

General Comments on Micah

Micah's ministry coincided with Isaiah's. They both witnessed firsthand the depravity of Judah under Ahaz and its regeneration under Hezekiah. Chapters 1-3 are heavily influenced by the idolatry experienced under Ahaz, and ch. 3 forms a withering attack against the religious leaders of the time. This theme is prevalent in Isaiah as well. It should be no surprise that Micah shares a great deal in common with Isaiah when it comes to rhetorical style, symbolism, imagery, and content. As such, Micah is just as demanding a book as is Isaiah, its only shorter.

Both books draw heavily on things Jewish (e.g., "the manner of the Jews" per 2 Nephi 25:5), and especially the Law of Moses. The more one is familiar with the Law, the easier it will be to understand what they are saying. For example, 1:2-3 draws on the Sinai Covenant (cf. Exod. 19, Exod. 24:1-8), and as a result of rebelling against that covenant Israel will be punished according to the covenant curses listed in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28, which form the substance of 1:5-7. If one is unfamiliar with these texts, they would never realize the underlying premise is Israel's ancient lineage-based covenant with the Lord, which is designed to get them to repent per Lev. 26. It would simply read as an angry God striking His people out of malice.

The KJV does a reasonably good job on this book, but on the obscure verses comparison with the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translation is recommended. Many modern translations, for example the New American Standard (NAS), still retain a considerable amount of the obtuse text of the KJV. The JPS translation is much clearer.

Comments on Micah 1

The general theme of this chapter is the deliberate rebellion of Israel and Judah against the Lord, and His dealing out covenant curses upon them for it.

1 THE word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

v1 The author is identified, as is his calling, and the time of his ministry, which was from about 757 B.C. to 699 B.C. This is

a common means of opening a prophetic book, cp. Isa. 1:1, Hosea 1:1, Joel 1:1.

"Micah", the uncontracted version is "micaiah" and means "Who is like Jehovah?"

2 Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord GOD be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. 3 For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. 4 And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, [and] as the waters [that are] poured down a steep place.

5 For the transgression of Jacob [is] all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What [is] the transgression of Jacob? [is it] not Samaria? and what [are] the high places of Judah? [are they] not Jerusalem? 6 Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, [and] as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. 7 And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered [it] of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot.

v2-7 Micah indicates the Lord will shortly be visiting Israel and Judah with judgment (v. 1-4) because of their sins (v. 5-7).

The Lord is called forth as a witness against them per the Sinai Covenant (cf. Exod. 19, Exod. 24:1-8, this is when Israel chose to do all things He commanded). That this covenant is still in force at the present is indicated by the Lord coming from the Temple, where present Israel covenants with Him (v. 2). The Lord is presented as descending from His high place in heaven to smash the high places of the earth, which are Jerusalem and Samaria, the capital cities of Judah and Israel (v. 3). The Lord's Judgement upon them is powerful and inexorable. Just as He exercises power over all of Creation and it melts before Him, so will He exercise power over man and they will fall before Him (v. 4).

Why is the Lord doing this? Because of rebellion among the political and religious leaders which is leading His covenant people astray (v. 5). The immediate result is Samaria will be crushed (v. 6) for her idolatry and adulteries (v. 7).

v3 The symbolism of the Lord descending from His high place to the high places of man necessarily implies mankind is lower than

and inferior to Him despite their best attempts at self-aggrandizement.

v4 The imagery of the mountains melting down in the presence of the Lord probably have their origin in earthquakes and volcanic natural disasters, which are referred to elsewhere in Isa. 64:1-3, Ps. 50:3, Ps. 97:2-5.

v5 Israel's lead offense in idolatry was that detailed in 1 Kings 12:28-33. The "the high places of Judah" are referring to idolatrous altars built even in the vicinity of the Temple at Jerusalem, cf. 2 Kings 16:2-4, Jer. 32:35, Ezek. 6:6.

v6 Samaria, and Israel in general, was sacked by Assyria ~721 B.C., contemporary with Micah. This resulted in the end of the Northern Kingdom and the scattering of Israel. Judah and Jerusalem weren't sacked until Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon during Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's time, which was ~587 B.C.

The imagery employed in this verse of Samaria being reduced to a vineyard is symbolic of how complete the city's ruin would be. It would be so thorough that all of the buildings and walls would be mere rubble cast into the valley and the site would be left open enough to plant vineyards.

v7 Idolatry is commonly equated with adultery in the OT, cp. Isa. 57, Ezek. 16, Hosea 1. The figurative basis is the Lord is husband to Israel and when she abandon's Him for other false god's she is acting as an adulteress, cf. Ezek. 23.

While the text is primarily speaking of spiritual infidelity, literal implications are drawn from the fact that Canaanite idolatries were lascivious and therefore involved literal acts of unchastity, cf. Lev. 20, cp. Hosea 4:11-14.

8 Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked: I will make a wailing like the dragons, and mourning as the owls. 9 For her wound [is] incurable; for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate of my people, [even] to Jerusalem.

v8-9 Micah informs us he must lament over the pronouncement of v. 2-7, and introduces the actual lament of v. 10-16.

The prophetic lament is a common occurrence among both the major and minor prophets, cp. Isa. 21:3-4, Lam. 1. It indicates their love of Israel, and the pain they experience when the people reject their message and continue in rebellion. They take no pleasure in casting judgment and destruction upon

Israel.

v9 "her wound is incurable", referring to Israel and Samaria. Her history of bad kings who reject the Lord is much worse than Judah's. Right from the start with Israel's first king, Jeroboam introduces idol worship (cf. 1 Ki. 12:25-33) and Israel never recovers from it. Judah has its bad moments as it goes on and off the track, but at times does return to worshipping the Lord, as is the case with Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. The latter half of the verse comments on the negative influence Israel has had on Judah.

10 Declare ye [it] not at Gath, weep ye not at all: in the house of Aphrah roll thyself in the dust. 11 Pass ye away, thou inhabitant of Saphir, having thy shame naked: the inhabitant of Zaanan came not forth in the mourning of Bethazel; he shall receive of you his standing. 12 For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for good: but evil came down from the LORD unto the gate of Jerusalem. 13 O thou inhabitant of Lachish, bind the chariot to the swift beast: she [is] the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee. 14 Therefore shalt thou give presents to Moreshethgath: the houses of Achzib [shall be] a lie to the kings of Israel. 15 Yet will I bring an heir unto thee, O inhabitant of Mareshah: he shall come unto Adullam the glory of Israel. 16 Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

v10-16 These verses form the psalmic lament introduced in v. 8-9. The JPS translation explanatory footnote states, "meaning of much of v. 10-13 is uncertain. They may refer to the transfer of part of western Judah to Philistine rule by Sennacherib of Assyria in the year 701 B.C.E."

These verses contain a series of word plays where the name of the town is used to denote what will befall it. A number of the towns referenced here are presently unknown. As the word plays are obscure they are inserted into the JPS translation:

10 Tell it not in Gath, [i.e., winepress]
Refrain from weeping;
In Beth-leaphrah [i.e., house of dust],
Strew dust over your head.
11 Pass on, inhabitants of Shaphir! [i.e., pleasantness]
Did not the inhabitants of Zaanan [i.e., going out]
Have to go forth naked in shame?

There is lamentation in Beth-ezel [i.e., house of removal]
 It will withdraw its support from you.
 12 Though the inhabitants of Maroth [i.e., bitterness]
 Hoped for good,
 Yet disaster from the Lord descended
 Upon the gate of Jerusalem.
 13 Hitch the steeds to the chariot,
 Inhabitant of Lachish! [i.e., invincible]
 It is the beginning
 Of Fair Zion's guilt;
 Israel's transgressions
 Can be traced to you!
 14 Truly, you must give a farewell gift
 To Moresheth-gath. [i.e., possession of the winepress]
 The houses of Achzib [i.e., deceit] are
 To the kings of Israel
 Like a spring that fails.
 15 A dispossessor will I bring to you
 Who dwell in Mareshah; [i.e., possession]
 At Adullam [i.e., justice of the people] the glory
 Of Israel shall set.
 Shear off your hair and make yourself bald
 For the children you once delighted in;
 Make yourselves as bald as a vulture,
 For they have been banished from you.

Overall, the lament emphasizes both Israel and Judah will be delivered into the hands of their enemies because of their rebellion from the Lord. Historically, the Northern Kingdom was sacked first by Assyria, and then Judah was sacked by Babylon. Assuming Micah foresaw the events in detail (4:10 suggests he did), this section of text would primarily be a warning to the people of Judah to repent when they see Israel punished. Israel's sack has been decreed, Judah still has the opportunity to change its destiny.

v10 "Declare ye it not at Gath, weep ye not at all", a paraphrase of 2 Sam. 1:20 and means they are not to let their Philistine neighbors at Gath know calamity has befallen them so they cannot gloat. It rhetorically connects David's lament to this one.

"roll thyself in the dust", a symbol of the humiliation they will face, they will wallow on the ground in dust and

ashes, cp. Jer. 6:26, Jer. 25:34, Ezek. 27:30.

v11 "having thy shame naked", the KJV is poor, the JPS is better. The Semitism means they are shamefully naked, they are entirely stripped and therefore entirely shamed, cp. Isa. 20:4 for similar imagery.

v12 The Assyrian invasion came right up to the gates of Jerusalem and stalled there, cf. Isa. 36-37. The city "maroth" is unknown, and was certainly used because of the meaning of the name. It is possible the name was simply applied as a descriptor and not an actual place name as in "The people living in bitterness hoped things would get better, but instead the Lord brought destruction to the gates of Jerusalem". The people living in bitterness would be Judah.

v13 Lachish was on the edge of Judean border with the Northern kingdom of Israel, and was apparently the first Judean city to be influenced by Jerobaom's idolatry. The warning sent to Lachish "the invincible" is they had better flee on swift chariots in order to escape, because they aren't invincible. Lachish was sacked by Sennacherib king of Assyria, cf. 2 Kings 18:13-14.

v14 The Hebrew term "shilluwach" used here to denote a gift is probably referring to a dowry (the same term is used in 1 Kings 9:16 in reference to a city being given as a dowry). If the dowry is being returned, then the invoked imagery is that of divorce. There was apparently some political alliance between Lachish and Moresheth-gath, and with Lachish being sacked that "marriage" has been ended so the dowry must be returned. Perhaps Moresheth-gath was paying Lachish tribute for military protection.

v15 Mareshah was a city fortified by Rehoboam (cf. 2 Chron. 11:8) and renowned for its victory over the Cushites/Ethiopians under king Asa (cf. 2 Chron. 14:9-13). Invoking this name is intended to signify a reversal of fortune. Where the city was formerly a site of a great victory for Asa who appealed to the Lord for His intervention and received it, now this city will be a site for precisely the opposite. The wordplay on the city name is lost in the KJV, but can be seen in the JPS.

The meaning of the rest of the verse, making reference to Adullam, is obscure.

v16 The Semitic imagery of self-imposed baldness is associated with terrible lamenting, cp. Job 1:20, Isa. 15:2, Jer. 7:29. Micah is calling on Judah in general to humble itself before the Lord for the losses it will see. Presuming Micah foresaw the Assyrian sack of the Northern Kingdom and knowing Judah would largely escape this incursion (4:10 indicates he saw Judah's exile in Babylon as separate), he is warning Judah to repent when they see what happens to their idolatrous brothers to the north.

"eagle", better translated to "vulture". The vulture's head is completely bare of feathers.

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