict pronounced on Jerusalem. “The statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab’s house have been observed; you have followed their policies” (6:16a). Smith explains, “To show the seriousness of the problem in Judah, Micah compares Judah to the northern kingdom

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<sup>42</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 169.

<sup>43</sup>Claude F. Mariottini, “Oil,” in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 1043.

<sup>44</sup>George H. Shaddix, “Oils, Perfumes, and Cosmetics,” *Biblical Illustrator* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 8.

<sup>45</sup>Mariottini, “Oil,” 1043.

under the reigns of Omri and Ahab, two wicked kings of Israel.”<sup>46</sup> First Kings 16:23-28 chronicles the wicked rule of Omri, the founder of Samaria. Omri “did what was evil in the LORD’s sight; he did more evil than all who were before him” (16:25). Omri led Israel into idolatry, provoking Yahweh (16:26). Jenson notes, “The ‘statutes of Omri’ is an ironic perversion of the ‘statutes of Yhwh,’ a common term for the commandments of the Torah (Deut 4:6, 8).”<sup>47</sup>

Omri’s son, Ahab, was even worse. He plunged Israel further into idolatrous ruin by marrying Jezebel. Together they built an altar to Baal in Samaria and set up an Asherah pole (1 Kgs 16:31-33). Micah’s comparison of Jerusalem’s leadership with Ahab is also seen in Ahab’s murderous seizure of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-16). Yahweh sent Elijah to pronounce judgment on Ahab and Jezebel for this covenant violation (1 Kgs 21:17-24). Ahab’s theft of Naboth’s vineyard is remarkably paralleled by the way the rich oppressors of Micah’s time were coveting and seizing fields and taking houses (Mic 2:2). Centuries later, Yahweh has sent Micah and his contemporaries to point out Israel’s covenant violations. Once again, Yahweh has sent his prophet “to proclaim to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin” (3:8b).

Yahweh’s verdict on guilty Jerusalem is three-fold: desolation, contempt, and scorn (6:16b). Significantly, the chapter ends by designating these punishments as befalling “My people” (6:16b). Again, we note the covenantal context of this dispute/lawsuit and verdict. Therefore, the triad of judgment is a condensation of the covenant curses listed in the Torah (see Deut 28). God is contending with and correcting his covenant people.

It might be tempting for Christians today to write this off as some irrelevant Old Testament reality. After all, we are new covenant believers. God would never bring

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<sup>46</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 557.

<sup>47</sup>Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 178.

us to account for being faithful/unfaithful to the covenant. Would he? Alan Bandy has persuasively argued that the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 “exhibit a pattern that corresponds to the basic structure of prophetic lawsuit speeches.”<sup>48</sup> Bandy carefully examines the forms and features of several OT covenant lawsuit texts and the seven letters of Revelation 2-3. He then argues that John, the author of Revelation, was adopting and adapting the covenant lawsuit for his own purposes. Bandy proposes three arguments in favor of recognizing the resemblance between the passages. First, the churches “comprise new covenant communities”<sup>49</sup> so that the use of covenant language and imagery pervades the letters. Christ and the church are in covenant relationship. Therefore, he has the right to expect faithfulness from the church and to discipline her waywardness. Second, “the seven oracles exhibit a forensic quality that evokes lawsuit imagery.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, there is a court-room “feel” to both.<sup>51</sup> Third, the letters share several features with the OT covenant lawsuit form.

Like the covenant lawsuits of the OT, the letters of Revelation 2-3 express God’s justice in judging his covenant people and urging them to repent. Jesus, the covenant lord of his people, “investigates his churches and audits them according to their faithfulness to covenant stipulations.”<sup>52</sup> The churches at Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (3:7-13) are not charged with unfaithfulness. The other five churches are indicted of some covenantal breach and urged to repent. For example, the church at

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<sup>48</sup>Alan S. Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” *Neot testamentica* 45, no. 2 (2011): 178.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>The juridical setting of the seven letters of Revelation is further strengthened by the recognition of “the Roman assize circuit that began in Ephesus and circled around to Laodicea. Letters were sent ahead of the judge’s visit. ‘The one who overcomes’ in these letters is the one who overcomes in court, i.e. is found blameless.” F. Alan Tomlinson, “Revelation and New Testament Backgrounds,” (Lecture, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, January 2009).

<sup>52</sup>Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” 201.

Ephesus had abandoned “the love they had at first” (Rev 2:4), failing to keep the supreme instruction of the covenant: love the Lord with all one’s being (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:36-38). Unless they repent, Christ will come in judgment and remove their lampstand from its place (Rev 2:5). Aune comments, “This is nothing less than a threat to obliterate the Ephesian congregation as an empirical Christian community.”<sup>53</sup> The church at Laodicea is indicted for being “lukewarm, neither hot nor cold” (Rev 3:16). Their spiritual uselessness brings the threat that Christ will vomit them from his mouth! These threats and judgments sound similar to Micah 6:16’s desolation, contempt, and scorn.

Christ’s words to those first century congregations speak still to congregations in the twenty-first century. Christ is our covenant lord. We are accountable to him. Let us not think we are above judgment. After all, as many as he loves, he rebukes and disciplines (Rev 3:19). Our lampstand is removable. Let us repent of our covenant infidelity and remain faithful to Christ. When Christ the judge comes, we will be vindicated and rewarded.

### Conclusion

Micah 6 reveals a perfectly faithful God contending with his unfaithful people. It silences our excuses for our sin. It cuts through the self-delusional fog of our ritualistic attempts to please God while we ignore the heart of his covenant instruction. It calls us to social justice and a humble walk with God. It reminds us that we are accountable and there are consequences for our stubborn rebellion. It provokes us to repentance and pleads with us to be faithful to God.

While judgment begins with the household of God, unbelievers should be sobered by the words of this text (see also 1 Pet 4:17). God is the judge of all people. He has set a date on the court calendar of the cosmos “when He is going to judge the world

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<sup>53</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1997), 147.

in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). On that great and terrible day, you will stand before the judge, Jesus Christ. His verdict will be perfect and his judgment just. You are a guilty sinner (Rom 3:23). Apart from Christ you will perish (Rom 6:23). However, God has accomplished salvation through Jesus Christ in his perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection from the dead. Repent of your sin and believe in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life.

## CHAPTER 8

### WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? MICAH 7

Our senior adult group recently enjoyed a wonderful presentation from a local man who collects postcards of St. Joseph from over the years. He is especially interested in postcards from the first few decades of the last century. Many of these postcards are rare because they were made by individuals taking their own photographs rather than the mass-produced kind. This gentleman was noticeably excited as he shared the cards, what they depicted, and how he came to possess them. There was a certain thrill in his voice when he spoke of these unique treasures. Those cards had such an intrinsic value he could not help but gush over them.

As we come to the final chapter of Micah, the prophet is much like our friend with his postcards (only more so). Micah points to Yahweh and asks, “Who is a God like you?” (7:18). He revels and rejoices in the wonders of who Yahweh is. He invites us to stand in awe, to worship, to believe, and to hope in God.

This final chapter contains two distinct divisions, 7:1-7 and 7:8-20. The first division parallels Micah 2 in the chiastic structure of the book.<sup>1</sup> The second division parallels Micah chapter 1 and is itself a chiasm.<sup>2</sup> We will consider the two divisions together under four headings: Troubled Times (7:1-7), Temporary Anger, Timeless Love (7:8-13), Turning the Tables (7:14-17), and The Triumph of God’s Covenant (7:18-20).

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<sup>1</sup>David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis to Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 299.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. See also Stephen G. Dempster, *Micah*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 180.

## Troubled Times (7:1-7)

In this first section, Micah paints a grim picture of the moral and spiritual condition of Judah before renewing his hope in God alone. He begins with אֶלְיָהוּ, a “rare interjection.”<sup>3</sup> It is used elsewhere only in Job 10:15 in reference to being found guilty. Smith defines it as “a cry of disappointment and hopelessness.”<sup>4</sup> Why does Micah employ this rare word and not the typical הָאֵת (“woe”)? Waltke proposes that he does so to break the meter coming out of the previous chapter and that the phrase is something like a sigh.<sup>5</sup> Micah has come to a pained acceptance of his people’s condition and coming judgment.

### A Fruitless Field (7:1-4)

The prophet compares himself to a hungry person coming to a field or vineyard in search of fruit to eat but who finds nothing to satisfy his craving.<sup>6</sup> The vineyard has been stripped bare. Micah explains his metaphor in the following verses. “Godly people have vanished from the land” (7:2). HCSB’s “godly people” translates צַדִּיקִים, an adjective derived from צַדֵּקָה, which was one of Yahweh’s central covenant values in 6:8. Micah and Yahweh<sup>7</sup> are craving for a “covenant man.”<sup>8</sup> That is, they desire people “who live out

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<sup>3</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 173.

<sup>4</sup>Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 570.

<sup>5</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 424.

<sup>6</sup>The end of 7:1 is literally “which my soul desires.” The word for “soul” is שְׁנָא, which is also used of the throat and by extension life and soul. Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark), 179, states that its use here “appropriately represented the appetite of the starving person.”

<sup>7</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 570, sets this speech at the end of Micah’s ministry, when Manasseh has begun to take over from Hezekiah. The positive changes under Hezekiah are quickly degenerating. Micah’s hard work seems to be all for naught as the nation plunges back into wickedness.

<sup>8</sup>Dale Ralph Davis, *Micah* (Darlington, England: EP, 2010), 142.

their relation to YHWH with singleness of purpose.”<sup>9</sup> God and his prophet are heartbroken to find no such people and no such fruit.<sup>10</sup> There is certainly a literary connection to be made between the futility curse of 6:13-16 and the absence of godly people in the land here in 7:1ff. The punishment fits the crime. The lack of דָסַח results in agricultural and economic lack in the land.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, where Yahweh and Micah search for the fruit of righteousness they find only works of evil (5:2-3). The people “wait in ambush to shed blood, they hunt each other with a net” (7:2b). Fellow members of the covenant have become like wild animals to hunt down and kill. “Both hands are good (טוֹב) at accomplishing evil” (7:3a). Jenson notes that this statement “may be an ironic reversal of the moral norms,”<sup>12</sup> since טוב typically refers to what is pleasant, agreeable, or fitting.<sup>13</sup> We could say it this way, “They are really good at being really bad.” They are ambidextrous in their sin. Their proficiency in iniquity includes collusion: “the official and the judge demand a bribe; when the powerful man communicates his evil desire, the plot it together” (7:3b). HCSB’s “plot it together” is literally “they weave it.”<sup>14</sup> The wicked leadership and oppressive rich braid ropes of oppression by which they strangle God’s people.

Micah 7:4a puts the exclamation mark on this tragic evaluation of Judah: “The best of them is like a brier; the most upright is worse than a hedge of thorns.” As Mays comments, “Any who expect goodness from them end up entangled in a thicket of

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<sup>9</sup>James L. Mays, *Micah*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 151.

<sup>10</sup>See Isa 5:1-7 for a powerful parallel to this text.

<sup>11</sup>See Hos 4:1-3 for a remarkably similar connection. Also see Deut 28 for covenant blessings and curses on the land in response to Israel’s relationship with Yahweh.

<sup>12</sup>Philip P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 180. See also Kenneth Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 122.

<sup>13</sup>BDB, טוב, 373-74.

<sup>14</sup>The verb is עֲבַת, the noun form of which is used of “ropes, cords, interwoven foliage” (BDB, עֲבַת, 721).

intrigue and avarice.”<sup>15</sup> Briers and thorn bushes are biblical metaphors for God’s enemies (Ezek 28:24) and of worthless land (Isa 5:6; 7:23-25). Such vegetation is not good for anything but the fire (see Judg 9), and the fire of judgment is coming as 7:4b states: “The day of your watchmen, the day of your punishment is coming; at this time their panic is near.”<sup>16</sup> The watchmen are God’s prophets (Ezek 3:17) and their day is the time of God’s judgment.

God desires and requires his people to bear the fruit of righteousness. Israel and her leadership failed to do so in Micah’s time and during their history. Jesus was likely acting out Micah 7:1ff when he cursed the barren fig tree on his way into Jerusalem (Matt 21:18-20; Mark 11:12-14). Jesus is “the true vine” (John 15:1), the true Israel, and those who abide in him bear the fruit he desires (15:5), but those branches that do not abide in him and bear fruit will be removed and thrown into the fire (15:6). Christian believers and churches must be diligent to remain in Christ and to bear the fruit God desires. We can thank God when he prunes and cleans us so that will produce more fruit (15:2). We can rejoice that through Christ and the new covenant God’s people will “blossom and bloom and fill the whole world with fruit” (Isa 27:6; cp. Hos 14:4-7).

### **Trust No One (7:5-6)**

Micah warns the believing remnant of Judah against trusting in their wicked countrymen.<sup>17</sup> The sinful ways of the leaders have trickled down and ingrained themselves in every crevice of the covenant community. Those few righteous people left cannot depend on those one would normally trust. The unreliability of others escalates in 7:5 from one’s neighbor (“friend” in HCSB) to one’s close companion even to one’s wife

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<sup>15</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 152.

<sup>16</sup>Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 123, identifies the word play in the assonance of 7:4’s “hedge of thorns” (*מִזְרָחַת*) and “panic” (*מִבּוֹכָה*).

<sup>17</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 145.

(“the woman who lies in your arms”). Allen comments, “His nearest and dearest cannot be relied on to keep faith with the secrets of his heart. Intimacy is no guarantee of fidelity.”<sup>18</sup> You cannot share your heart with the woman who shares your bed. What a lonesome position.

Judah has become so depraved that even the most basic and important building block of society, the family, is corrupt (7:6). Family members oppose one another. The rebellion of children against parents is a violation of the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12) and “there is evidence both in the prophets and ancient Near Eastern literature that such a total breakdown in community was eschatological, portending the end of an era.”<sup>19</sup> Jesus quoted this verse in Matthew 10:35-36 in respect to the opposition his followers will face from unbelievers, including their own family members. While Jesus wonderfully unites people and tears down human divisions, it is also undeniably true that Jesus divides people. He himself said, “Don’t assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34). Persecuted believers around the world experience this truth still today. Muslim and Hindu converts to Christianity are disowned and even killed by their families for following Jesus. In this eschatological age, expect division and opposition.

### **Hope in Yahweh (7:7)**

Who can Micah and the faithful remnant trust in such peril and chaos? “But I will look to the LORD” (7:6a). The verb “look” is in the intensive stem (piel), indicating a posture of faith and expectation. Micah believes that Yahweh will do something to turn an upside-down world right-side-up. “I will wait for the God of my salvation” (7:6b).

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<sup>18</sup>Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 388.

<sup>19</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 176. See Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 389, as well as Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 573-74, for references to Ancient Near Eastern sources.

Mays notes that waiting is “the most powerful form of action by the helpless who express in their waiting the knowledge that God comes to them in the form of salvation.”<sup>20</sup> The prophet teaches us an important lesson today. There are times for assertive action and energetic discipline. However, there are also times we need to simply watch and wait for God to act. The Israelites stood on the shore of Red Sea, the Egyptian army closing in on them. Moses instructed them, “Stand and see the LORD’s salvation He will provide for you today...The LORD will fight for you; you must be quiet” (Exod 14:13-14). Stand still, be quiet, and watch God accomplish your deliverance.

### **Temporary Anger, Timeless Love (7:8-13)**

Micah ends his prophecies with relentless hope (7:8-20). In 7:8-13 he confesses the sin of his people and accepts Yahweh’s coming judgment while looking beyond to salvation. David wrote, “For [God’s] anger lasts only a moment, but His favor, a lifetime. Weeping may spend the night, but there is joy in the morning” (Ps 30:5). Like the whole book, this passage “displays a two-beat rhythm of doom and hope, of judgment and renewal.”<sup>21</sup> Zion will experience Yahweh’s temporary anger followed by his timeless love as she is vindicated and exalted.

### **Zion Vindicated (7:8-10)**

In 7:8 Micah speaks as the representative of God’s people<sup>22</sup> and he addresses their enemy. Several enemies have been identified throughout the book: wicked land barons (2:2), others inside the society and one’s home (7:2-6), and foreign nations (5:8). The feminine form makes it probable that the enemy here is a city. Since Babylon was

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<sup>20</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 157.

<sup>21</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 337.

<sup>22</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 183.

identified as the agent of Judah's coming exile in 4:10, that city is in view here. However, Dempster makes a good argument for seeing Babylon as a "typological figure representing the opposite of Daughter Jerusalem."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, there is ongoing significance and application for God's people. Our enemies may seem to have the upper hand, but it is a temporary illusion. God will raise his fallen people, bring them out of the darkness, and he himself will be their light (7:8).

Micah confesses his nation's sin in 7:9 much like Moses did earlier in Exodus 32:30-34. The coming defeat and exile is Yahweh's rage, the just penalty of their covenant violations. Here we behold the temporary anger of God. His justice burns against his wayward people. He will not leave their sins unpunished or his holiness despised. Jerusalem will endure the Lord's rage for a season, but only for a season. After his justice is satisfied, Yahweh will take up Israel's case and establish justice for her (7:9a). In Micah 6 Yahweh had a case against his people, but here in Micah 7 Yahweh takes Israel's case into his own hands. He who is their judge is also their defender and advocate. God will see that justice is done concerning Israel's sin as well as concerning the wrongs Israel will suffer at the hands of her conquerors.

When Yahweh acts on behalf of his people, her enemies will be covered with shame (7:10a). Micah records the taunt of Zion's enemies: "Where is the LORD your God?" This is a religious ridicule: "Isn't Yahweh able to save you?"<sup>24</sup> Smith comments, "When the majesty and power of God are at stake, God intervenes to vindicate his reputation."<sup>25</sup> God, who is zealous for his glory, will not suffer the proud jeering of mere men. He will set the record straight. The remainder of 7:10 looks forward to when Zion's enemy will "be trampled like mud in the streets." Second Kings 9:30-37 tells of how the

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<sup>23</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 183.

<sup>24</sup>Similar taunts are found in Joel 2:17; Ps 42:3, 10; 2 Kgs 18:33-35.

<sup>25</sup>Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 574.

evil Jezebel was hurled to the ground and trampled by the horses of Jehu's chariots. This is the fate of Yahweh's enemies.

### **Zion Exalted (7:11-13)**

While Zion's enemies will be thrown into the mire, Zion herself will be exalted. Her walls will be rebuilt (7:11a). "Walls" translates **מִצְבָּה**, also used of the walls of Yahweh's vineyard in Isaiah 5:5. This is more than a promise to rebuild the stone walls of Jerusalem that the Babylonians will decimate. God will restore his covenant people. The nation will rise from the ashes like a phoenix because God will turn his favor once again to her. Her "boundary will be extended" (7:11b). Zion's dominion must expand because people will be coming from all over (4:12). Mays interprets this narrowly as the return of Jewish exiles.<sup>26</sup> However, in light of 4:1-2's promise that the nations will stream to Zion, it must be more expansive. Through a restored Israel under a new David, Yahweh will bless all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:3). This wonderful promise finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the church. Micah envisioned what was revealed to John: people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation brought into right relationship with God through the Messiah (Rev 5:9). This salvation for God's people will come through the judgment of their enemies: "Then the earth will become a wasteland because of its inhabitants and as a result of their actions" (7:13). Dempster comments, "Morality affects ecology."<sup>27</sup> This has already been seen in Micah 6:13-16. Back in Genesis 3:17-19 the earth is cursed as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. Now the lands of rebellious nations are cursed. Moreover, the desolation spoken of here likely also

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<sup>26</sup>Mays, *Micah*, 162.

<sup>27</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 185.

includes the removal of its inhabitants. Thus, we encounter here “the double edge of Yahweh’s truth,”<sup>28</sup> some from the nations coming to salvation and others perishing.

### **Turning the Tables (7:14-17)**

This section begins with a prayer from the prophet on behalf of the people (7:14) that receives a remarkable answer from God (7:15-17). Yahweh will reverse the fortunes of his people as he defeats their enemies and redeems them through a new and greater exodus.

#### **A New Exodus (7:14-15)**

Micah asks Yahweh to “shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock that is Your possession” (7:14a). Exodus 19:6 also refers to Israel as God’s “people” and “possession.” Earlier in Micah 2:12-13 Yahweh promised to lead his flock out of exile; now Micah pleads this promise. His petition for Yahweh to shepherd the people recalls their exodus from Egypt. The reference to shepherding evokes God’s promise of a new David who will “stand and shepherd them in the strength of Yahweh” (Micah 5:4). Micah continues with more language recalling the exodus: “They live alone in a woodland surrounded by pastures. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in ancient times” (5:14b, c). Bashan and Gilead were desirable, lush lands (Num 32:1-2; Deut 32:14). Micah prays for God to bring Israel back to the promised land. He prays for a new exodus. Yahweh answers Micah’s prayer positively. He will “perform miracles for them as in the days of [their] exodus from the land of Egypt” (7:15). God revealed his saving power through inflicting Egypt with a series of plagues, bringing his people through the Red Sea, and sustaining them through the wilderness (Exod 7ff.).

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<sup>28</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 156.

The coming new exodus will not pale in comparison. When Yahweh saves his people “he will do so in a way that displays all the flair and fury of the Exodus events.”<sup>29</sup> Concerning Micah 7:8-20, Waltke has noted the “striking intertextual connections with Moses’ Song of the Sea, Israel’s first victory song (Exodus 15).”<sup>30</sup> He lists six significant words shared by both texts. Exodus 15 is clearly in the background for Micah as he envisions God’s future redemptive act on behalf of his people. This new exodus will be like the rescue from Egypt but greater in every way. The authors of the NT often picture God’s redeeming work in Christ as a new exodus.<sup>31</sup>

### **Yahweh Victorious (7:16-17)**

When Yahweh accomplishes this new exodus, “nations will see and be ashamed of all their power” (7:16a). NIV helpfully translates as “deprived of all their power.” That is, the strength of God’s enemies will be as nothing compared to his redeeming might. “They will put their hands over their mouths, and their ears will become deaf” (7:16b). Israel’s enemies will be shocked and thrown into disbelief by this reversal of fortunes. They were once on top of the world but now they are under the heel of Yahweh’s deliverance. In 7:17 Micah continues to expound the coming defeat and humiliation of God’s enemies. “They will lick the dust like a snake.” In the ANE, defeated enemies would kiss the feet of their conqueror as a sign of their submission.<sup>32</sup> In Genesis 3:14 God cursed the snake who tempted Adam and Eve to sin: “You will move on your belly and eat dust all the days of your life.” Additionally, the Lord put hostility between the woman’s seed and the serpent’s seed. In the end, the serpent’s seed will

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<sup>29</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 159.

<sup>30</sup>Waltke, *Micah*, 450.

<sup>31</sup>See Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) for an excellent example of how pervasive the new exodus theme is in the NT.

<sup>32</sup>Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah*, 400.

strike the heel of the woman’s seed, but the woman’s seed will strike his head (Gen 3:15). Micah 7:17 is a continuation of the promise begun in Genesis 3. The serpent and his seed will be defeated and crushed beneath the feet of the woman’s seed. The New Testament reveals the fulfillment of this promise in Jesus Christ (Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8) and his church (Rom 16:20). Through his cross-work and victorious resurrection, Jesus Christ has crushed the serpent’s head. At his return, “every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). Or, as Micah put it centuries earlier, “They will tremble in the presence of Yahweh our God; they will stand in awe of You” (7:17b).

### **The Triumph of God’s Covenant (7:18-20)**

“As Micah began his prophecy with the fury of God’s wrath (1:2-9), so now he closes it with the fountain of God’s mercy—and he can hardly contain himself!”<sup>33</sup> Come, behold our God. As Bayliss has observed, “Micah’s theology centers around the covenants.”<sup>34</sup> The judgment coming in the near future is a result of Israel’s violation of the Sinai covenant, but the God’s faithfulness his covenant with Abraham “will mean a future for the nation, a future for Zion, a future Davidic king and final victory and peace.”<sup>35</sup> This final paragraph of Micah is filled with the majesty of Yahweh’s character, the power of his forgiveness, and the certainty of his promise.

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<sup>33</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 162.

<sup>34</sup>Albert H. Bayliss, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 287.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

## The Majesty of Yahweh's Character (7:18)

Micah answers the taunting question of Israel's enemies back in 7:10 with a question of his own: "Who is a God like you?"<sup>36</sup> The Israelites pondered the same question after witnessing Yahweh's redeeming power at the Red Sea (Exod 15:11). The very promise of a coming new exodus causes the prophet to explode in praise of his great God. Micah 7:18 is a quotation of Exodus 34:7, God's self-revelation of his glory to Moses after forgiving Israel after the golden calf incident. Yahweh "[removes] iniquity and [passes] over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance" (7:18a). "Removing" translates the Hebrew נָשַׁׁיְל, meaning "to lift, carry, take."<sup>37</sup> Leviticus 16:21-22 describes the practice of the scapegoat, wherein the high priest put his hands on the head of goat, confessed Israel's sins over it, thereby transferring them to the animal who would "carry on it all their wrongdoings into a desolate land" (16:22). God provided a substitute to take away his people's sins. Isaiah foretold a suffering servant who would bear our sicknesses, carry our guilts, be pierced for our transgressions, and be crushed because of our iniquities (Isa 53:4-5). According to John 1:29, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming and said, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Peter wrote of Jesus, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). This radical promise of forgiveness is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.<sup>38</sup> In grace, God passes over our rebellious treason, forgiving and restoring us to a right relationship.

The second half of Micah 7:18 tells us that Yahweh "will not hold onto his anger forever, because he delights in faithful love." Why does the Lord show such grace and forgiveness? Yahweh acts this way toward his people simply because that is who he is. It is his pleasure, his delight to treat his people with such unmerited favor. As Davis

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<sup>36</sup>Dempster, *Micah*, 181.

<sup>37</sup>BDB, נָשַׁׁיְל, 669.

<sup>38</sup>Contra Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, 580.

notes, “Micah wants to stagger us with the miracle of Yahweh’s character.”<sup>39</sup> The prophet wants us to join the song:

Great God of Wonders, all your ways,  
Display the attributes divine.  
But countless acts of pard’ning grace,  
Beyond your other wonders shine.  
Why would you pardon one like me,  
Or give me grace so rich and free?<sup>40</sup>

### **The Power of Yahweh’s Forgiveness (7:19)**

While Yahweh will deal graciously with his sinful people, he will powerfully conquer their enemy. Micah has already foretold the defeat and destruction of Israel’s human enemies, the unbelieving nations. Now, he sets his sights on their great enemy, sin. After all, it is the people’s sin that has brought God’s judgment against them. It is the people’s sin that has violated the covenant and brought its curses on the nation. Even if Yahweh destroys their other oppressors, there will be no hope of lasting peace and security unless he deals decisively with their sin. Therefore, he will “vanquish [their] iniquities” and “cast all [their] sins into the depths of the sea.” Micah pictures God’s defeat of sin in the new exodus like his defeat of Pharaoh and his troops in the Red Sea of the first exodus. The power of Egypt over Israel was broken. They were once slaves but then God redeemed them. They were set free to live in loving relationship to Yahweh. How much more so in the new exodus! In Christ, God has trampled our great enemies under his feet. He made an end of all our sin on the cross. He defeated death through his resurrection from the dead. The power of sin and death over us is broken. Israel never saw Pharaoh’s face again (Exod 14:13). Our sins are removed from us. We shall never

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<sup>39</sup>Davis, *Micah*, 165.

<sup>40</sup>Samuel Davies and Paul Burr, “Great God of Wonders,” *Thousand Tongues*, December 23, 2010, accessed December 1, 2017, <http://thousandtongues.org/songs/updatedhymns/god-of-grace?s=great+god+of+wonders>.

see them again. “Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus, because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1-2). You are free for Christ has set you free. Live in loving, obedient relationship to Christ.

### **The Certainty of Yahweh’s Promise (7:20)**

Micah’s hope for Israel’s future salvation is rooted in the ancient promises God made to the patriarchs (7:20). As Bullock says, “History held the key to the future.”<sup>41</sup> God’s covenant love and promise are more powerful than human evil. Israel has been unfaithful, but God will be true to his word. There is a strong connection between 7:20 and the advent of the shepherd-king of chapter 5. In 5:2 the new David’s “origin is from antiquity (**מִקְדָּם**), from eternity.” Here in 7:20 God’s goodness to Israel is in keeping with what he “swore to our fathers from days long ago (**מִימֵי קָדָם**). The use of **קָדָם** links these two texts. Dempster has persuasively argued that in the Hebrew Bible the saving plan and promises of God come to be centered in David and his line.<sup>42</sup> These two promises (Micah 5:2 and 7:20) are not separate but unified. God will “show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham” (7:20a) by raising up the new David who will accomplish a new exodus for God’s people. God will keep his covenant with Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17) as he keeps his covenant with David (2 Sam 7). Both covenants will find fulfillment in Jesus and the new covenant. Micah knows there is hope for God’s people because God’s word is true, his promise is certain, his covenant loyalty is unfailing. Joshua declared in his day, “[N]one of the good promises the LORD your God made to you has failed” (Josh

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<sup>41</sup>C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 86), 120.

<sup>42</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 134-47. See also Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 395-401.

23:14). Believers today should rejoice in their faithful God and trust in his unfailing word for “he has granted to us his precious and very great promises” (2 Pet 1:4).

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word.  
What more can he say, than to you he has said,  
To you, who for refuge, to Jesus hath fled?<sup>43</sup>

### Conclusion

Indeed, there is no one like Yahweh. He is the God of inflexible justice and baffling mercy. He casts down and lifts up. He is mighty to save. The book of Micah calls us to turn to this great God in repentance from our sin. Micah invites us to believe in God’s promise of redemption. Micah points us to a new David, a new exodus, and a new Jerusalem. Micah points us to Jesus Christ. Therefore, church, “Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the sheep under His care” (Ps 95:6-7). You who are without Christ, I urge you by God’s mercy to be saved from the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). Turn from your sin. Trust in Jesus Christ, the Messiah foretold by Micah and who came in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4). He himself is our peace (Mic 5:5a).

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<sup>43</sup>“How Firm a Foundation,” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 338.

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## ABSTRACT

### WHO IS A GOD LIKE YOU? MICAH'S MESSAGE OF YAHWEH'S JUSTICE AND MERCY FOR MCCARTHY BAPTIST CHURCH OF ST. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

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This project offers a chapter-by-chapter exposition of the prophet Micah with a view to biblical theology. Chapter 1 seeks to define biblical theology and how it will help in understanding Micah. The first chapter also strives to gain a basic grasp of the book and the contemporary church's need for it. Chapters 2 through 8 contain the expositions. The headings seek to follow the natural divisions of the text. The thread, or theme, that runs throughout the book is that Yahweh must confront and punish the sin of his people, yet his love and covenant are greater than human evil. Because of the nation's sin, God will send his punishment in the form of defeat and exile. However, God will raise up a new David who will accomplish a new exodus for the people of God and establish his kingdom over all the earth.

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