

COMMENTARY ON MICAH

*The name “Micah” means “who is like Yahweh.” This prophet lived and ministered in and to the southern kingdom of Judah in the second half of the eighth century before Christ. According to verse one, some of his burden was also against the northern kingdom, here called “Samaria.” Since we know the northern kingdom went into captivity to Assyria about 722 B.C., and Micah mostly mentions them in his first chapter, it may be that his preaching and writing began before the Assyrian invasion and continued only in the south after it. Best known for the foretelling of the Bethlehem birth of the Messiah in chapter five and verse two, Micah also was a powerful voice on behalf of God against the sin of the people. He was known for his **present denunciations** of the people’s sins, as well as for his **promised deliverance** prophecies. Over 120 years transpired between Assyria’s deportation of the people of the northern kingdom, Israel, and Nebuchadnezzar doing the same in the south to Judah. Judah was perhaps spared in the earlier going because of a measure of righteousness, as well as for the sake of their dynasty’s founder, King David. But it was only a small measure of righteousness, because the prophets, including Micah, cry out against their sin again and again. Uzziah’s lengthy reign, like others of long tenure, led to stability and prosperity. These then often produced a materialism that was spiritually crippling. Assyria’s attempt to conquer Judah and Jerusalem fell just short of success. The closest they got to the capital was their conquering of Lachish, some 30 miles away from Jerusalem. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, but their ministries were very different. Isaiah was prophet at court to kings; Micah ministered more to common folks. Isaiah’s ministry included some political issues; Micah was more about religious and social matters.*

Chapters 1 - 3 contain the case he laid out to **demonstrate the guilt** of Israel.

In chapters 4 and 5 he **details the glory** of Israel.

Then in chapters 6 and 7 he **declares the grief** of Israel.

CHAPTER 1

The opening chapter of Micah’s prophecy is largely about judgment, both for Israel, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom of Judah. The sins of each kingdom have been witnessed by Yahweh, and they must be called into account. The wickedness was not just in the streets and back alleys, but it began at the top. The seats of government are chided for their wrongs. Idolatry and it’s soul-mate, immorality, have plagued the countries. Judgment will come from the hand of Yahweh.

JUDGMENT IS COMING

INTRODUCTION OF THE PROPHET

1) Micah did not trumpet his personal thoughts about the goings-on among God’s people. He went forth with a message from Yahweh, the LORD. God deposited His revelation to men through men - in this case the man Micah. He hailed from Moresheth, about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem in the direction of Philistia. His ministry was of some length, the names of the four Judean kings helping us know dates. From about 750 B.C. until around 686 B.C., possibly as long as 60 years, Micah prophesied. As mentioned earlier, Micah has words from God for Samaria (representing the northern kingdom, Israel) and Jerusalem (speaking of the southern kingdom of Judah). Isn’t it wonderful that the Holy God of heaven would make revelations to the sinful men of earth?! And we have this in the Word of God.

INTENTION OF GOD TO JUDGE

2) He opens with *Sh'ma*, the selfsame imperative to listen found in Deuteronomy 6:4, the famous "*Sh'ma, Yisrael, Adonai (actually Yahweh) Eloheinu, Adonai (and again, Yahweh), echad.*" "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." The substitution of Adonai for Yahweh is a Jewish thing - to them "Yahweh" is too holy to pronounce. A second command is to pay attention, for Adonai Yahweh (Lord GOD) is coming into court to testify against His own people! The phrase "*from His holy Temple*" reminds us that the manifest presence of Yahweh was over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant in the Temple's holy of holies. His real presence fills the universe, including the heaven of heavens.

3), 4) How imposing will be the presence of the LORD! His omnipresence of course means that "He was here before He came (and He will be here after He leaves)." This is similar to the "coming of the Holy Spirit" on Pentecost. He was already here, but He came in a new ministry. The God Who has no feet will "*tread upon the high places of the earth.*" Does this refer to the places of idol worship so often thus called? The melting of mountains and splitting of valleys were perhaps metaphorical of what Micah saw in his vision. Earth was made by the Creator, and He will visit it again in judgment!

INDICTMENT OF THE SINNING NATIONS

5) The reason for the coming judgment is here set forth - the sins of God's people. The writer to the Hebrews (2:2) said that "*every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward.*" Moses wrote (Exodus 34:7) of God that He would "*by no means clear the guilty.*" A just God cannot excuse sin, not even the sin of His beloved covenant people. Once again, it is noted that the places of government, and in the case of Judah, the center of religious life, is where the problem is. The transgressions and the sins start at the top - among the leaders, even the spiritual leaders. Samaria and Jerusalem are the focal points of accusation and accounting!

INVASION OF THE LAND BY ENEMIES

CALAMITY IN THE NORTH

6) The Assyrian hordes would devastate Israel, and especially Samaria. What would be left would be exposed foundations and open spaces for planting vineyards where once stood a mighty city! 2 Kings 17 details the successful invasion of Samaria by Shalmaneser and his Assyrian armies. Much devastation occurred to the land, followed by deportation of many of the people. Foreigners would be brought in as inhabitants, and they would intermarry with Israelites, producing the people known as Samaritans.

7) The idols used for worship will not be sold, but they will be rather destroyed - beaten to pieces and burned with fire. They were some deities, eh? Samaria's idolatry was spiritual adultery, and the people prostituted themselves to other so-called "gods." Some of the false worship actually involved religious prostitutes! The people of the northern kingdom seemed to want other "gods," so Yahweh would ship them off to a land where false gods were the order of the day! Like sin - like punishment!

CATASTROPHE IN THE SOUTH

8) The prophet takes no pleasure in delivering this message of judgment. He mourns with outward signs of inward grief. Howling like an animal, walking barefoot and stripped of proper clothing, he will be like the desert animals, jackal and ostrich, wandering and howling in the night. This national calamity affected him deeply, and his mourning demonstrates that.

9) This southern-kingdom prophet mourns even more deeply because the sins of the north have

been duplicated in the south. So grievous are the sins of Judah that the Assyrian armies will have some success in attacking even that southern kingdom. The sin had reached the gate of Jerusalem, and the current punishment will come almost that far! Ten years after the conquest of Samaria, Sennacherib will lead Assyrian forces in a full frontal attack against Judah (2 Kings 18). When it looked for the world like Jerusalem would fall, Hezekiah prayed for deliverance. Isaiah came with the news that Jerusalem would not fall. In a single night the “angel of the LORD” slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, prompting Sennacherib to return to Nineveh, where his sons assassinated him. It did not pay to defy the God of Israel!

10) Even though Jerusalem had been spared, many cities in Judah had been desolated. Micah didn’t want the Philistines, their perennial enemies to enjoy the destruction and carnage, so he borrowed David’s statement about the deaths of Saul and his sons on Mt Gilboa many years earlier: *“Tell it not in Gath.”* A play on words is found after this; *“in dust-town, roll thyself in the dust.”* While we make no public announcement of our losses, it is alright to mourn “in-house.”

11), 12) Several more word-plays are seen here. Names in Hebrew often, if not always, have much meaning. “Shaphir” means “beauty,” but she became the opposite of her name - passing her way in “nakedness and shame.” The name “Zaanai” is akin to the word for “come out.” But the warring all around kept them from “coming out.” How often have people fled to neighbors for protection and help in times of distress, but no one came to stand in “Beth-Ezel,” which can mean “neighbor’s house.” The name “Maroth” is similar to the word for “bitter.” Its inhabitants waited anxiously and in vain for good to come instead of bitterness. Yes, sadly, Yahweh’s judgment was coming right up to the gates of Jerusalem, the city of God.

13) There is satire in this verse. “Lachish” is akin to the word for a team of horses. So, Lachish is called on by the prophet hook up teams of horses to chariots (for battle or for escape?). But Lachish was taken over by the Assyrians (2 Kings 18). It is suggested that Lachish was involved in influencing Jerusalem away from obedience to the Law of Moses. Perhaps this was a place where horses were multiplied by the kings of Judah, violating the Law (Deuteronomy 17:16).

14) Word-plays continue. Moresheth-Gath was given over by Jerusalem to the Assyrians, as a possession. Its name could mean “Possession-town.” “Achzib” = “lie-town.” It will become a seat of deception in Israel.

15) There is a similarity between this town’s name, “Mareshah,” and the Hebrew word for “conqueror.” God would send the conqueror, Sennacherib, against Mareshah. Generations before this, King David had fled to Adullam as a hiding refugee. It may be now that the leaders of Israel would have the shame of being fugitives hiding there themselves.

CAPTIVITY FOR THE PEOPLE

16) What was coming to the north (and over a century later to the south) was unthinkable! People would be ripped from their homeland and carted off in exile, in captivity to some strange land! In some cases, children would be separated from parents for special service (recall Daniel and the three Hebrew boys?). Such devastating judgment would cause people to express their mourning in many ways, including shaving their heads. This would make them resemble the vulture of the eagle, and this was not to them a compliment. The consequences of sin in time are often awful; in eternity, they are far worse!

CHAPTER 2

This prophet was a contemporary of Isaiah and of Amos. Unlike Isaiah, who was a “court prophet,” speaking at least to kings Ahaz and Hezekiah, Micah seemed to be more of a “country preacher.” Rural people need the Word of God as well as do city folks. In American churches, we pronounce a

long “I” in this man’s name. I had read for years about an Israeli archaeologist who found the “Pontius Pilate” seat marker in the theater in Caesarea; his name was “Micah.” A few years ago, I got to meet him at a baptismal site on the Jordan River called “Yardenit.” I was surprised when he introduced himself as “Mee-cuh” Ashkenazi. We do tend to Anglicize pronunciations, and while it is not how the Israelis say it, we will no doubt keep calling this Hebrew prophet “My-cuh.” Perhaps in heaven we will all say it the same way!

REJECTED MESSENGERS AND THEIR MESSAGES

CATALOGING THE SINS

- 1) When God’s prophets pronounced a “woe” on people, it was His declaration of their guilt and approaching judgment because of their sins. That was certainly the case here. Among God’s people there were some who were so devious that they “thought themselves to sleep,” devising means by which they could do harm to others. And sleep did not remove it from their minds, for as soon as it was light, they used their power to carry out the evil!
- 2) The injustices that Micah decries were not nickel-and-dime shoplifting-size sins; today they would be major financial crimes! These wrongs were no doubt committed by wealthier men of business, people who were in a position to defraud others of significant property that would by man’s and God’s laws be their inheritance and that of their children for generations to come. This was a people whose law forbade coveting and stealing property!

CONSEQUENCES OF THE SINS

- 3) So often we see this truth repeated: “Actions have consequences.” Because God’s people had failed to obey His law and keep basic principles of justice, He had planned some negative consequences from which they could not rescue themselves. Going through this time of calamity would knock the edge off their pride and force them to walk humbly - which is what they should have been doing in the first place! God will take them down a bit.
- 4) Prophets who should’ve been the object of the nations’ admiration would be subjected to their scorn and ridicule. God had promised (Deuteronomy 28:37) that a disobedient Israel would become a *“byword among all nations.”* He would keep His promise. Interestingly, those whose injustice had included robbing poor people of their fields would see their own lands being held by others. God turns the tables on them, as Babylon will treat them unjustly.
- 5) Once God had directed Joshua to divide the land among the tribes, describing boundaries and making landmarks. Now they will cross all the boundaries and leave all the landmarks behind as they are carried off into captivity by the Babylonian hordes. It seems certainly ironic that God made their punishment remind them so painfully of their sin that caused it! Those who took away the land of others will be taken away from the land themselves.

CRITICIZING THE SPOKESMEN

- 6) It is as old as sin that those who love the darkness try to “put out the light.” Cain tried to silence truth by slaughtering Abel; the false prophets joined forces against Micaiah in the court of Ahab. Jeremiah and Amos spoke the truth of coming judgment, incurring the ire of the ear-tickling, flattery-mongering contemporaries in the office of prophet. Here they do the same, saying, “Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us.”
- 7) This takes a turn, beginning with the false prophets’ utterances that the Lord is not so impatient with His people that He would judge them for their sin! But Micah turns them around, showing the true purpose of warnings of judgment to come: “If you are willing to do right, to obey the words of

the Lord and stop your unjust practices, then God will recognize your repentance and turn from judgment as He did with Nineveh, when they repented before Jonah.”

CALLOUS BEHAVIOR AND CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON

8) Micah describes a summary of the injustices of the people of Judah. Men of war may callously strip their vanquished dead and seize their goods as spoils of war - that is right and proper. But the men of Judah were just as callous in taking the garments of others, presumably debtors, more concerned with their greed than with proper care of their neighbors. They were more like the thieves than they were like the Good Samaritan! Shame on them!

9) And the weakest were the women without a man in their lives (widows). These greedy money-lenders repossessed their homes when they could not pay their mortgages, even depriving fatherless children of the blessing of a home provided by their now-deceased fathers. Was there no mercy to be shown, no loss to be borne by the rich in defense of those helpless ones who were and are so dear to God’s heart?! These wicked men deserved the judgment to come!

10) Those who had evicted the needy from their homes, or who had stood by and watched in silence as others did, were now to be evicted from the homeland of Israel themselves. As so often with God, the punishment mirrored and fit the wrong! Off to Babylon they will go, where they will be the tenants, no longer to be the greedy landlords!

11) People in rebellion against God reject His message and messengers. In the early 1990's, I served as interim pastor of a church at their request in a unanimous vote. One afternoon about 20 of the members asked me to meet with them and insisted that I stop preaching certain hard things and talk more about love. I refused their request. The kind of prophet that will please such people is one who will say, “Everything will be ok; just live as you wish to.”

COMING OF BETTER THINGS

12), 13) In the midst of condemnatory judgment being proclaimed, the gracious God of Israel offers His wayward people a ray of hope. Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham and His seed through Isaac and Jacob will not be forgotten or abrogated. The day will come when he will gather the scattered Jews back to their land. In addition to this national reclamation will be this wonderful thing - Yahweh will be their Leader. This is of course a hint of the Messianic role of Jesus (Yeshua) in the kingdom to come! The promise of Genesis 49:10 will prevail when One of Judah’s tribe will bear the scepter of governance on David’s throne!

CHAPTER 3

*Micah ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah between 750 and 700 BC. Some of his burden was also against the northern kingdom, here called “Samaria.” The northern kingdom went into captivity to Assyria about 722 B.C., and Micah mostly mentions them in his first chapter; it seems that his ministry began before the Assyrian invasion and continued only in the south after it. Best known for the foretelling of the Bethlehem birth of the Messiah in 5:2, Micah also was a powerful voice against the sin of the people. Over 120 years transpired between Assyria’s deportation of the people of the northern kingdom, and Nebuchadnezzar doing the same in the south. Perhaps Judah’s judgment was delayed because of a measure of righteousness. But it was only a small measure, because the prophets also cry out against their sin. Chapters 1 - 3 contain the case to **demonstrate the guilt** of Israel. In chapters 4 and 5 he **details the glory** of Israel. Then he **declares the grief** of Israel in chapters 6 and 7. With that background, we come now to our text.*

CORRUPTION AT THE TOP

CONDEMNATION OF THE LEADERS

1) In chapter one Micah had told the people that judgment was coming - it was inevitable. He shared in the second chapter some reasons for the coming judgment, pausing in the last two verses to share that this was not a permanent casting off, for God would redeem Israel. Here the prophet boldly addresses the leaders of the nation. He reminds them, if they ever knew it, that it was their responsibility to be acquainted with justice, and as leaders, to dispense it. Of all people, those in positions of power should be just in their dealings with others. If justice does not drive the politics of a nation, its people will be taken for a sorry and unfortunate ride.

2) This reminds us of King Ahab; he hated good and loved evil. He married a wicked woman from an idolatrous nation, and he let her have her way all too often. Elijah was sent by God to tell Ahab the error of his ways, and Jezebel sought to kill that prophet. Micah uses metaphor to describe how the leaders were treating their people. He said that they tore off their skin and then ripped the very flesh from their bones. Those leaders who should be **shepherds** of the nation's sheep had instead taken the part of the **butcher**. Is it so different in our land today?

3) Micah calls the acts of the rulers cannibalism. Enriching leaders by making the people poor was "eating their flesh." Then he tells how they got their victims ready for the feast - they skin them, break up their large bones, chop them up into pieces that will fit in the pot for cooking, and toss them in as if they were no more than a beast to be consumed! The poor and helpless, with no one to defend them, **were indeed consumed** by the powerful in acts of bloodshed (7:2), bribery of officials (7:3), acts of perversion of justice (3:9), and thievery (2:8).

4) Zechariah, in 7:13, cites God as saying *"He called and they would not listen, so they called and I would not listen."* The Psalmist (18:41) said it his way, *"They cried for help, but there was none to save, Even to the Lord, but He did not answer them."* This is a sowing and reaping of a sort - they would not hear, and so when they cried, they could not be heard. The wicked actions of the rulers so oppress the people that they find time to cry, unheard, to the Lord for help. The enemy from Babylon would come upon them as a terror, and this would shake them out of their confidence that being God's chosen people made them invulnerable to attack.

CORRUPTION OF THE LEADERS

5) A great evil had settled on the prophetic ministry in Micah's day. Prophets had become hirelings, preaching what people wished to hear. They said, "God is a God of peace - He will never harm His people." And they were fed. If people didn't pay them, they received bad prophecies from the prophets: God's coming wrath in the form of war.

6), 7) God knows how to deal with such self-seeking false prophets. Their light and day will become darkness, night. No vision or means of discovering a word from God will be theirs. If revelation from God is the shining of the sun for them, sunset has come. Their day is over; night has come. Heaven's information line to earth is shut down. The consequence of that closure to the door of God's knowledge is that those to whom men once looked for direction will be ashamed of themselves and disgraced to others. In shame they will hide their faces. Their prophecies of peace will be shown false when the enemy breaks in to take captives and lay waste cities.

COURAGE OF THE PROPHET

8) Micah describes himself in stark contrast to these gain-greedy preachers. They were corrupt, hirelings, catering a message according to purse. He, unlike them, was in touch with heaven for his preaching and his power. God had him declare divine justice in opposition to human sin. Israel was guilty. To go on in sin was folly.

9), 10), 11) Micah indicts the princes, priests, and prophets. Israel is corrupted in religion and in government. The princes (civil magistrates) are guilty of **1**, injustice, **2**, violence for profit, and **3**, accepting bribes. The priests (who speak to God for men), who were to teach God's Word (Leviticus 10:11), were corrupted into hirelings. The prophets (who speak to men for God) sought visions from God for money. With all this catalog of sins among the leaders of the people, they had the audacity to cry unto God and say to the people that "no ill can befall God's covenant people." One is reminded of those who might abuse their eternal security by testing God with sin in their lives, claiming that "I'll go to heaven no matter what I do, so it doesn't matter what I do." True believers don't think that way. They realize that a holy life flows from a heart redeemed by Christ, and they strive to so live.

12) When one reads the pages of Scripture and history, he discovers that Israel's capitol and holy city, Jerusalem, has experienced the judgments spoken of here again and again. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon sacked the city and destroyed Solomon's beautiful Temple in 586 B.C. - all because of sin. Titus of Rome did the same to the city and the Temple made grand by Herod, that destruction coming in A.D. 70. Sin has consequences that are severe for us and our children.

CHAPTER 4

The recent writing and preaching of Micah have not been kind or complimentary to the sons of Judah. He has described them - people, priests, and princes - as the worst sort in rebellion against Yahweh. Now he takes a lighter, brighter tone, as he looks down the corridor of time and sees better days for the chosen people of God. The coming kingdom is now in view, and such verses cannot be explained away as being fulfilled in us, the church. This is about Israel, for whom God has a future plan that is glorious. Israel will be delivered from the hand of her enemies, gathered back to her Land, and redeemed. Those who believe God is finished with Israel have a lot to consider here.

ISRAEL'S GLORIOUS FUTURE

THE INSTITUTION OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT

1) The "latter days" mentioned here are the Millennial Reign of Jesus on this earth. Isaiah 2:2 - 4 is a parallel passage. Daniel 2:35 also speaks of this same time frame. The Temple will sit on a literal mountain, but this mountain is figurative of a literal kingdom. Jerusalem sits at only 2,600 feet above sea level, but in authority and power it will be the highest place on earth in that day. When the Temple stood, it was home to the manifest presence of Yahweh in the holy of holies. In the kingdom, Jerusalem will host the localized, incarnate presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will sit there on David's throne to govern the world. This will be a genuine Theocracy - rule by God! Jerusalem is a favorite destination today for Christian tourists, but in that day the peoples of the world will stream to visit her.

THE INSTRUCTION IN THE LAW OF GOD

2) For so long the Gentile nations have been oppressors of Israel, persecuting her often with violent antisemitism. In the kingdom age, they will rather seek to come to "the mountain of the LORD" to learn His ways. This right learning will lead to right living. The life-changing truth of God's Word will go forth from Jerusalem, even as it goes forth today from pulpits, in home study groups, over Christian radio and television. The audience will be the entire population of the earth - what a glorious thing that will be!

THE IMPACT OF PEACE, PROSPERITY, AND PROPER LIVING

3), 4) Christ's righteous judgment in international disputes will make war a thing of the past. World peace will be here at last! Imagine the economic windfall of transferring the cost of war machines into production of food and other necessities of life! Swords will be beaten into plowshares, and spears will be remade into pruning hooks. Nations will be at peace with one another, and the economic result will be tremendous. People will live with plenty, and all men will be able to live without fear of some foreign invasion and attack. We sing at the Christmas season, "He rules the world with truth and grace." Another favorite of mine has these strains, "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." Yes, dear Friend, there are glorious days ahead, for Israel and for us! "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run."

5) It is true today that each people group on earth follow its own so-called god, but from that day forward forever Israel will walk in the name of Yahweh, the true God. And the nations will follow suit, as they come to Jerusalem to learn more about Israel's God. Zechariah 10:12 says, "*In His name they will walk.*" May we who know the true God walk in a way that the world can see Him.

THE INTENT OF GOD TO RESTORE ISRAEL'S FORTUNES

6), 7) The history of Israel has been one of persecution and pain in many different places. Pogroms and Holocaust have been among the most overt oppositions, but even in small ways in every place, Jews have been looked down upon and treated poorly. Here they are referred to as the lame, the scattered, the cast off, and the afflicted. Some of that has come from the hand of God because of their sins, and like all consequences of sin, it was deserved. However, there is coming a day when things will begin to turn around for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has a plan, and He will execute it in His time. He will assemble them and gather them (to their homeland). He will make them into a remnant and a strong nation. He will reign over them Himself as their rightful King. That will be an unending reign as the millennial kingdom (1,000 years) merges into the eternal kingdom of Christ.

8) The former dominion of Israel will return to her. She will be like she was in the days of Solomon when monarchs and peoples came to Jerusalem to wonder at the king's greatness and glory and wisdom. A greater than Solomon will occupy the throne then, none less than Yeshua Ha'Mashiach - Jesus, the Messiah. From Jerusalem Israel will be overseen, and from Israel the world be overseen. The "tower of the flock" mentioned here and in Genesis 35:21 ("Migdal Eder") is known to be near Bethlehem, the site of so much Biblical history, and so vital in the gospel story of the incarnation.

INFORMATION IN A SUMMARY PREVIEW FOR ISRAEL'S HISTORY

9), 10) This first part of the preview is painfully difficult. The people of the kingdom will be snatched from their beloved homeland and carried off to Babylon. The slow journey would have them sleeping in the out of doors. She listened to bad counsel from false prophets, and she rejected the good counsel of men like Isaiah and Jeremiah. This is why she was crying aloud, and why she was commanded to writhe and groan like a woman in labor. The journey to and the exile in Babylon were necessary. God had promised exile for disobedience, and Israel had disobeyed. It was punitive in that regard, and it was also corrective. While in Babylon, the Jews were cured of their love for idolatry. After the seventy years prescribed by Jeremiah, they would be rescued and redeemed from the hand of their enemies. Tens of thousands would return home to rebuild. And this prophecy was made when Babylon was not a world power, but only a part of Assyria's empire. 11), 12), 13) What a hope-filled and positive conclusion to this chapter! Yes, many nations shall gather against Israel, whether in antisemitic hate or in covetousness for her great wealth. This sounds like end-time prophecy, though there may have been some local fulfillment along the way.

The unwary nations do not know that it is really Yahweh Who has gathered them around His people. Nor do they know the real reason they are there - to be threshed in judgment for their perpetual mistreatment of the Jewish people, whether in the *diaspora* or in their own land called "Holy." Tiny Israel will be the threshing instrument God will use against the global nations. He will command them to "*arise and thresh*" with horns of iron and hoofs of bronze. The Gentiles will be beaten into pieces by the Jews at the command of Yahweh. The Jews, instead of having their own wealth stolen away by the nations (as has happened many times throughout history), will devote the wealth and gain of the nations to their Lord, Who is actually "*Lord of the whole earth.*"

CHAPTER 5

Prophetic vision often saw dual "mountain ranges of events," one behind the other, separated by "valleys of time." These valleys were not visible to the prophets. A perfect illustration of this is in Isaiah 61, from which passage Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:18, 19). He paused in the reading in the middle of what seemed a continued thought. The apparent reason He interrupted the flow of Isaiah 61:2 was that there is a large gap of time between the "the year of the Lord's favor" and "the day of vengeance of our God." We are living in that gap, and we call it the "Church Age." With that background, we will see that the events spoken of ahead of time in this chapter are not necessarily sequential in their unfolding. It is just an idiosyncrasy of prophetic unveiling that we see from time to time.

PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH

A REGENT IS SCORNE

1) The people of Israel have been badly treated so often - Egypt's enslavement, perpetual fighting with neighbors (like the Philistines), the exiles into Assyria (north) and Babylon (Judah), the Roman occupation, and the entire "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). In which mistreatment of Israel her king was struck on the cheek we cannot be sure. You can guess it happened often - even Jesus was struck in the face repeatedly by the Roman soldiers. A facial slap is the height of insult and is the cause of great humiliation.

A RULER IS BORN

2) Here is a great geographical/Messianic prophecy! When the Magi sought a recently-born Jewish monarch, Herod inquired of the religious scholars the whereabouts of His birth. Without hesitation they quoted this verse. Ephratah is the region, and the name means "fruitful" (like "Ephraim"). Bethlehem is the town, and the name means "house of bread." At the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) Jews asserted that Jesus Messianic identity was false because He came from Galilee, citing that Messiah would come from Bethlehem. Both of Jesus' birth certificates, one in Matthew (2:1) and the other signed by Dr Luke (2:4-7), reveal their error - Jesus was born in Bethlehem! Micah also hints at the eternal pre-existence of Jesus in the end of the verse.

REBELLION IS PUNISHED, REGATHERING IS PROMISED

3) The "He" is Yahweh, and He has sent Israel into worldwide dispersion because of her sins. They will continue to be largely scattered until the time when God sees fit to gather them home. We see today a significant number and portion of world Jewry back in Abraham's Land, and our verse says that "*the rest of his brothers shall return...*" The timing of this is at the glorious return of Jesus after the Tribulation, as Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse, "*...immediately after the tribulation... they shall gather together His elect...*" (see Matthew 24:29-31).

REIGN OF MESSIAH IS BEGUN!

4) These are Messianic strains to be sure! The religious and civil leaders in Israel had let their people down; they were not good shepherds. There is coming One Who will be the quintessential Shepherd, the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23, John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Psalm 22, Hebrews 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd (Psalm 24, 1 Peter 5:4). He is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ! "*He shall stand*," which is the posture of a servant; Jesus came to serve, not to be served (Mark 10:45). The strength of the Lord and the majesty of His name empower and impel Jesus as He serves His sheep, us. Because "He shall be great to the ends of the earth," His sheep can dwell securely and in peace.

5), 6) The idea of Israel at peace is quite foreign to thinking today, for she seems to constantly have to defend herself against so many enemies. But when Messiah comes, He will defend them with the almighty power of the omnipotent God. Any foe who intrudes across Israel's border will be defeated. Israel will have bountiful leaders - seven, even eight shepherds and princes will lead. Whether this speaks of ancient empires falling by the way or future kingdoms falling in defeat, Israel will stand. Where is the might of Assyria? Over whom does Babylon rule today? Where is the might of Alexander's Greek empire? What happened to Rome and its Caesars? But Israel is alive and well, and a mighty midget in size but large in contributions to the welfare of the world.

THE REMNANT OF ISRAEL WILL PREVAIL

7) The influence of Israel upon the world is like that of no other nation its size. Why, even larger nations by far contribute less to the health, welfare and comfort of the people of earth than does Israel. In medicine, technology, art, and so many other fields, Israel is a major donor to the world's people. The presence of Jews among the nations has always been beneficial, like the rain and the dew that bless the plants of earth.

8), 9) Israel in the world of nations is like David against Goliath. That turned out better for the shepherd child than it did for the warrior giant, for sure. Since her re-establishment as a nation in 1948, little Israel has faced more existential threats than any nation on earth. Yet she stands with an olive branch extended to the hostile nations around her. Know this, however, that her desire for peace does not make her weak - she has defended herself with might again and again, against all odds. While she may suffer even more in this age, when Messiah comes, hers will be victory!

REDEMPTION FOR ISRAEL WILL COME

CLEANSSED OF TRUSTING MIGHT IN WAR

10), 11) While military might is to be gained and respected by the world, Yahweh had given a prohibition against utter reliance of the horse and the chariot instead of depending on Him. Deuteronomy 17:16 and 20:1 forbade the king from multiplying horses and the people from fearing the horses and chariots of enemies. Yes, they needed (and need) military preparedness, but it is better to trust in God than in military might. When Jesus comes, they will no longer need these things to survive and thrive, so He will remove them from them. They will learn to trust Messiah.

CLEANSSED OF FALSE WORSHIP

12) Enemies from without were never Israel's greatest problem; they were their own worst foe. Occult activity, with sorceries and fortune tellers, was corrupting a people whose spiritual life should be around Yahweh and His Word. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint), the word here for sorceries is *pharmaka*; do you see "pharmacy" there? The drug culture opens up people's minds and souls for occultic, demonic activity. A right relationship with the true God precludes the need for that type of experimentation. Warn your young people!

13), 14) While the occult and the spiritism activity may have been individual and private, there was a plague in Israel of organized idolatry. It was one of the two prime reasons (2 Kings 17:6-12) for the captivity, the other being the nation's failure to obey the Sabbatic laws of letting the land rest every seventh year (2 Chronicles 36:20, 21). The captivities for the northern kingdom in Assyria and Judah in Babylon seemed to have cured them of overt, organized, religious idolatry. God said He would "cut off" and "root out" images that were the objects of worship. The Law of Moses strictly forbade Israel from making and worshiping such material representations of so-called "gods" (Exodus 20:4-6).

CLEANSED OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE NATIONS

15) From where did Israel learn about false gods and their images? They borrowed these wicked ideas from other nations. And Yahweh would not hold those nations guiltless for this great crime. Yes, judgment begins at the house of God, but it extends wherever sin corrupts the minds and hearts of people made in the image of God. Judgment is often seen as individual, but there is a sense in which national judgment comes into play, as well.

CHAPTER 6

Because of Judah's sin, Micah and his contemporaries were sent by God to upbraid them and to warn them of judgment to come. But it was not all chastisement from these men; each of them also had encouraging words for the people, primarily about the coming golden age of the kingdom. It seems, though, that Israel had some rough waters through which to sail before that glorious time would come. They were failing God in the matters of the heart, even though they were fulfilling some of the outward requirements. God goes to court against Judah, as it were, and calls witnesses against them in the case that He prosecutes (verses 1,2). In verses 3 - 5 Judah is on the stand, and God is reminding them of the advantages with which He had blessed them. When Judah testifies, he asks rhetorical questions that actually describe some of the nation's religious activities, but things done routinely and without any real heart-felt worship. After an exaggeration about child sacrifice, the prophet, serving as God's advocate, responds with a sobering reminder that routinely-done outward activity can never replace heart-felt justice toward their fellow-Jews and a heart right before God.

GOD TAKES ISRAEL TO COURT

CALLING THE WITNESSES

1), 2) The great mountains, the hills, and the undergirding foundations of the earth are called to hear the case that God has against His people. The words "case," "charge," and "accusation" all speak of a courtroom setting in which God is the Prosecutor and Israel is the defendant. The mountains and the hills had been around to observe God's gracious dealings with Israel from the day He called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees until the then-present time. They had seen His watchcare over them as they developed from seventy-some people in Joseph's day to the several million of Moses' time. They had watched as God sent plagues on Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to let His people go. They saw the miraculous parade through the Red Sea, and continued watching as the same waters that were a wall on each side to the Israelites came crashing in to drown the Egyptian pursuers. Under the eye of these witnesses, the mountains and the hills, God had fed and provided drink for His wilderness-wandering millions. It did not escape their notice that God led them into the land of promise, driving out the squatters before them. They looked on as God gave them Judges to lead them, and then He granted them a king at their request. So now God calls on these ancient observers to come forth and tell their stories.

CHARGE REQUIRED, HISTORY RECALLED

3) For the Israelites to have abandoned the Lord as they did, one would think He had wronged them in some way. So, He asks them to charge Him with wrongdoing if they can. "Have I done anything against you? How have I made your load heavier? Answer me?" And no voice is heard because none is raised. And so it will be throughout all eternity, in every situation, for "*shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" Therefore, God is exonerated of any crime against His chosen people, and Israel becomes guilty of abandonment without a cause.

4} Verse four is like a miniature summary of the Exodus in which God reminds them of His bringing them out of Egypt, redeeming them from the bondage of slavery, and placing at their head great leaders from among themselves. The benefits that God had given Israel spoke of His love for and faithfulness to them. They really had no cause to complain about the God Who had been so benevolent toward them! Have Micah's hearers forgotten that in the Passover God saved the lives of the firstborn in every home where by faith blood was placed on the doorposts and on the lintel? Had they not been reciting this gracious act of God annually as He commanded?

5) As verse four harkened back to the story in Exodus, this verse recalls the part of their history that is recorded in the book of Numbers. God commands them to remember the wilderness journey in which a hireling prophet, Balaam, was called upon to curse the people of Israel for Balak, King of Moab, but God would not allow him to do so. It appears that at Shittim Balaam's counsel led the Moabites to seduce the Israelites so that God could not continue to bless them. Their journey then brought the Jews to Canaan, where they first camped at Gilgal.

CALCULATED RESPONSE

6), 7) The prophet Micah now inquires of Yahweh on behalf of the nation. He is a righteous man, and he knows what God requires from His people. But they do not seem to know, and so he asks some rhetorical questions, using hyperbole, to help Israel understand. He mentions approaching God, which men must do, bowing before God, and making offerings to God. He speaks of multiplied numbers of sacrifices, and even satirically suggests the law-forbidden offering of a firstborn child. But the prophet does not bid high enough in the auction for a soul. These offerings only **cover** sin **after the fact**. What is needed is rather a fleeing from sin. Outward actions, such as sacrifices and offerings, unless they are born in a heart of repentance and faith, are only motions. God is seeking genuine response - real, faith-produced worship from His people. It is far too easy to fulfill the forms and lack the reality behind them. What was true then is true today. We can go through religious motions without having any heart for God. We are as guilty as they when our actions are empty, devoid of meaning.

CORRECT RESPONSE

8) Micah has told us what God **does not** want from us. Now he tells us what God **does** want. He showed us that the heart affected by grace, cleaving to God by faith, demonstrates itself in the actions of its life. That life includes acting with justice, which **the law required and the gospel provided**. The God-pleasing life also is one that values love and mercy, unselfish love toward God and man. Finally, one who is walking with the high and holy God of heaven must do so with a bowed head." The brightest lights of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testaments, Moses and Jesus, were men of meekness (Numbers 12:3, Matthew 11:28). This is what God requires of those who would please Him and spend eternity with Him. The same is true now as then - To be "*in Christ*" is to be a "*new creation*."

9) When the prophet speaks or writes, it is the Lord's voice, the words of God that people hear

spoken and see written. So, Yahweh's voice cries to the city - Jerusalem - as Micah is ministering to the southern kingdom of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem. Those who are wise will listen and heed, that is, they will hear and obey. "Hear" is identical with the opening command of the "Sh'ma," for which see comments above on Micah 1:2. Again, any who are wise will hear of the rod of God's discipline, and they will submit to that chastisement. Babylon was Yahweh's rod of punishment to discipline His people.

CORRUPTION IN COMMERCE

10), 11), 12) Two of Solomon's proverbs (and more than a few others) state God's position on honesty in commerce. Proverbs 16:11, *"A just balance and scales are the LORD's; all the weights in the bag are his work."* 11:1 *"A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight."* Were God and His prophet expected to overlook dishonest trade practices? The treasures in the houses of the wicked were ill-gotten, and Yahweh could not, would not acquit those who used deceitful weights and wicked scales. Not all of Israel's sins were at the altars of false gods; some were at the altar of wealth! Such sins God would not pass by without acting! Much wealth was gotten deceitfully, flying full in the face of Him Who is very truth (honesty) Himself.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PEOPLE

13), 14), 15) "Actions have consequences," a mantra I preached in our home, at the Rescue Mission, in so many churches, and on the radio for decades. We cannot sin with impunity, and God's chosen people would feel the weight of His chastening hand on their proverbial backsides. Your eating will not satisfy your hunger; what you try to save will be lost. You will not reap your sown fields, and the oil from your olives will not anoint your skin. Treading your grapes will produce wine, but you will not drink it. Yahweh will withhold His blessing from you, just as He promised in His Law. Deuteronomy 28:39, *"You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off."* All the efforts of the people to provide their needs will be fruitless, and many will suffer.

CAUSE OF THE JUDGMENT

16) Those who are wise in their search for examples to follow will pick the best available models to follow. This is true in any discipline of life - sports, vocation, parenting, or any other thing you may consider. Sadly, two wicked northern kingdom rulers had been the pattern followed by too many other monarchs. Omri and Ahab were vile men, as chronicled for us in the books of history. We read in 1 Kings 16:25 - 26 of Omri's surpassing evil. The record of Ahab's evil reign is long and storied, and a summary preview of it is found in 1 Kings 16:30, *"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him."* The result of acting like these wicked kings, even following their evil counsel, was Israel being made a desolation and bearing scorn as a people. Actions have consequences, and evil actions so often have devastating results.

CHAPTER 7

Recall that Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, unlike his better-known colleague, prophesied to Judah and to Samaria, also known as Israel, Ephraim, or the northern kingdom. The great adversary of the day was Assyria, a warmongering, power-hungry neighbor to the northeast, who was feared by the whole world. As Micah begins what we call his final chapter, he sounds

depressed, *“Woe is me...”* (Verse 1). Verses 2-4 describe the absence of good and righteous people, but the presence of blood-thirsty, men-trapping, bribe-seeking people who are like a briar that will pierce your hand. He describes them in verse 3 as doing evil *“with both hands”* - their wickedness is *“ambidextrous!”* Verses 5 and 6 tell of a spiritual malaise in which the closest of family members cannot, should not trust each other because children are rising up against parents and family members have become enemies instead of bosom companions to be trusted. How blessed to reach verses 7-10, where depression is replaced with hope! The prophet will look to God and wait; God will hear and act. When the sin of Israel has been purged, God will turn the tables and bring justice to her. God will deliver His people from the throes of captivity, and it will be the Assyrians, not the Israelites, who will be ashamed.

THE FORTUNES OF ISRAEL WILL BE REVERSED

RECOGNITION OF HER SIN

1), 2) Verse one is filled with simile, as Micah describes the times in which he lives and ministers. God had warned that wicked behavior would leave the people unsatisfied, and now they are pictured like a hungry man walking in his orchard or vineyard and finding nothing to pick or pluck to satisfy his hunger. It is as if Yahweh walks through his vineyard (see Isaiah 5), and as He examines the vines, there are no grapes. Verse two says it clearly, *“The godly man has perished... there is no one upright among mankind.”* Men pursue men with knives to shed blood or nets to capture and sell them. Violence and betrayal are the order of the day, and they see it so.

3), 4) Solomon had written a couple of centuries earlier, *“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might”* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Well, these men did evil well, like asking for a bribe, uttering evil desires, and such. Materialism had corrupted the land, as people cared about getting money at any cost. Morality had sunk so low that the best of men was like a briar, the most upright like a thorn hedge. People seek the beauty of garden plants, or even flowers in the wild; but a hedge of thorns is to be avoided. There were just no good men left in the land, and the days foretold by the watchmen (prophets?) Had come. Perplexity and punishment were the order of the day.

5), 6) Social and family relations were in shambles. Neighbors and friends could not be trusted. A man is even cautioned about sharing the secrets of his heart in the presence of his wife! Sons are contemptuous of their own fathers, while daughters rise up against their mothers. One's in-laws become enemies within the family circle. Life is upside down, as those who should be the closest confidants, the people kin to them and who live with us\them, have made themselves their enemies! One would not normally expect to find treachery in those relationships, but sin had turned close relatives against each other. There was shame throughout the land.

REPENTANCE FROM SIN

7) One calls to mind here the words of Joshua (Joshua 24:15), *“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* Are these words in verse seven those of Micah in the midst of all this treachery? Are they the hopes of the remnant in Israel in Micah's day? Do these thoughts express the desires of believing Israel in the last days? Isaiah prophesied this (59:20), *“And a Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression,” declares the LORD.* Whoever had or will have these thoughts, the answer to sin is always trust in the sin-bearing Savior, Yeshua Ha'Mashiac. Looking to and waiting for Yahweh are never done in vain, for He always hears us.

RESULTS OF REPENTING

8) What a trilogy of verses are these! They give confidence, they inspire hope, and they enable the one who is down to look up! The beloved of God says to his enemies, *“Don't gloat over me. This isn't over yet. I fall, but I will rise; I am shrouded in the darkness, but Yahweh will bring me into the*

light.” Jesus said that in the world we would have trouble, but that we could be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world. The last word will be God’s, not man’s, not Satan’s.

9) God’s ways are always just, and I will bear His indignation because my sin deserves it. But the difficulty is only temporary, for he says “Until...” There is coming a day of deliverance, and the One Who judges is the One Who will deliver. There will not only be an end of darkness and judgment, but there will be vindication for me, as well. The righteous God can justify the sinner and remain just while doing so - how? By judging my sin in Another, in Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God. Check out Romans 3:26, *“that He might be just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus.”*

10) The one who mocked the child of God will be brought to shame themselves. People like to ask when trouble comes, “Where is your God now? They do this as a taunt, as an implied assertion that He either doesn’t have the power to help, or that he does, but He won’t help, or that He just doesn’t exist. None of the above are true. There is a God in heaven Who loves us and Who is all-powerful. Ultimately, He will heal all our diseases and fix all our hurts. It is also true that in this present world, sometimes He gets greater glory from the way His children trust Him through pain than He would by just removing the cause of the pain. Today I sat with a soon-to-be widow by the side of her dying husband’s bed. God’s glory was in that room as three generations waited and prayed for him to be taken away from them because it would be best for him. My heart breaks worse for the folks who don’t understand that than for those going through it.

IN NEED OF GOD’S MERCY

THE MILITARY SIEGE

11), 12), 13) Here we have a prophecy that ultimately looks to Christ’s kingdom on earth, what we “old-schoolers” call the “Millennium.” The land of Israel will be expanded into the fulness that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even today we see “strangers” filling her land. The southern coastal plain, once the stronghold of the Philistines, is today populated by the Palestinians (no relation to the ancient inhabitants). The media refer to it as “Gaza,” but it is really Israel’s territory. The same is true of Biblical Judea and Samaria; it is called today the “west bank,” also inhabited by strangers with no valid claim to the land. Then there is Gilead, once populated by Reuben, Gad, and ½ the tribe of Manasseh; today it is ruled by the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan. But note Obadiah 1:19, 20, where the prophet describes these as having been returned to the rightful possession of the children of Israel. You can mark it down; God said it, and it will happen! In addition to the geographical change, there will be a change in the mind-set of the nations about Israel. Anti-Semitism pervades many nations today, especially Israel’s neighbors. The prophet Micah has already told us in 4:2 that, *“Many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”* Before this glory, however, will come the devastation of the judgment of the Gentile nations by Christ (13). He says that their judgment will be *“the fruit of their deeds.”*

THE MIGHTY SHEPHERD

14) Here Micah addresses Yahweh, asking Him to “shepherd His people.” Once a rod of judgment, now His “staff will comfort them.” God had promised many times (like He did in Jeremiah 50:19) to restore Israel to her former “pasturelands;” now Micah asks Him to make good on His word. Once again here we see reference to Israel’s inhabiting the land that God promised them through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That full habitation has never happened in her long history, but we believe that it will be so during the time called the Millennial Kingdom. Gilead and Bashan are to the east of the Jordan River, with Bashan being more to the north and in the mountains we call “the

Golan Heights.”

15), 16), 17) Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures we find numerous references to God's deliverance of His people from Egypt. Here He promises to provide another wave of miracles for the nations to observe and bow before His will. Some apply this to the miracles of Jesus during the days of His earthly incarnation, but remember that not even Israel, much less the nations of the world, acknowledged His Messianic identity, of which the miracles were prophesied, incontrovertible proof! No, this must refer to a yet-unfulfilled wave of miracles. A promise was made in Jeremiah 23:7, 8, indicating that just such a thing will happen that will replace the Exodus as Israel's landmark deliverance by the Lord. Nations who thought themselves mighty will be ashamed of their puny “powers” in the face of Almighty God's great power. Long have the nations ignored God, making themselves the measure of all things (Humanism). Their ivory-tower halls of academia will be seen as the snake holes, viper pits that they are. Men will crawl forth from these to pay homage to the God they rejected for so long. In so doing they will acknowledge the rights of the people of God, as well, the people they mocked so laughingly. There's will not be the last laugh.

THE MERCIFUL SAVIOR

18), 19), 20) So many times the question has been asked, “*Who is like our God?*” Exodus 15:11; Psalm 35:10; 71:19; 77:13; 89:6; 113:5 are just a few. No other so-called deity really exists, but all are figments of their founders' imaginations. The only reality in such deities is that Satan may have assigned certain demons to act out behind the scenes on behalf of these supposed “gods.” The uniqueness of the one true God is pointed up here in His grace, His mercy, and His love. He lifts our sin from us; He passes by our transgressions; He does not forever execute His wrath because it is His delight to show mercy - to us and to His people, Israel! In His compassion God tramples underfoot our guilt, hurling our sins into the sea's depths. This is forgiveness! Micah's last stanza is one of the faithfulness of God to His Word as promised to His people. He goes back to the seminal head of the race, Abraham, and the unconditional covenant God made with Him. God also confirmed this oath to Jacob. Israel has a bright future because God keeps His promises. Not one word of His commitments to the sons of Abraham and Jacob will fail. It is those realities that cause us to say that Israel has a future in God's plans. He has not, as some believe, replaced His chosen nation, Israel, with the church.