

# **The Book of Micah**

by

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## THE BOOK OF MICAH

Micah is one of four prophets in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC whose careers are specifically correlated with the regnal years of Israel's kings. Like his contemporary Isaiah, Micah lived in the southern kingdom of Judah. However, whereas Isaiah was from Jerusalem, the capital city, Micah came from the border village of Moresheth, a site in Judah's Shephelah south of Gezer, north-northeast of Beersheba, east of Ashkelon and northwest of Hebron.<sup>1</sup> The compound village name in Hebrew, Moresheth-Gath (1:14), suggests its relationship to the Philistine city of Gath. Archaeological evidence indicates that the village was unoccupied after the end of the Bronze Age until the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, the period of Micah. Because of its location near the Philistine border, we may assume that the village suffered its share of difficulty. A few decades before Micah, Gath had been raided by Hazael of Aram (2 Kg. 12:17), and later, the Assyrian Adad-Nirari III (810-783) collected tribute from this area. Uzziah of Judah, the king immediately prior to Micah's career, raided the Philistine country (2 Chr. 26:6-7), including Gath, and he rebuilt some of the local towns. Possibly it was during this period that Moresheth once more was occupied. During Micah's lifetime, the Philistines raided Judah's occupied cities in the Shephelah (2 Chr. 28:18; cf. Is. 9:12; 14:28-32). Tiglath-pileser III, the Assyrian suzerain, attacked both Gath and Ashdod in 734 BC for disloyalty.<sup>2</sup> Later, Hezekiah warred with the Philistines (2 Kg. 18:8). Thus, Micah's locale had a history of turbulence and fragility.

### Micah, the Man

The Bible offers little in the way of personal information about Micah. His name, which is a shortened form of Micaiah (cf. Je. 26:18 MT), means, "Who is like Yahweh?" He certainly distanced himself from members of the prophetic guild, who likely were supporters of the status quo (3:5-8). There is no record that the kings of Judah sought him for counsel as they did Isaiah. Micah stands as an individual, a

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<sup>1</sup> Tell el-Judeideh, the excavation site of ancient Moresheth, shows evidence of extensive fire damage and no fortification system during the Iron Age. It yielded some thirty-seven *lmlk* (= belonging to the king) jar handles, probably from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, cf. D. Manor, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (New York: Oxford, 1997), p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> J. Greenfield, *IDB* (1962) III.794.

champion of the small farmer whose property rights were threatened by the wealthy movers and shakers in Judah (2:2; 3:1-3; 4:13b). Whether Micah was himself a peasant farmer is unclear, though clearly it is with this class that his deepest sympathies lay.

It is likely that Micah was a force behind the reforms Hezekiah introduced in Judah (cf. 2 Kgs. 18:1-8; 2 Chr. 29:1-31:21).

## Historical Background

The Golden Age of Uzziah was now past (792-740 BC). A new era was beginning whose profile would be shaped by the threatening imperialism of Assyria. The prosperity during Uzziah's reign had been largely due to a power vacuum with no serious outside threat. Trade and commerce had increased, bringing to the wealthy class in Jerusalem the finery of sophistication and culture (cf. Is. 4:16-23; 5:11-12). Unfortunately, much of this amassed wealth came at the expense of the poor, whose fortunes were decided by dishonest magistrates in cahoots with thieves (Is. 1:21-23; 3:13-15; 5:23; 10:1-2). The dirt farmers were losing their land (Is. 5:8), much as Ahab once had stolen the vineyard of Naboth (cf. 1 Kg. 21).

Now, another threat loomed on the horizon. The Assyrian war machine was on the move, and the kingdoms of Aram and Israel to the north formed a coalition to defend against it. They attempted to force Jotham of Judah to join them (2 Kg. 15:37), and when Jotham died, his son Ahaz was left to deal with the extortion (Is. 7). Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel marched against Jerusalem (2 Kg. 16:5), inflicting heavy casualties to Judah (2 Chr. 28:5-8). In his terror, and in spite of the warnings of Isaiah (cf. Is. 7:7-9), Ahaz appealed directly to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, offering himself as an Assyrian vassal (2 Kg. 16:7-10).

This Assyrian vassalship lasted until the death of Tiglath-pileser III. Hezekiah, Ahaz' son, took advantage of the shift in Assyrian power to throw off the yoke and withhold tribute (2 Kg. 18:7), though later, he was forced to accept Assyrian vassalship once more (2 Kg. 18:13-16).

## Date and Structure

As is common with many of the prophets, critical scholars have proposed that the book was developed over time by multiple authors and passed through various editorial stages.<sup>3</sup> The date of Micah's ministry itself is not in general doubt, since he specifically cites the reigns of three of Judah's kings in the opening oracle (1:1, *ca.*

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<sup>3</sup> See the extensive discussion in O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 407-412 and the summary in B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 429-436.

735-700 BC). However, a perceived lack of logical unity between chapters 1-3 and the remainder of the book suggested more than one hand and more than one context. In the first oracle, Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom, was still intact even if under threat (1:2-7). Hence, this oracle must have been authentic and delivered prior to the fall of Samaria in 721 BC. Various passages in later chapters, however, were assigned to the post-exilic period, and part of this conclusion was driven by the reluctance to accord any validity to the supernaturalism of prediction. The idea that Micah could have predicted a Babylonian captivity a century and a half before it occurred (cf. 4:10) or that he could have foreseen the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls after the return from exile (cf. 7:11) seemed too incredible. On the other hand, apart from the supernatural aspect of predictive prophecy, nothing in the oracles of Micah are out of place in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Hence, the integrity of the text should be allowed to stand.<sup>4</sup>

Structurally, the oracles in Micah alternate between doom and hope. With the exception of 2:12-13, the first three chapters predict a coming disaster. Chapters 4-5 carry promises of blessing. Chapter 6 and the first half of 7 return to the theme of disaster, and the book closes in 7:8-20 with visions of hope. The editorial marker that separates the three sections is the imperative form of the Hebrew **שמע** (= Listen!) in 1:2, 3:1 and 6:1

- ♦ Oracles Against Israel and Judah (1-2)
- ♦ Judgment and Restoration (3-5)
- ♦ Crime, Punishment and Mercy (6-7)

The opening superscription (1:1) locates the ministry of Micah during the regnal years of Jotham (ascension *c.* 750), Ahaz (ascension *c.* 735) and Hezekiah (ascension *c.* 715). On the whole, the calculation of regnal years and co-regencies along with their correlation to the modern calendar is very convoluted.<sup>5</sup>

## **The First Oracle (1-2)**

### **Yahweh's Day in Court (1:1b-7)**

The opening oracle is addressed to the capitals of both the northern and southern nations. The form of the oracle is a lawsuit in which Yahweh intends to prosecute a case against Samaria and Jerusalem.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 925.

<sup>5</sup> See discussion in J. Oswalt, *ISBE* (1979) I.684.

The enforcement of law in the ancient Near East ranged from local courts, whose magistrates or local elders heard cases in the city gates, to royal courts, where the king himself presided in his palace. Law codes stretch back into antiquity.<sup>6</sup> While we have no detailed records of trial proceedings from ancient Israel and Canaan, a number of biblical texts use court vocabulary, such as, רִיב (*riv* = dispute, case, lawsuit), דִּין (*din* = verdict, legal claim), שָׂטָן (*satan* = accuser), and עֵדִים (*ed'im* = witnesses). Punishments for convicted offenders ranged from fines to executions.<sup>7</sup>

The opening oracle of Micah uses such court language. A divine summons is issued to the whole world, and the venue will be the royal court of Yahweh himself, his “holy temple” (1:2). Yahweh has decisive testimony to give against the nations and his own people. It is immediately clear that the idea of a temple is not confined to the edifice on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. Solomon had indicated when it was built that it could not contain the full presence of God (cf. 2 Chr. 6:18). For Micah, the “dwelling place” of Yahweh is in the heavens, not merely on earth, and when he descends to the earth in theophany to hold court, the very earth itself shatters before him (1:3-4).

His charge against the two nations is covenant unfaithfulness, or to put it in terms of a court case, broken law codes (1:5). The repeating charge of פֶּשַׁע (*pesha'* = rebellion) indicates that the failures of the two nations are not only human weakness (חַטָּאת *hatta't* = sin, missing the mark) but also high-handed defiance. It should be noted that in addressing the two nations, Micah tends to use “Jacob” and “Samaria” to refer to the northern nation of Israel, while he tends to use “house of Israel” and “Jerusalem” to refer to Judah in the south (cf. 3:1, 8-9). If Samaria was the full expression of the northern nation’s erring ways under Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah (2 Kg. 15:17-31), Jerusalem in the south had become nothing more than a pagan בִּמְהָ (*bamah* = high place) under Ahaz (2 Kg. 16:1-4). The blunt accusation of Jerusalem as a “high place,” the term used for the sites of pagan worship and cultic prostitution (cf. 1 Kg. 11:7), can only be described as scathing!<sup>8</sup> The very first commandment in the decalogue was, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:2//Dt. 5:7). Now, both nations had lapsed into syncretism, and in doing so, they invited the sworn covenantal judgments of Yahweh (cf. Lv. 26:14, 30-33; Dt. 28:15,

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<sup>6</sup> Known law codes from the ancient Near East include the Eshnunna Laws (c. 2000 BC), the Ur-Nammu Laws (c. 2000 BC), the Lipit-Ishtar Laws (c. 1900 BC), Hammurabi’s Code (c. 1700 BC), the Nuzi Texts (c. 1500 BC) and the Hittite Laws (c. 1400 BC). The law for Israel, of course, was the Torah given by Yahweh at Sinai.

<sup>7</sup> For a more complete discussion of legal procedures, see H. Avalos, “Legal and Social Institutions in Canaan and Ancient Israel,” *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1995), I.615-631.

<sup>8</sup> The term *bamah* appears over a hundred times in the Bible, and primarily it refers to a cultic site, a primitive open-air installation, often on a natural hilltop, equipped with some combination of *asherah* (= sacred pole symbolizing the female element) and *massebot* (= standing stones serving as phallic symbols), cf. H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 158.

45-52, 64-68).

Because of these violations, Yahweh announced that Samaria would be razed to its very foundations (1:6). Her crime was idolatry and cultic prostitution. Hence, her punishment would be the breaking down of her idols and the burning of her payments to temple prostitutes (1:7). This imagery of prostitution was more than just a metaphor. In the Canaanite fertility cult, the common people engaged in sacred prostitution as a kind of imitative magic by which fertility energy could be maximized in agriculture, animals and humans. At the high places and sacred sites the *qedeshim* (= male cult prostitutes) and *qedeshot* (= female cult prostitutes) practiced their ritual sexual orgies.<sup>9</sup>

### **Micah's Lament (1:8-16)**

The prophets derived no satisfaction from their announcement of coming judgment. The looming disaster was for their own people, their own land, and ultimately, for themselves. Prophets were not aloof; they felt deeply and terribly the dire consequences of their nation's sins. Micah, for his part, was so deeply moved by what he foresaw that he took up the demeanor and actions of mourning for the dead. In the ancient Near East, lamentation was as much an imperative duty for the dead as burial. It was expressed by divesting oneself of normal clothes and substituting coarse material (sackcloth) over the loins, removing one's sandals, rolling in the dust and/or ashes, and shaving the beard or hair (1:8).<sup>10</sup> Also, Micah's adopted posture served as a symbol of coming exile, much as did the similar prophetic gesture of his contemporary in Jerusalem (Is. 20:2-4). Howling and moaning were also common expressions of grief over the dead. If Samaria, the capital of the north, was marked for death, Micah took no pleasure in it! Worse, the incurable wound of Samaria had spread like gangrene to Judah and its capital (1:9).

It is difficult to locate precisely the immediate military threat, though several possibilities exist. Early on, of course, there were attacks from the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance and their Edomite and Philistine cohorts in about 735 BC (cf. 2 Kg. 15:37; 16:5; Is. 7:6; 2 Chr. 28:17-19). Later, there were Assyrian invasions in 721 BC (Shalmaneser, cf. 2 Kg. 17:3-6), 711 BC (Sargon, cf. Is. 20:1) and 701 BC (Sennacherib, cf. 2 Kg. 18:17ff.). The eleven towns Micah lists in his lament (other than Jerusalem), so far as they can be located, are all in Judah's *shephelah*, and of

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<sup>9</sup> P. Craigie and G. Wilson, *ISBE* (1988), IV.98-100. That Judah was involved in religious syncretism is corroborated by 8<sup>th</sup> century drawings excavated in Judah that depict Yahweh with a female consort along with the accompanying inscription, "Yahweh and his Asherah", cf. Z. Meshel, "Did Yahweh Have a Consort?", *BAR* (March/April 1979), pp. 24-35.

<sup>10</sup> The "nakedness" of Micah probably refers to this rudimentary garment, cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), I.59.

course, one of them was Micah's own town, Moresheth-Gath. Some, like Gath (one of the five principal Philistine cities) and Lachish (a fortress city), are well known,<sup>11</sup> others obscure.

In naming the towns marked for disaster, Micah employs a series of wordplays. In English, puns almost invariably are used for humor, but in Hebrew, puns demonstrate much deeper emotions (cf. Je. 1:11-12; Am. 8:2). The puns Micah used point to the horror of the coming judgment (1:10-16).

- **Gath** (גת) creates assonance with *nagad* (נגד), meaning to report or to announce [i.e., disaster]. The line “tell it not in Gath” repeats the sentiment of David’s elegy over Saul (cf. 2 Sa. 1:20).
- **Beth Ophrah** (בֵּית עֹפְרָה) means “house of dust”, and its citizens are sentenced to rolling in the dust as an expression of lament.
- **Shaphir** (שָׁפִיר), meaning “pleasant”, sounds like *shophar* (שׁוֹפָר), the war trumpet, and its pleasantness would be brutally reversed by the coming invasion.
- **Zaanan** (צֶאֱנָן) creates assonance with the verb *yatsa’ h* (יָצָאָה), meaning “to come out”. Her citizens will refuse to engage in battle because it will be hopeless.
- **Beth Ezel** (בֵּית אֶזֶל) sounds similar to the verb *’asal* (אָסַל), meaning “to take away”. The city’s protection will vanish.
- **Maroth** (מְרוֹת) sounds like *mar* (מָר), which means “bitter,” and the bitterness of disaster will reach as far as the gates of the city of peace (Jerusalem). Here, *shalom* as the suffix of Jerusalem stands in bitter irony to the coming judgment from Yahweh.
- **Lachish** (לַכִּישׁ) sounds like the word *rekesh* (רֶכֶשׁ), which refers to a team of horses [i.e., chariot horses]. Lachish had the distinction of being the first in the *shephelah* to adopt the sins of the northern nation. Whether these sins were pagan practices or the city’s reliance on the military technology of chariotry is unclear (cf. Dt. 17:16; Is. 30:15-16; 31:1; Ps. 20:7).
- **Moresheth** (מֹרֶשֶׁת) sounds like *morashah* (מֹרָשָׁה), meaning “possession”, the very thing the citizens would give up when invaded.
- **Aczib** (אֶכְזִיב) sounds like *’ak’zav* (אֶכְזֹב), meaning “deceitful.” The king’s reliance on this city to provide defense would fail like a dry wadi without water (cf. Je. 15:18).
- **Mareshah** (מֶרֶשָׁה) sounds like *yarash* (יָרַשׁ), meaning “to dispossess.”
- **Adullam** (עֲדֻלָּם) recalls David’s flight to the cave when outlawed by Saul (1 Sa. 22:1), and Gath and Adullam, the towns that begin and end the list, are the ones also cited in David’s escape. That the *kavod* (= glory, heaviness) of God would come to Adullam is not necessarily

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<sup>11</sup> Lachish, especially, has been under excavation for some years by archaeologist David Ussishkin with considerable material evidence for its destruction in 701 BC, cf. D. Ussishkin, “Defensive Counter-Ramp Found at Lachish in 1983 Season,” *BAR* (March/April 1984), pp. 66-73. Furthermore, the Assyrian conquest of Lachish is vividly portrayed in the bas-reliefs of Sennacherib’s palace excavated in modern Iraq, cf. H. Shanks, “Destruction of Judean Fortress portrayed in Dramatic Eight-Century B.C. Pictures,” *BAR* (March/April 1984), pp. 48-65.



a sign of blessing; in this case, it is a metonymy either for the king or the court in Jerusalem that will be forced to flee just as David once fled before Saul. Nothing was left except to fulfill the rituals of mourning for the dead-and here, it is the nation itself that is dying.

### **The Crime of Land-Grabbing (2:1-5)**

Besides the religious syncretism and idolatry rampant in the land, powerful landowners aimed to drive out the farmers with small holdings by an unjust court system. The relevance of carrying out an evil plot “at morning’s light” is that local civil cases probably were heard early in the morning at the city gates before the workers left for the fields (2:1). Those with power had managed some legal precedent for foreclosure and eviction (2:2). They worked in cahoots with civil leaders (cf. 3:1-3), priests and prophets (cf. 3:9-11) to gain their objectives.<sup>12</sup>

The Torah treated family property as inalienable (Lv. 25:23ff.). The severity of God’s judgment on those who forced changes in property ownership is nowhere so evident as in Elijah’s denunciation of Ahab a century or so earlier (cf. 1 Kg. 21). Now, because the same kind of fraud was being perpetrated in Judah, Yahweh sentenced the kingdom to a yoke of servitude from which her citizens would not be able to extricate themselves (2:3).<sup>13</sup> The land would fall to the jurisdiction of their enemies who would allot it as they so pleased (2:4-5).

### **Preachers and Frauds (2:6-11)**

Since the prophetic guild supported the status quo of the power-mongers, they were eager to silence Micah’s scathing denunciations. Consistently, one of the hallmarks of false prophets was false optimism. Always they seemed to demand that any oracle of discipline or judgment was altogether out of order (cf. 1 Kg. 22:1-28//2 Chr. 18:1-27; Am. 2:12; 7:10-13; Je. 2:8; 5:30-31; 11:21; 14:14-15; 20:1-6; 23:9-40; 26:7-16; 27:9-10, 14-16; 28:8-9; 29:8-9, 21-23, 31-32; 37:18-19; Eze. 13:1-23). Surely Yahweh would not do anything harmful to his own people, they urged (2:7a; cf. 3:11a; Zep. 1:12; Je. 5:12; 23:17). Their question, “Does he do such things?”, implies that they thought the answer surely would be an emphatic “no”!

However, covenant behavior and covenant blessing and cursing was reciprocal by definition (cf. Dt. 28). Divine benefits were for the upright (2:7b). Those who without compassion exploited others could hardly expect God’s favor (2:8)!<sup>14</sup> In their heartless greed, they deprived mothers of their homes and destroyed any future hopes

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<sup>12</sup> J. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 45-48.

<sup>13</sup> The NIV translators failed to preserve the metaphor of an ox yoke, which literally reads “...this disaster from which you cannot save your necks.”

<sup>14</sup> The “stripping” of 2:8 more than likely was the demand for exorbitant security for debts (cf. Am. 2:6-8; Ex. 22:25-27).

for their children's heritage (2:9). Hence, the divine imperative could be nothing short of exile (2:10). The promised land—the land of rest (Dt. 12:10; 25:19; Jos. 1:13)—would no longer be a place of rest (cf. Is. 28:11-13)! Because of their crimes, they had forfeited their privilege. As for the prophetic guild and its alliance with the powerbrokers, Micah dismissed them both with dripping sarcasm (2:11).

### **Hope After Judgment (2:12-13)**

As is true for all the prophets, judgment is never God's final word. True, the immediate future held only the promise of disaster. Yet after the judgment of exile, a remnant would survive to be gathered again by Yahweh like sheep in a fold (2:12). The idea of a remnant that would survive the coming disaster is a common theme among the eighth century prophets (cf. Am. 9:14; Is. 1:27; 4:2-3; 7:3; 10:22; 11:10-16; 35:10). As in the days of the united kingdom, there would be a single flock under a single king—a king who would be none other than Yahweh himself (2:13). Under the leadership of this king, the remnant would “break free” from their exile.

### **The Second Oracle (3-5)**

Because the judgment in 3:12 was later recalled in the lifetime of Jeremiah, the dating for this oracle probably should be during the early years of Hezekiah's reign prior to his extensive reforms (cf. Jer. 26:17-19).

### **Dirty Politics (3:1-4)**

Micah's second oracle continues his scathing indictment over social injustice. This time the culprits are the political leaders of Judah, probably public officials in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> As representatives of the people, they ought to have had the best interests of their subjects at heart. Especially, they should have sought to preserve justice. Instead, they treated their subjects like carcasses to be butchered (3:1-3). Nevertheless, as the cliché goes, the mills of God grind slowly, but exceedingly fine! Such leaders could look forward to a time when they would plead for mercy, and God would be as deaf to their cries as they had been the cries of their subjects (3:4). They had preyed on those without power, and God would refuse to hear them in the

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<sup>15</sup> Our knowledge of local government is limited. Both Israel and Judah had kings, of course, and we also know that the two capitals had governors (cf. 2 Kg. 10:5; 23:8; 2 Chr. 34:8). Beyond that, there were various city officials, such as, a palace administrator, a secretary and a recorder (2 Kg. 18:18; Isa. 22:15). Ideally, such officials should have served as “a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah” (Isa. 22:21). Beyond such appointments, there were probably other officials, the “servants of the king” (cf. Jer. 24:8; 26:10; 34:19, 21). Seals and bullae of such officials have been recovered from excavations, including the seal of “Abdi, Servant of Hoshea” and “Hanan, son of Hilkiah” (cf. 2 Kg. 22:8), cf. A. Lemaire, “Royal Signature—Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1995) pp. 48-52. In outlying villages, civil affairs probably were handled by the village elders, the heads of influential families, R. de Vaux, 168-70, 137-138.

time of their own helplessness.

Centuries later, the teachings of Jesus about the poor and their coming vindication by God were very much in the spirit of prophets like Micah (cf. Lk. 6:20-21; 16:19-31; 18:6-8).

### **Prophets for Hire (3:5-8)**

As before, Micah viewed the popular preachers as in cahoots with the politicians (cf. 2:1, 6). Such prophets were only interested in themselves. They “bite with their teeth and proclaim ‘peace’” (3:5a). Their sermons were for hire. If they were fed, they preached prosperity; if they were not fed, they threatened those too poor or too honest to bribe them (3:5b). Consequently, judgment was coming! Though called “seers” for their supposed ability to forecast the future, they would stumble in darkness, ashamed and without an answer (3:6-7).

Jesus, also, warned against shepherds for hire (Jn. 10:12-13), and the early church was careful to specify that a leader must not be “a lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Tit. 1:7). False leaders are the ones who think, “godliness is a means to financial gain” (1 Tim. 6:5). Rather early, the policy of the early church was that a prophet was worthy of his food, but “if he asks for money he is a false prophet” (*Didache* 11).

True prophets, by contrast, spoke only the oracle of Yahweh. They were not concerned with personal wealth but justice. As for Micah, he was Spirit-filled to preach in the interests of such social justice (3:8).

### **Payday Someday (3:9-12)**

Leaders who perverted justice in both nations included political and religious figures-officials, priests and prophets (3:9, 11a). Rank with the tainted money of bribery, they felt no compunctions about even murder to fulfill their ambitions (3:10). Perhaps, like Ahab a century earlier, they were willing to kill through trumped up capital charges in order to gain more land (cf. 1 Kg. 21).

The critical word here is מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat* = justice), which appears in Micah several times (3:1, 8, 9; 6:8; 7:9). *Mishpat* is the judgment given by a judge; hence, it means justice or legal right. To the Hebrew, however, this concept could never be separated from the character of God who was the judge *par excellence* (Gen. 18:25; Dt. 1:17; Ps. 19:9). The demands of God’s law were God’s justice.<sup>16</sup>

The injustices of Judah’s leaders were exacerbated by a false sense of optimism. They were moral schizophrenics, dealing out dishonesty in civil affairs on

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<sup>16</sup> N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), pp. 93-96.

the one hand but grasping for piety and religious status on the other (3:11b). In spite of their cruel business transactions that squeezed the powerless, they claimed to pursue spiritual things, believing that Yahweh's presence in Zion's temple justified their optimism for the future. Therefore, Zion and Jerusalem were marked for disaster. Those who rejected God's moral claims could hardly look for comfort in his promises! Like his contemporary, who used the name Immanuel (= God with us) to preach both promise and judgment (Isa. 7:14-25), the claim of God's presence was always double-edged! Micah, then, becomes the first prophet to explicitly predict the destruction of Jerusalem-more than a century before it would happen.

### **Hope Beyond Judgment (4:1-5)**

Already Micah has offered a small glimpse of the future beyond judgment (cf. 2:12-13). Now, he intends to expand this theme. If earlier he said this future would involve a surviving remnant and a future king, now he says that Mt. Zion would be established as the center of worship for the world.

Micah 4:1-3 obviously parallels Isaiah 2:2-4.<sup>17</sup> The question of literary dependency must almost certainly be answered affirmatively. However, which oracle is prior is virtually impossible to determine, especially since both prophets were contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> The parallelism does show, however, that the concept of biblical inspiration certainly includes the use of citation.

Micah employs the stock phrase "in the last days" or "in the days to come" when speaking of God's future beyond judgment. This phrase, which is found in several of the prophets, has a range of nuance. By itself, it simply points to the indeterminate future. In context, however, it often carries a nuance referring to the end of the age.<sup>19</sup> Mt. Zion, though not the highest mountain in the central range, would be elevated in status as the goal of pilgrimages for the nations. The same site to be devastated in the coming disaster (cf. 3:12) would be reclaimed as the teaching center for Torah to all the peoples of the world (4:1-2). Here Yahweh would dispense true justice in sharp contrast to the blight of injustice currently being practiced in Jerusalem (4:3a; cf. 3:1-3). The wars of the world would cease, and the weapons of war would be reduced to farm implements (4:3b).

The imagery of each citizen sitting under his own vine or fig tree expresses the ideal of freedom and peace (4:4; cf. 1 Kg. 4:25; 2 Kg. 18:31; Isa. 36:16; Zec. 3:10).

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<sup>17</sup> While the Hebrew texts in the two passages are not exactly the same, the differences are minor, mainly, the transposition of words.

<sup>18</sup> It is common for historical-critical scholars to deny both passages to either prophet and relocate them to the exile or post-exilic periods. Such a subjective literary judgment seems unwarranted.

<sup>19</sup> For a more complete discussion of the phrase, see D. Lewis, *3 Crucial Questions About the Last Days* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 34.

Though other nations might worship other gods, for the remnant of Israel, Yahweh alone was to be revered (cf. Dt. 6:4).<sup>20</sup>

### **Yahweh's Glorious Plan (4:6-5:1)**

The phrase “in that day” like the previous phrase “in the last days” becomes a stock expression for God’s eschatological future (cf. 5:10). Though Micah’s oracles do not contain the phrase “Day of Yahweh” as did his contemporaries (cf. Am. 5:18; Isa. 2:12), the other two phrases carry much the same nuance (Am. 8:3, 9-11; Isa. 2:11, 17, etc.; Hos. 1:5; 2:16, 18).<sup>21</sup> Here, the future contains hope for those who have suffered in exile (4:6-7). Again like his contemporaries, Micah views these survivors as a remnant that will be blessed under the sovereign kingship of Yahweh (cf. Am. 9:13-15; Hos. 1:10-11; 2:21-23; 11:10-11; Isa. 10:20-22; 11:11-12, 16). The fortified Hill of Ophel,<sup>22</sup> the ancient City of David, would be lost, but the former royal dominion someday would be restored, implying the restoration of the dynasty of David (4:8). David’s dynasty might be crushed in the coming disaster, but it would not be extinguished forever. Like his contemporaries, Micah predicted that the kingship would yet survive (cf. Isa. 9:7; 11:1, 10; Am. 9:11; Hos. 3:5).

The pathway to this glorious future, however, must lead through an intermediate judgment in which there would be no king (4:9; cf. Hos. 3:4). The nation of Judah must be exiled to Babylon before it could be restored to glory (4:10).<sup>23</sup> From Babylon Yahweh would redeem his people. In the meantime, many nations cast vengeful eyes toward the wealth of Judah, hoping to rape the land (4:11), not the least of which were the Assyrians and the surrounding Canaanite peoples. Nevertheless, though they were eager for conquest, they could not discern that they were only being bent to God’s bigger purpose (4:12; cf. Isa. 40:12ff.; 41:21-29). Little did they realize that in coming against Judah they were merely being drawn into God’s great threshing floor, where the people of God would thresh them with iron horns and bronze hooves (4:13a). In the end, the spoils of war would be

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<sup>20</sup> This verse is easily the most controversial in the book. It could be read as a statement of tolerance, that is, that in the restoration the nations would simply be allowed to follow their ancestral religions without requiring of them the strict monotheism of the Hebrew faith. However, it is virtually impossible to think that Micah is here giving cart blanche to religious pluralism. Rather, he simply comments on the realism of the moment. Much more likely, he is echoing the sentiments of his contemporary that in the consummation, the present pluralism, which God tolerates during history (cf. Ac. 14:15-16; 17:30), will be tolerated no longer (cf. Isa. 45:22-25).

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, pp. 30-34.

<sup>22</sup> The Hebrew text uses the name *Ophel* (= stronghold) to represent the impregnable fortress David used as his capital and which remained as the capital of the southern nation.

<sup>23</sup> The explicit mention of the Babylonian exile has convinced many scholars that this oracle must be dated much later, but their reluctance to credit it to Micah is largely due to their rejection of the validity of biblical prophecy. It should be remembered that Isaiah, at about the same time, predicted that Babylon would be the one to send Judah into exile (Isa. 39; 2 Kg. 20:12-18).

presented to God as an offering of thanks (4:13b). First, however, would come the siege against Jerusalem (5:1a) during which Jerusalem's king would be insulted (5:1b).<sup>24</sup>

If this siege from the "many nations" of 4:11 includes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 BC with his army of provincial divisions and mercenaries, the fulfillment is striking. In the first place, Hezekiah of Judah was certainly "struck on the cheek." He lost forty-six of Judah's fortress cities, including Lachish, as Sennacherib himself records.<sup>25</sup> It is significant, however, that Sennacherib does not claim the fall of Jerusalem. In fact, the biblical account indicates Sennacherib's armies were struck by an angel who destroyed 185,000 troops, after which the Assyrians withdrew (2 Kg. 19:35-36; Isa. 37:36-37). Isaiah, also, predicted the ultimate victory of Judah (2 Kg. 19:20-34; Isa. 37:21-35). So, when Micah calls upon the troops of Jerusalem to "rise and thresh" and to "break in pieces" their enemies, his call was answered by the miraculous victory of Yahweh!

### **The Coming King from Bethlehem, Judah (5:2-5a)**

The demise of the Davidic dynasty (cf. 4:9), even though temporarily forestalled by a brief reprieve (cf. 4:13), was a formidable theological problem for the ancient people of Israel. God's covenant had guaranteed David an everlasting dynasty (2 Sam. 7:11b-16) and a homeland for the nation from which her citizens would never be removed (2 Sam. 7:10-11a; 22:51b; 23:5a). An attitude of complacency, based largely on this ideal, permeated Judah's political assumptions (cf. 2:6-7; 3:9-12). Micah, however, along with other prophets, understood this ideal in a much different sense than was popularly conceived. Rather than a perpetual dynasty without a break, they predicted that there would indeed be a sharp break in succession. Such a break would not make null the covenant promises to David. Rather, in the indeterminate future-in "the last days"-a future king would come from David's family to fulfill these promises. It is to this future that Micah now turns.

The coming king, whom Micah already has mentioned twice (cf. 2:13; 4:8), would be born in Bethlehem, David's ancestral city (5:2a).<sup>26</sup> The paradox of this king

<sup>24</sup> The assignment of 5:1 to what precedes follows the MT, where it appears as 4:14 instead of 5:1.

<sup>25</sup> Sennacherib's own prism recounts: *As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth)-ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate, cf. J. Pritchard, ed., The Ancient Near East, Volume I: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures (Princeton: Princeton University, 1958), pp. 199-201.*

<sup>26</sup> The appellation "Ephrathah" is an ancient name for Bethlehem or perhaps the region around Bethlehem (Gen. 35:16, 19; 48:7; Ru. 1:2; 4:11; 1 Sam. 17:12).

yet to be born is that his natural origins were in antiquity (5:2b). Such a phrase could refer to the origins of the coming king in the posterity of David's family, which could be traced backward to the ancestral period prior to the conquest of Canaan (cf. Ru. 4:18-21). However, there may be a hint of something supernatural as well, since the words קדם (*qedem* = antiquity) and עולם ('*olam* = long ago, eternity) are sometimes used of God himself (cf. Dt. 33:27; Gen. 21:33). Since the beginning of Christianity, this passage consistently has been understood as messianic and fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Son of David, in the village of Bethlehem (cf. Mt. 2:1, 5-6; Lk. 2:4-7).<sup>27</sup> It comes as a surprise, therefore, that historical-critical scholars often flatly reject this passage as messianic.<sup>28</sup> There is no sound reason for such a rejection.

Between the time of the Babylonian exile and the birth of the coming king, the people of Israel would be abandoned to the vicissitudes of ancient Near Eastern aggressors (5:3a). Israel would be like a pregnant woman, ready to deliver the king to the world through the pathos of labor pain.<sup>29</sup> Associated with the birth of this coming king would be the gathering of the scattered exiles (5:3b). When the king arrived, he would tend the flock of Israel like a good shepherd, faithful to Yahweh and ruling as his representative (5:4a). The people would live in safety, and the magnitude of the coming king's reign would be worldwide (5:4b). There is a sense, then, in which Micah anticipates the exile as continuing until the advent of the messianic king. To be sure, as we now know, the exiles would return to rebuild Jerusalem and the second temple. However, even as late as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the concept of a continuing exile was barely beneath the surface of the Jewish mindset (Lk. 2:25, 38).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Apostolic Fathers cited this passage, also, cf. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, xxxiv; *Trypho*, lxxvii; Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, xiii.

<sup>28</sup> A good example is Harold Bosley, who bluntly says that this tradition was simply written into the gospels as an abuse of scripture and that he finds it hard to believe "that anyone who had actually read this chapter carefully could think that it had any reference at all to the coming of Jesus Christ," cf. *IB* (1956) 6.930. Contrary to Bosley's skepticism, such abrupt changes within a single oracle from descriptions of judgment to a blessed hope after judgment and then a return to current political trends, if anything, is typical of the prophets. The problem is not in the text nor the early church's interpretation. It lies in Bosley's presuppositions about what constitutes prophetic literature.

<sup>29</sup> This imagery of birth pains for the coming of the messiah became an important theme in Jewish apocalyptic. It also is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, *Hymn of Thanksgiving*, III, 3-18, cf. T. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 152-154.

*Yea, I am in distress as a woman in travail bringing forth her firstborn son, when, as her time draws near, the pangs come swiftly upon her and all the racking pains in the crucible of conception. For now, amid throes of death, new life is coming to birth, and the pangs of travail set in, as at last there enters the world the man-child long conceived. Now, amid throes of death, that man-child long foretold is about to be brought forth. Now, 'mid the pangs of hell, there will burst forth from the womb that marvel of mind and thought, and that man-child will spring from the throes!*

Later, the same imagery is employed in the Revelation of John (12:1-5).

<sup>30</sup> The perception that the exile was not yet over, even in the time of Roman occupation, is thoroughly explored in N. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 268-272.

### **The New Kingdom (5:5b-15)**

The remainder of Micah's second oracle describes the prominence of God's people under the reign of the new king. True, the invasion by the Assyrians loomed large in the near future. There would be a judgment in history before eventual triumph. Nevertheless, the aggression of the Assyrians would be temporary, and the ultimate promise was that God's people would rule over both Assyria and Babylon, after being delivered by the coming messianic king (5:5b-6).<sup>31</sup> The centerpieces of this new kingdom would be the survivors of the intermediate judgment, a powerful remnant that would distil among the nations as mysteriously as dew (5:7-8). The enemies of the remnant would be vanquished (5:9).

Once again, Micah uses the stock expression "in that day" to point toward the eschatological future (5:10a; cf. 4:6). The many covenant violations of the Israelites would cease "in that day." God would purge the Israelites' penchant for relying on conventional military strategies and their frequent lapses into Canaanite superstition and religion (5:10-14; cf. Hos. 14:3; Isa. 2:6-8). Divine judgment would extend to all the nations, and not Israel only (5:15). Judgment might begin at the house of God, but it would not end there!

### **The Third Oracle (6-7)**

#### **The Covenant Lawsuit**

The third oracle, like the first, returns to the imagery of a court scene (6:1-2). As before (cf. 1:2, 5), Yahweh presses his case, though this time the members of the jury are the mountains and hills of the land. Such a personification may seem unusual, but two factors demonstrate why it is appropriate. First, it was customary in an ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty for the Great King to call upon witnesses to the covenant, usually the gods and goddesses of both contracting parties.<sup>32</sup> For God's covenant with Israel, of course, this feature necessarily was changed, and the elements of nature, not a pantheon of deities, serve as witnesses to the covenant oath (cf. Dt. 32:1). When Israel broke covenant, these same witnesses arose to testify against her (cf. Ps. 50:3-6). Hence, the summons to the mountains and hills in Micah's oracle recalls the original witnesses to the covenant in the time of Moses.

Second, Micah already has indicated that a major part of Israel's covenant violation was religious syncretism with the Ba'al cult (cf. 1:5, 7; 5:12-14). The fertility rituals, which often took place on the "high places"-the hills and mountains

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<sup>31</sup> Babylon is suggested by the expression "land of Nimrod" (cf. Gen. 10:8-10).

<sup>32</sup> For more extensive treatment of the suzerainty pattern of ancient covenants and their relationship to the Torah, see G. Mendenhall, *IDB* (1962) I.714-723



of Israel-were a desecration of the land. Other prophets, also, addressed the mountains because of their role in this transgression (e.g., Eze. 6:1-7).

The language of the רִיב (*riv* = lawsuit, quarrel, case, dispute), that is used here (6:2), is employed by prophets other than Micah (cf. Ho. 4:1; 12:2; Je. 25:31). The litigation takes the form of interrogation in which Yahweh cross-examines Israel (6:3). Since Israel has broken covenant, she implied that she was the aggrieved party and that Yahweh had failed in his covenant obligations. Yahweh's response was a defense of his historical relations with his people, whom he redeemed from Egypt (6:4a) and for whom he raised up powerful leaders (6:4b). He had thwarted the efforts to curse their nation by a pagan king (6:5a; cf. Nu. 22-24). He miraculously enabled them to cross the Jordan (6:5b) from their camp on the east bank (Jos. 2:1) to their camp on the west bank (Jos. 4:19). In view of such blessings, how could the people of Israel desert their covenant and complain that Yahweh had not fulfilled his obligations?

For too many citizens, the covenant was only the external form of religious ritual. So long as they performed the temple requirements they believed themselves to have satisfied their covenant obligations. Yahweh, however, was not looking merely for cultic ritual! The external form of religion, without the inward character of righteousness, was hollow and deceptive (6:6-7), a theme that arises in Micah's contemporaries as well (Ho. 6:6; Is. 1:10-17). Yahweh did not want more blood or more oil (6:6-7a). He certainly did not want the vicious practice of child sacrifice, a detestable Canaanite ritual (cf. 2 Kg. 3:27; Is. 57:5; Je. 19:5; Eze. 16:20; 20:26) and an act performed by no less than the king of Judah himself (2 Kg. 16:3). Rather, he wanted מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat* = justice, upholding what is right), חֶסֶד (*hesed* = mercy, loyal love) and a judicious lifestyle (6:8).<sup>33</sup> Religion for religion's sake was empty! True religion was the kind that sought to minister to the needs of others (cf. Ja. 1:27).

Consequently, judgment was coming! The balance of chapter 6 details the guilt and punishment of the unfaithful nation. Judgment would start with the city, the source of most of the abuses (6:9). Like the mountains (cf. 6:1), the city is personified in this verdict (6:9, 13-16), and judgment on the city is pronounced in the first person. Wealth piled up by exploitation-dishonest business practices, violence and deception-would not be overlooked (6:10-12).<sup>34</sup> The Torah was clear that honesty in

<sup>33</sup> The rarely used verb צָנַע (*tsana'* = to live cautiously or carefully) implies humility, not so much in terms of self-effacement as by considered attention to others. Such humility is the opposite of being presumptuous. It is paying attention to the will and way of God, cf. J. Mays, *Micah [OTL]* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> It is likely that Abraham Lincoln was aware of sentiments like these in the prophets. They are the most natural source for his assessment of the divine judgment on the United States in the Civil War because of slavery: *Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk,*

such mundane things as weights and measures were fully expected of God's holy people (Lv. 19:35-36; Dt. 25:13-16)! Amos had denounced the northern nation for the same practices (Am. 8:4-6); now Micah denounced Judah.

The deuteronomic curse for covenant violation was judgment (6:13), beginning with deprivation (6:14-15; cf. Dt. 28:15-24) and ending with the sword of invasion (6:14b; cf. Dt. 28:49ff.). Such judgment was a just verdict in light of the nation's flagrant sins of the sort of Omri's dynasty in the north, sins like those of Ahab and Jezebel, who were among the original exploiters of property owners (cf. 1 Kg. 21). The mention of the names Omri and Ahab must surely also have recalled the divine judgments on their dynasty pronounced by Elijah (1 Kg. 21:17-24) and carried out by Jehu and others (1 Kg. 22:37-38; 2 Kg. 9:6-10, 17-37).

### **A Moral Man in an Immoral Society (7:1-7)**

The social consciousness of Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most influential ethical minds in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was shaped in metropolitan Detroit during his pastoral ministry at Bethel Evangelical Church beginning in 1915.<sup>35</sup> Here he encountered the harsh realities of industrial America as he contemplated the future of American civilization when "naive gentlemen with a genius for mechanics suddenly become the arbiters over the lives and fortunes of hundreds of thousands." His conclusion that liberal optimism was a false hope and that social groups were selfish almost by definition resonates with the frustrations of Micah.

Micah, like all the prophets, was a man with a pronounced sensitivity to evil, especially social evil. The things that once horrified the prophets now have become daily occurrences throughout the world: injustice, hypocrisy, falsehood, outrage and misery. Unlike modern humans who have grown accustomed to such life, the prophets were outraged! Micah's moan, "What misery is mine!," expresses how fiercely he felt about such conditions (7:1a).<sup>36</sup> He was like a hungry man in the middle of a stripped vineyard (7:1b). He looked for godliness but saw only greed and corruption, a "dog eat dog" world in which the primary human activity was the ambush of others (7:2). In their lust for advantage, the ones in positions of authority abused their powers for personal profit (7:3; cf. Pro. 18:16). Magistrates were in cahoots with city officials, each reinforcing kickbacks for the other (cf. 2:1-2; 3:1-3, 9-11a). The best among them was no better than a thorn bush (7:4a).

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*and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."*

<sup>35</sup> My title for this section is an obvious play on Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribners, 1932).

<sup>36</sup> For an extremely insightful discussion of the prophetic mind and mood, see A. Heshel, *The Prophets* (1962 rpt. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), pp. 3-26.

Yes, judgment was coming! Earlier, Micah depicted the coming catastrophe by the phrase “in that day” (5:10), a prophetic shorthand for the Day of Yahweh. Now, he speaks of it as the “day of your watchmen,” an allusion to the soldiers who guarded the city walls and warned of approaching invasion (7:4b). The coming invader was not merely a foreign army, however, but God himself who would come to confuse the powerbrokers who abused the poor (7:4c). Micah’s phrase “the day God visits you” is very much like his northern contemporary’s word of doom, “Prepare to meet your God” (Am. 4:12)! The malaise was so deep that no one could be trusted, neither neighbor, friend, spouse, child or relative (7:5-6).

In the midst of this moral disintegration, Micah determined, as did other prophets, that he could only wait for God’s justice (7:7; cf. Hab. 2:1, 4b; Isa. 8:17; 26:8-9; 30:18; 40:27-31; Hos. 12:6; Zep. 3:8; Lam. 3:19-26; Psalms 5:3; 27:14; 33:20; 37:7, 34; 38:15; 119:84, 166; 130:5-6). God, alone, could be trusted to bring salvation to a crooked and warped people.

### **Rising Again (7:8-13)**

The anticipation and expectation that God’s justice will come in his own sovereign time prepares the way for a concluding anthem of hope. The familiar message of all the prophets is judgment for sin followed by redemption from sin’s consequences.

The hope that Israel would rise from the ashes of judgment had an important relevance to the nations that surrounded her. Those nations would be God’s unwitting instrument of chastisement against his people. When they invaded Israel, they believed themselves to be acting under the power of their own deities, as voluminous inscriptions from the ancient Near East testify.<sup>37</sup> Hence, they taunted Israel that Yahweh was too weak to oppose them (cf. Isa. 36:7, 10, 14-15, 18-20; 2 Kg. 18:22, 25, 30-35). Yet, though Israel’s enemies might gloat over her demise and though Israel might sit in the darkness of despair as a penalty for her sins, judgment was never God’s final word (7:8-9). The fallen would rise! The ones sitting in darkness would see light! The wrath of God would be turned into a righteous defense of his oppressed people! The oppressors, who questioned Yahweh’s sovereign power, would be shamed and trampled beneath the feet of the redeemed (7:10)! Though Jerusalem might fall, the city would be rebuilt (7:11). Those formerly her enemies would make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Mesopotamia and Egypt and from around the world to acknowledge Yahweh’s justice (7:12). While Zion would be rebuilt, the rest of the world would become desolate under God’s judgment “in that

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<sup>37</sup> Assyrian and Babylonian inscriptions describing the victories of war are invariably connected with the Mesopotamian deities of Shamash, Sin, Ashur, Nebo, Bel and Marduk.

day” (7:13). This theme of redemption for the remnant and the nations’ making pilgrimage to Jerusalem is picked up in the New Testament as a symbol for the spread of the gospel (Rom. 9:24-32; Eph. 3:6; Heb. 12:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:3-5; 2:4-10), and ultimately, the nations who would bring their treasures to the New Jerusalem in the consummation (Rev. 21:22-26).

### **A Bidding Prayer (3:14-20)**

The third oracle closes with a prayer addressing Yahweh as the true Shepherd of Israel. It intercedes for pastureland in the transjordan, and in an ellipsis, Yahweh responds that he will bless the restored nation with his protective power reminiscent of the exodus and Israel’s initial entry into the land (7:13-14). The nations who have been disciplined by God will see the restoration of Israel, and their taunts will cease (7:16). Like the ancient snake in Eden, they will lick the dust (7:17a; cf. Gen. 3:14). With appropriate fear toward both Yahweh and his people (7:17b), they will marvel at the God whose property is always to pardon sin and forgive transgression (7:18a). God’s righteous wrath, an expression of his holiness and justice, is more than surpassed by his mercy, which is the essence of his character (7:18b). Earlier, the people of Israel confess: “I will bear Yahweh’s wrath, because I have sinned against him” (cf. 7:9a). Nevertheless, divine wrath does not most fully define God’s character, for his wrath is momentary compared with his faithful love (*hesed*), which endures forever (cf. Ho. 11:9; Psa. 30:5). Hence, Yahweh does not stay angry forever but he delights to show *hesed*. Yahweh’s last word is compassion and forgiveness! Yahweh will turn again<sup>38</sup> in compassion. Sin will be vanquished and hurled into the deepest sea (7:19; cf. Psa. 103:12). Yahweh will be faithful to his covenant oath-true to his promises to the patriarchs (7:20).

In the New Testament, St. Paul consistently understands this covenant promise to be fulfilled to the remnant of faith (cf. Gal. 3:6-9, 14-16, 26-29; Rom. 2:28-29; 4:1-17, 22-24; 9:6-8).

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<sup>38</sup> The verb *shuv* (= to turn), here used of Yahweh turning back to his people, fits within the larger usage of this verb in the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophets.