

# **An Isogogical Survey of Micah 1 and 2**

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## **Micah, the Man**

The prophet Micah lived at a very crucial time in the history of Israel. The Lord had patiently held out his hand to his people for centuries, calling them to repentance. However, the time of grace was fast drawing to a close. It was the task of the prophets of this era to announce the Lord's Impending Judgment at the same time as they announced the Lord's grace to those who repented.

It was not that Israel had not been warned. In his farewell words to the new generation about to enter the promised land, Moses warned of future defection from God and its disastrous consequences. "You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other (Deuteronomy 28:63-64)", he stated.

What Moses had foretold Micah confirmed. He wrote,

Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion,  
like a woman in labor,  
for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field.  
You will go to Babylon;  
There you will be rescued.  
There the Lord will redeem you  
out of the hand of your enemies (Micah 4:10).

God's purifying judgment was about to descend on Israel. The trouble was that the people could not see nor did they wish to see what lay in the future. They rather deluded themselves with the idea that God could never send his judgment on them as they were his people. They fully forgot what the Lord had said to them at Sinai, "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession" (Exodus 19:5). Israel had violated God's covenant, willfully, repeatedly, and faithlessly. Now the time of reckoning was near.

Micah was one of those prophets who ministered to God's people in this eleventh hour situation. He served at a time when the Assyrian captivity was imminent and the Babylonian captivity was on the horizon. Very little is known of the prophet. All that we know of him comes from the content of the book he wrote. His name is a shortened form of Micaiah, which means in Hebrew, "Who is like the Lord?" He came from Moresheth, a small and insignificant village on the border between Judah and Philistia, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Since Moresheth lay only a few miles from Gath, a major city of Philistia, it was also called Moresheth Gath (Micah 1:14). Micah, then, would have been a small town prophet who preached in the big city of Jerusalem. Yet, he fearlessly delivered the Lord's message of sin and grace to his contemporaries. For us who stand centuries removed from this prophet of God, his message looms far more important than his person. The lack of autobiographical information given us by the prophet simply accentuates all the more the importance of the message over the messenger.

## **Micah, His Times**

The prophetic ministry of Micah took place during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. This means Micah would have been active from about 739 to 693 B. C. Amos, the shepherd-prophet from Tekoa (780 to 740 B.C.), and Hosea (760-720 B.C.) preceded Micah. They were active in Israel before the fall of Samaria, foretelling the coming judgment on the Northern Kingdom. Isaiah was a contemporary of Micah. Both were active in Judah. They had to deal with the same subjects: the people's great sin, the impending judgment, and the promise of the restoration. Both wrote great Messianic prophecies. Isaiah foretold the virgin birth of Christ and so many other details of the Savior's life and work that he has earned the name

“The Gospel Writer of the Old Testament.” Micah unmistakably identified the future birthplace of the coming Savior—in Bethlehem.

Let us begin by looking at the historical setting in which Micah’s message was delivered. We shall first view the world picture. Then we shall focus on the scenes in Israel and Judah, looking at their leaders, the political, social, and religious conditions of the day.

Two nations in particular were troublesome to Israel and Judah before and during the time of Micah. Aram and Assyria were thorns in the flesh of God’s people by which he called on them to repent. Ultimately, Assyria became the Lord’s tool to bring judgment on the Northern Kingdom. It is interesting to note, however, that for a period of time before Micah lived, God had given his people respite from their enemies and a time of grace to turn to him.

In 841 BC, Jehu of Israel and Athaliah of Judah began their reigns. Jehu was sent by God to exterminate the line of Ahab. Athaliah was a daughter of Ahab who wound up in Judah by virtue of her marriage to Jehoram, the son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. When Jehu killed Jehoram (the son of Ahab) and Ahaziah (the son of Jehoram of Judah and Athaliah), Athaliah seized the throne in Judah. Jehu basically stood alone politically at that time. He was unable to align with Judah, for its ruler was the daughter of the man whose line Jehu had wiped out. The Phoenicians of Tyre also separated themselves from Jehu because of his activities against Ahab, Jezebel, and Baal.

While all of this was going on, an energetic Aramean by the name of Hazael was busy consolidating his position in the north. He assumed power by assassinating his predecessor, Ben-Hadad, as the prophet Elisha had foretold. Hazael was prevented from immediately embarking on a campaign of conquest by the Assyrian invasion under Shalmaneser III of Assyria (859-824 BC). Unable to make Hazael capitulate, Shalmaneser moved southward. Tyre, Sidon, and Israel were forced to pay tribute to the Assyrian monarch. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, discovered in AD 1846 by A.H. Layard, depicts Jehu of Israel bringing tribute to Shalmaneser.

The Assyrians initially did not leave garrisons in the conquered lands. They were content to receive annual tribute. If the payment was withheld, the Assyrian armies would soon reappear to collect. After Assyria withdrew from the west, Shalmaneser became occupied with problems at home. This allowed Hazael to move southward and expand his own territory. He seized the entire East Bank of the Jordan as far south as the Arnon River. Jehoahaz, Jehu’s son, lost further territory. Hazael reduced Jehoahaz’s standing army to ten chariots, fifty horsemen, and 10,000 infantry. To add to Israel’s problems, the Philistines and Ammonites took advantage of Israel’s weakness to stage raids into her territory.

However, the Lord gave his people a reprieve, another evidence of his mercy. In 806 BC Assyria renewed its pressure on Damascus with the ascension of Adad-nirari III to the throne (806-783 BC). Damascus was forced to surrender and pay a heavy tribute. During Adad-nirari’s later years, however, he became occupied in a war against the kingdom of Urartu (Armenia) and was not able to maintain dominion over Aram and Palestine. This respite from Assyrian power lasted about fifty years. During this time Aram exhausted its resources with a war against Hamath, its neighbor to the north. All of this allowed a period of political and economic development to take place in Israel and Judah. As Elisha prophesied, Jehoash of Israel defeated Ben-Hadad, Hazael’s son, three times and regained much of Israel’s territory. Thus, when Jeroboam II of Israel (?82-?53 BC) and Uzziah (Azariah) of Judah 767-740 BC) began to reign, “happy days were here again.” The territory of Judah and Israel approximated the days of David. Prosperity abounded in both kingdoms. Merchants secured luxury goods at Phoenician ports and transported them into Israel and Judah. Overland trade routes passed through Trans-Jordan into northern Arabia. Copper was mined in the Arabah and the Red Sea trade was revived through the restored port of Ezion-Geber (Elath). Archeologists recovered more than two hundred ivory plaques and fragments in a store room from Jeroboam’s palace at Samaria.

This same prosperity was evident in Judah. King Uzziah rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah, giving her access to the Red Sea trade. He subdued the Philistines and took Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. From Jabneh he gained access to the Jarkon River and the Mediterranean Sea. The Arabs were defeated, and the Ammonites brought Uzziah tribute. Uzziah built forts along the road through the Negev. Archeological work has revealed

resettlement was at its height during this period. Guard towers were built in the desert, and cisterns were dug to preserve water. Under Uzziah agriculture flourished. He kept great herds of livestock in the foothills and plains. He had large amounts of land under cultivation and many vineyards. He was said to love the soil. Uzziah's army consisted of 307,500 soldiers with 2600 family leaders over them. The army was well equipped. Jerusalem was fortified and protected by towers and special siege machines designed to hail arrows and stones down on attackers.

In the midst of all this prosperity the people delighted in the prophets who foretold continued prosperity with all the optimism of Jimmy and Tammy Baker. God's forbearance was considered indifference, and the hearts of the people remained unchanged. It is no wonder that the message of Amos was not well received. In the midst of rising prosperity with no end in sight, Amos told the people of Israel that they were soon to hit the crest, and the ride down would be swift and final.

After Jeroboam died, the fall came quickly. Jeroboam II's son, Zechariah, was assassinated after 6 months. His murderer, Shallum, reigned only one month. Menahem, his successor, came under the domination of the Assyrian monarch, Tiglath-pileser III (Pul: 745-727). The heavy tribute drained the resources of the Northern Kingdom. Pekahiah, Menahem's son, reigned two years before he was assassinated by Pekah. It was at this time that the activities of Israel and Judah became so intertwined that we must view them together.

Let us back up a minute, though, to the days of Uzziah in Judah. At the beginning Uzziah was a pious king. He was not immune, however to the temptations bred by prosperity. Toward the end of his reign he became proud. One day he entered the temple and demanded to burn incense on the altar of incense in the Holy Place. Azariah the priest tried to reason with Uzziah but he would not listen. In the middle of a fit of rage Uzziah was struck with leprosy. He was quickly hurled out of the temple and from that time on lived in a separate house, relieved of his reign. His son Jotham reigned as co-regent until the day of Uzziah's death. Because of his leprosy, Uzziah was not buried in the traditional burial place of the kings of Judah.

Jotham is described as a pious king. He conquered the Ammonites and grew powerful. Little else is said of him. He was succeeded by his son, Ahaz. Of all the kings of the Divided Kingdom in Judah, Ahaz ranks among the worst. What made his reign so terrible was not the political mistakes he made. Rather, his evil influence in religious matters had such a detrimental effect on Judah she never recovered. Though there were other bad kings of Judah, it remains for Ahaz and Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, to claim the title of having the worst influence on Judah in the Divided Monarchy.

Ahaz followed the idolatrous ways of the kings of Israel. He practiced Baal worship and encouraged it by making cast idols for this purpose. 2 Chronicles 28:3 tells us, "He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites." At this time permit a digression which will serve to elucidate the moral and religious situation prevalent at the time of Micah.

The worship of Molech was clearly forbidden in the Mosaic law (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5). However, Solomon erected a high place for Molech east of Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7). We already have seen that Ahaz sacrificed his sons in the Hinnom Valley. Manasseh of Judah did the same thing (2 Kings 21:6). Josiah desecrated the Hinnom Molech center to render it useless for continuing the pagan rites practiced there (2 Kings 23:10). However, the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel give evidence that the cult revived and continued to the time of the exile (Jeremiah 7:30-34; 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20-21; 20:26,31; 23:37-39).

There is a scholarly debate over the meaning of the Hebrew letters "MLK". Most over the years have translated the letters "Molech". In an article printed in the January/February, 1984, issue of Biblical Archeological Review, Lawrence Stager (Associate Professor of Syro-Palestinian archaeology at the U. of Chicago's Oriental Institute) and Samuel Wolff (P.H.D. Candidate in archaeology at the U. of Chicago) presented this argument on the basis of their excavation of the child and animal cemetery uncovered at the north African site of Carthage:

Let us return for a moment to the "mulk" sacrifice. This word suggests that passages from Jeremiah and Kings ...contain an incorrect translation. In Jeremiah 32:35 and 2 Kings 23:10, most translations tell us

that at the Tophet in Jerusalem, the Israelites had been causing their children to pass through, or into, the “fire of Molech,” an old Semitic deity. The passage probably means rather that the Israelites had been burning their children as a “mulk” sacrifice. Remember that Semitic languages are written without vowels so that Molech and “mulk” are both written the same way—mlk. In fact, the Hebrew word for king (melech) is also written this way. Only from the context can you tell which of these words is meant.

From the inscriptions at Carthage, we begin to understand what a “mulk” sacrifice is—either a young child or a young animal substitute. “Mulk” seems like a far more appropriate translation of mlk in Jeremiah and 2 Kings than Molech, a god who is not otherwise referred to in connection with Israelite child sacrifice. (Indeed, it is the familiar Baal who is associated with child sacrifice in 2 Kings 17:16-17 and ...in Jeremiah 32:35.)

There is also a scholarly debate over whether the Israelites simply caused their children to “pass through the fire” or really sacrificed them. In this respect we quote the words of Charles Pfeiffer:

Molech worship included a practice which is described in Scripture as making a son or daughter pass through the fire. Some scholars have thought of this as a harmless rite of purification from which the child emerged unscathed. The testimony of Scripture, however, indicates that the child died as a result of this hideous rite. Ezekiel complains, “(NIV) You took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols... You slaughtered my children and sacrificed them [made them pass through the fire] to the idols.” The evidence is clear that children were slaughtered and burnt like other sacrificial victims. Josephus says of Ahaz, “He also sacrificed his own son as a burnt offering to the idols according to the custom of the Canaanites.” Archaeologists have found hundreds of urns containing the bones of children of from four to twelve years of age who had been burned alive. [Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History*, p. 76).

Concerning the matter of why children were sacrificed, Stager and Wolff comment:

Inscriptions from the Tophet (of Carthage) demonstrate that the commonest reason for child sacrifice was the fulfillment of a vow. The Phoenician/Punic word for vow (ndr) frequently appears on inscribed stelae. Taking vows was an old and hallowed Near Eastern custom. As one scholar has described it, “When seeking a certain boon from the deity, the worshipper would promise that upon the granting of this boon he would ‘repay’ his vow by offering a sacrifice, erecting a stele, or some such appropriate act of thanksgiving” [p. 441].

...Children were vowed by the parents in order to obtain a great favor from the gods. In fulfillment of a vow for a favor granted, the parent would pledge an unborn child. But if this child was either born dead or died before the time of sacrifice (the premature-newborn individual), this created a problem. To fulfill the vow, the parent was obliged to offer the youngest living offspring (the two- to four-year-old) as an acceptable sacrifice for the favor granted by the gods [p. 497].

Concerning the manner of the sacrifices, Stager and Wolff quote the third century B.C. Greek author Kleitarchos, who was paraphrased by a later writer as saying:

Out of reverence for Kronos (the Greek equivalent of Ba’al Hammon [Ba’al Hammon was the Phoenician equivalent of the patriarch of the Canaanite pantheon, El. Tanit, Ba’al Hammon’s consort, was identified with Astarte, the Canaanite and Phoenician goddess of love and war]) the Phoenicians, and especially the Carthaginians, whenever they seek to obtain some favor, vow one of their children, burning it as a sacrifice to the deity, if they are especially eager to gain success. There stands in their

midst a bronze statue of Kronos, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child. When the flames fall upon the body, the limbs contract and the open mouth seems almost to be laughing, until the contracted (body) slips quietly into the brazier. Thus it is that the ‘grin’ is known as ‘sardonic laughter’, since they die laughing.” [pp. 32-33].

To bring this digression to a close, permit me to cite the interesting comment made by Albertus Pieters concerning the Canaanite religion:

It is interesting to note the statement in Josephus that the grand niece of Jezebel, about 20 years after the death of Jezebel’s father, founded the city of Carthage in Northern Africa, the forces of which, under Hannibal, nearly overwhelmed Rome ...Had Jezebel succeeded in Palestine and Hannibal in Italy, this faith might have overspread the world. The sword of Scipio Africanus and the faith of Elijah the Tishbite were strange allies, but the Lord used them both to save the world from such a fate. [Pieters, Notes on Old Testament History, p. 971].

Whether the offerings were made to Baal or Molech, idolatry and human sacrifice were practiced in Israel and Judah. The people of Micah’s day were acquainted with human sacrifice. This is evident from the Lord’s question through Micah, “Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul (Micah 8:7)?” This was indeed tragic, for Israel could count on the Lord’s providential care. Instead, they offered their children in the vain hope of receiving aid from dead idols.

Now back to Ahaz. He also departed from the worship God had commanded at the central sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12:1-19) and encouraged worship at all the high places and hilltops. Thus, he opened the floodgates for wholesale defection to the worship of the Canaanite fertility cults and all their attendant evils. The Lord allowed Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel to sack the city of Jerusalem. 120,000 soldiers of Judah were killed. 200,000 people were taken captive. Ahaz lost one of his sons in the battle. It took the intervention of the prophet Oded to move Pekah to send the captives back here. In the meantime, the Edomites and Philistines took advantage of Ahaz’s problems to make raids into his territory and carry away more prisoners.

It is at this time that Assyria came into the picture again. We piece the story together from 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28-29, and Isaiah 7. In an attempt to stave off the Assyrian threat and place a pro-Babylonian king on the throne in Judah, Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus united in an attempt to depose Ahaz and place the son of Tabeel on the throne of Judah. When the Lord sent Isaiah to Ahaz to assure him that Judah would be spared while Israel and Aram would be destroyed, Ahaz refused the Lord’s sign that this would come to pass. The reason that Ahaz didn’t want the Lord’s help was because he had already sent word to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria for help. Thus, Isaiah announced to Ahaz that the Lord would judge him by giving him exactly what he wanted. Only, Assyria would not help Judah but devastate it. In addition, Isaiah said that even though Ahaz did not want a sign, the Lord would give him one anyway. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).”

Tiglath-Pileser marched westward and then down the coast of Palestine. The king of Gaza fled to Egypt. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Ashkelon, and Judah paid tribute. Israel was attacked. In 732 BC Tiglath-Pileser captured Damascus, executed Rezin, and deported a large part of the population. Whereas his predecessors had been content to take tribute from conquered peoples, Tiglath-Pileser adopted the policy of incorporating them into his empire. This had significance for the exile of Israel, which already began at this time. 2 Kings 15:29 tells us, “In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee—all the land of Naphtali—and deported the people to Assyria.” After this Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea.

Ahaz was among those who scurried up to Damascus to pay homage to Tiglath-Pileser. While in Damascus he was impressed with an altar which he saw there, and made a model of it to be used in Jerusalem. Upon his return to Jerusalem, conditions went from bad to worse. Ahaz got rid of the temple furnishings, shut

the doors of the temple, and set up pagan altars on every street corner in Jerusalem. When he died, the religious scene in Judah was devastating. The temple was shut down, the worship of the Lord had come to a stand-still, and paganism was practised everywhere. Yet, God in his grace raised up a reformer, but even his efforts could not stem the tide of the coming Judgment nor change the hearts of God's people.

It was during the days of Hezekiah that the Northern Kingdom was carried into captivity. Hoshea, the last king of Israel, withheld tribute from Assyria when Tiglath-pileser died and was succeeded by Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.). Hoshea made an alliance with So of Egypt, hoping the Egyptians would be able to rescue him. Egypt, however, was in no position to do anything against Assyria. In 725/4 B.C. Hoshea was summoned before Shalmaneser and imprisoned. The city of Samaria withstood a siege of three years but finally fell. While the siege of Samaria was in progress, Shalmaneser died and was succeeded by Sargon II (722-705 B.C.). In his Display Inscriptions at Khorsabad, Sargon boasted of the conquest of Samaria. Many of the inhabitants of Samaria were deported to Upper Mesopotamia and Media and lost their identity there. Others who remained amalgamated with the races imported by the Assyrians and eventually formed the race of the Samaritans. The inspired writer records this statement at the end of the account, "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God (2 Kings 17:7)."

Turning to the reign of Hezekiah, we find that he was one of the best kings who reigned in Judah during the Divided Monarchy. The only other king of Judah who shares that stature is Josiah. Though there were other kings such as Asa and Joash who had good beginnings, we find serious problems at the end of their lives which marred the good examples they had set previously.

It is truly an enigma how such a wicked king as Ahaz could have such a pious son as Hezekiah. A further enigma is how godly Hezekiah could have such a wicked son as Manasseh. When Hezekiah began his reign, the temple in Jerusalem was defiled and defunct. Hezekiah moved quickly to bring about a reformation. He removed the high places Ahaz had erected and encouraged. He opened the doors of the temple for worship again, cleansing it from what desecrated it and repairing it for service. He smashed the sacred Baal stones and cut down the Ashera. He even got rid of the brazen serpent which had come from the wilderness journeys of Moses, for it had become an object of veneration for the people. He brought the Levites back to the temple, set them in charge of the worship and music, and gathered a collection of the psalms for use in public worship. He also reinstated the observance of the Passover, even inviting people from the Northern Kingdom to participate. Politically Hezekiah is noted for his rebellion against Sennacherib of Assyria. After the death of Sargon, Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) spent his early years putting down revolts in the empire. One hot spot proved to be Babylon which sought to become free of Assyrian control. The account of Merodach-Baladan's visit to Hezekiah to congratulate him on his recovery from his illness may date to this period. It quite likely was an attempt on the part of the Chaldeans to enlist Hezekiah as an ally against Assyria.

Sennacherib quickly disposed of the Babylonian threat and installed a vassal on the throne. He soon turned his attention to the West where Egypt was stirring up trouble among the Palestinian states. Scripture states that Hezekiah also rebelled against Sennacherib. Hezekiah fortified Jerusalem and insured a supply of water against invaders by building a tunnel to bring water inside the city from the Gihon spring.

The annals of Sennacherib describe his third campaign which took him into Syria and Palestine. Marching down the Phoenician coast, he received the submission of Sidon, Arvad, Byblos, Beth-Ammon, Moab, and Edom. Ashkelon resisted and was destroyed. Sennacherib stated he defeated the Egyptians at Eltekeh. Thus the Egyptians proved unable to help the Palestinian states. Sennacherib proceeded to conquer them. He claims to have captured 46 fortified cities in Judah. The most prominent and the best documented conquest is that of the city of Lachish.

Lachish was situated about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Judean hills. Lachish was first of all a large Canaanite city-state. A few of its letters were found in the fourteenth century royal Egyptian archives at Tell el-Amarna. In the southern campaign of Joshua the city was destroyed. Following the death of Solomon Lachish was rebuilt and heavily fortified by the kings of Judah. It became a garrison city and a royal stronghold, second in importance only to Jerusalem itself. The city was situated on a high mound. Two massive walls surrounded the city. One most likely served as an inner wall, and the other as a revetment wall to shore up the

glacis built against the slope to fortify it. Yet, in 701 BC, Sennacherib conquered the city by building a siege ramp up to it. This enabled him to breach the walls and rout the city's inhabitants. Archaeological excavations at Lachish. Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions giving Sennacherib's own account of the conquest, and the monumental pictorial reliefs uncovered at Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh by A.H. Layard in his excavations from 1847-1851, all give information concerning the conquest of the city. Sennacherib considered the conquest of Lachish one of his greatest conquests. After returning to Nineveh, he built a palace he called "Palace Without A Rival." He devoted one entire room to reliefs depicting the siege and conquest of Lachish.

Sennacherib did not, however, conquer Jerusalem. The Lord sent the blasphemous king back to his homeland by decimating his army. In one night the angel of death killed 185,000 of the Assyrian army. Sennacherib was forced to return home where he devoted his energies to building his "Palace Without A Rival" to the glory of his name. A fitting footnote to this story is that Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his sons. They fled and Sennacherib was succeeded by Esarhaddon. Today the magnificent relief showing the conquering Sennacherib does not show the king's face, for it was defaced by those who came after him. "*Sic transit gloria.*" After Sennacherib the Assyrian empire began a slow decline which turned into a rapid disintegration. In 612 B.C. Nineveh was destroyed by the Chaldeans, as the prophet Nahum had foretold. In 609 B.C. the Assyrian empire breathed its last gasp when the provisional capital of Haran was destroyed by Nabopolassar of Babylon. Control of the Babylonian forces was transferred to crown prince Nebuchadnezzar by his father. In 605 BC the Egyptian army, was almost annihilated by a surprise attack on Carchemish at the Orontes River in Syria. Thus the Neo-Babylonian empire dawned, and the historical details of that take us well beyond the scope of our assignment.

In summary, we could list the social problems that Micah faced in his day as follows:

1. Some people benefited from the increased prosperity and became very wealthy. Luxury items became commonplace for them. Amos summed it up this way: "You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotion but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph." (Amos 6:4-6).
2. There was a distinct gap between the rich and the poor.
3. Oppression of the poor by the rich was commonplace. (Isaiah 1:17; 3:12-15; 5:8; Amos 2:6-8; 3:10: 4:1; 5:11-13; 8:4-6; Micah 2:1-20)
4. The rich often seized the property of the poor by unjust means. (Isaiah 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-2; Amos 5:1; Micah 2:1-2;)
5. Judges and rulers were corrupt and often influenced by bribes. Justice was often perverted. (See #4. Also Micah 3:11; 7:3)
6. Dishonesty in business was commonplace. Weights and measures were often not accurate. (Amos 8:5-8; Micah 6:10-11).
7. The land was full of violence and bloodshed. (Isaiah 1:15,21; 5:7; Micah 7:2-3)
8. Drunkenness was commonplace. (Isaiah 5:11,23; Amos 4:11; 6:6; Micah 2:11)
9. Reliance on foreign powers for protection was the rule. (Isaiah 30:1-3; 31:1-3; Hosea 7:11).
10. Immorality was rampant in the form of promiscuity, sacred prostitution, and incest. (Amos 2:7)

The religious problems which Micah faced were the following:

1. Religious formalism was a problem. People went through the motions of worship but their hearts were far from God. (Isaiah 1:11-14; Amos 5:21-27; 8:5)
2. Religious formalism was a problem. People went through the motions of worship but their hearts were far from God (Isaiah 1:11-14; Amos 5:21-27; 8:5).
3. Religious syncretism was a problem. People combined elements of the worship of God with heathen worship. The veneer of the worship may have seemed pious, but the core was corrupt. (Israel had

engaged in syncretism with the golden calf and with the calf-worship of Jeroboam I. This syncretism also accompanied the worship at the high places which was where the Canaanites worshiped).

4. Heathenism was rampant. On a large scale the people had adopted the worship of the Canaanite cults with all their attendant evils of Immorality and human sacrifice.
5. Occult practices flourished In Israel and Judah. (Isaiah 2:6; 8:19)

### **Micah, His Message**

Let us now turn to the first two chapters of Micah's message. They dealt with the announcement of God's impending judgment but also announced his promise of deliverance.

#### **Chapter One Verse 1**

The word of the Lord given to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah kings of Judah—the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah identified the message he delivered as the Lord's message. It was not his own. In contrast to the messages delivered by the false prophets who often spoke their own thoughts, Micah message came by revelation from the Lord. The time of his message we have already considered (739-693 BC). The focus of his message was what God revealed to him concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Jerusalem became the capital of Israel under David who took it from the Jebusites. Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom under Omri (875 BC) and remained such until the Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. In this case both capitals stood for the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, which the Lord was about to Judge.

#### **Verses 2-7**

2. Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign Lord may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.
3. Look! The Lord is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth.
4. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope.
5. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?
6. "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations.
7. All her idols will be broken to pieces: all her temple gifts will be burned with fire: I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used."

Micah delivered the Lord's message in the form of Hebrew parallelism. With this verse he began the first of three prophetic addresses, each beginning with the command to "hear" (1:2) or "listen" (3:1; 6:1). He called upon all people of the world to hear his word. The Lord intended to use his dealings with Israel and Judah as an object lesson for all the world. By the way he dealt with their sins he would both demonstrate his justice and his grace. He would reveal himself as a Just God who must punish sin and a loving God who would punish sin in his Son.

Micah announced the imminent coming of the Lord for Judgment. No one or nothing in all the universe can resist him. Just as wax melts before the fire and water rushing down a slope sweeps all obstacles away before It, so the Lord's coming in Judgment will be unstoppable.



The reason for the coming Judgment is the sinfulness of God's people. Both kingdoms came under God's Indictment. Jacob (the Northern Kingdom) was Indicted because of the sins of Samaria. Before Omri the Northern Kingdom's capital was at a number of other places. Under the Omrid dynasty (Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram) Samaria became capital of the kingdom and the center of Baal worship. This is not to say that religious syncretism and idolatry were not practiced before this. All the kings of Israel during the Divided Monarchy were bad. Ahab simply was the worst of them all. During his reign Baalism became the state religion. The efforts of his wife Jezebel in this respect are also well known. Though Jehu eradicated the line of Ahab, destroyed the temple of Baal, and killed his prophets, he lapsed into the sins of Jeroboam—calf worship. His successors never rose above that and often lapsed into Canaanite cultic worship.

Judah had the temple, but still was plagued with idolatry. Thus Jerusalem was described as Judah's high place. Already under Solomon idolatry was tolerated in Jerusalem. The age of Solomon has been called the "golden age" of Israel, but it was really more "the tarnished age". By excessive taxation and spending Solomon sowed the seeds of discontent that led to the division of the kingdom. By permitting his heathen harem to worship their idols, he made the transition for his people to worship heathen gods easier. We have already noted the wholesale idolatry practiced in Jerusalem during the days of Ahaz.

Micah announced the Lord's impending judgment on Samaria. That proud capital, beautified by Ahab and those after him, would be turned into a heap of rubble, desolate of human inhabitants, used for agricultural purposes. Conquering Assyrians would push her building stones into the valleys beneath, laying bare the city's foundations. Baal would be powerless to save. The city's temples would be destroyed, the idols broken to pieces, and the gods they represented would prove impotent. Everything the Israelites had used in the cultic activities would be carried away by the Assyrians and used in their own idolatrous practices.

### Verses 8-16

8. Because of this I will weep and wall; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.
9. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself.
10. Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all. In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust.
11. Pass on in nakedness and shame, you who live in Shaphir. Those who live in Zaanan will not come out. Beth Ezel is in mourning; its protection is taken from you.
12. Those who live in Moroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the Lord, even to the gate of Jerusalem.
13. You who live in Lachish, harness the team to the chariot. You were the beginning of sin to the Daughter of Zion, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you.
14. Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Aczib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel.
15. I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam.
16. Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile.

As Micah contemplated the impending destruction of Samaria, he was reduced to bitter mourning. He did not take delight in this coming judgment of Israel. It was all the more bitter because the coming Judgment on Israel was a preview of the coming Judgment on Judah. In 722 BC Samaria was destroyed. After 705 BC Sennacherib began his campaigns against Palestine and Judah. By 701 BC 46 fortified cities of Judah had been taken and Lachish was destroyed. Only the Lord's intervention prevented Jerusalem from being destroyed at that time.

Micah then lamented God's judgment on Judah in the form of a dirge. By means of paronomasia or a play on words, in this case on the name of the cities, Micah predicted the coming judgment on these cities. No one was to tell Gath (Tell-town) about Judah's judgment for this Philistine city would rejoice in Judah's trouble. David urged the same course of action when Saul and Jonathan were killed (2 Samuel 1:20). In fact, no weeping at all (Weep not in Acco—Weep-town—LXX) should be done, lest the enemy learn of Judah's judgment. The people of Beth Ophrah (Dust-town) were to roll in the dust to symbolize their sorrow over sin and the coming judgment.

The people of Shaphir (Beautiful-town) would not be beautiful as they were taken away captive, stripped of everything including their dignity. The inhabitants of Zaanan (Exit-town), south of Moresheth, would not leave their city when the enemy approached, for they would either be dead or hiding in fear behind the walls. Beth Ezel (Neighbor-town) would fall to protect her neighbors as they would be paralyzed by grief. In Maroth (Bitter-town) people would wait in vain for help, as God had determined to judge his people. There would be no rescue. This judgment would reach even to the gate of Jerusalem (city of peace), as Sennacherib's invasion actually did. The people of Lachish (chariot-town) were encouraged to take their horses and escape, if possible. Lachish, one of the leading cities of Judah, also led God's people into sin. Her inhabitants were led away captive by Sennacherib when he destroyed the city in 701 BC.

Moresheth (Betrothal-town) would be lost to Judah as a bride is lost to her family. Aczib (False-town) would prove deceptive to the kings of Israel, failing to deliver any help to them against the invading armies. Mareshah (conqueror-town) located between Aczib and Gath, would also be destroyed by the Assyrians. The "glory of Israel", her nobility, riches, military strength, all she at one time took pride in, would be compelled to flee to Adullam (Refuge-town). It was there that David once fled from Saul. Micah called on the people to shave their heads in mourning, for Judah will be carried away into exile. Though Lachish was destroyed in 701 BC, Jerusalem was spared. God granted another reprieve to his people. Yet, they did not heed God's warnings nor turn to him. In 605, 597, and 586 BC God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to lead contingents of the people of Judah into exile. The Lord said what he meant and he meant what he said.

## CHAPTER 2

### Verses 1-5

1. Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.
2. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.
3. Therefore, the Lord says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity.
4. In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: "We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors."
5. Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot.

A lack of love for God shows itself in a lack of love for our neighbor. This lack of love was evident in the Judah of Micah's day. The Lord indicted those who spent their nights in planning evil rather than in communion with him, who embarked upon this evil at the very beginning of the day. They had the power to seize their neighbor's property as they controlled the corrupt judges, rulers, and priests by the bribes they offered. They seized people's property, depriving them of their livelihood. (Family property was to remain within the family—Numbers 36:7). They took away their homes, depriving them of their shelter. (All of this is reminiscent of the account of Ahab with Naboth's vineyard.)

Though they seemed to get away with their crimes for a while, though it seemed as if God was indifferent or actually rewarding them for their deeds, the opposite was the case. "WOE" the Lord said. God is patient but he is also just. The Lord had determined to judge those who impenitently clung to their sinful way of

life. He would do it in a way in which the punishment would fit the crime. The invading armies of Assyria and Babylonia would take away the property these people had taken from others. Those whom they had defrauded would mock them, mimicking their lament that God had taken their property and given it to the heathen. No longer did they have access to the corrupt rulers who gave them land. Instead the invading armies would parcel out the land.

### Verses 6-7

6. “Do not prophesy,” their prophets say. “Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us.”
7. Should it be said, O house of Jacob: “Is the Spirit of the Lord angry? Does he do such things?” “Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?”

Through Micah the Lord rebuked the false prophets who were misleading his people. There were not the first false prophets to mislead Israel. There were the prophets of Baal who assured Ahab of Israel and Jehoshapat of Judah that they would be victorious in battle against Aram. Only the prophet Micaiah foretold disaster, which in what came to pass (1 Kings 21). Amos had to deal with Amaziah the priest of Bethel who opposed his prophecies of God’s Judgment (Amos 7:10-17). Later Jeremiah and Ezekiel had to deal with the false prophets who foretold a rosy future for Jerusalem when God had determined disaster. In the same way Micah had to deal with those who did not want to hear his message of God’s impending judgment. They were confident that God could not send them away into captivity, for they believed they were his people by right. Thus, they not only did not listen to God’s message through his prophet, they also told him to shut up. They did not believe that God meant what he said, that he would indeed punish those who disobeyed him.

Speaking for the Lord, Micah explained that all of God’s word is profitable. The law convicts the sinner of his wrong relationship with God, showing his desperate need for a Savior. The gospel tells of the love of God and is the means through which he bestows the forgiveness won for all by his Son. The Lord had to speak the law to his people, for they were impenitent.

### Verses 8-11

8. Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle.
9. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever.
10. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy.
11. If a liar and deceiver comes and says, “I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,” he would be just the prophet for this people!

Micah brought the Lord’s indictment against Judah. They were oppressing the poor, even taking their garments from them. God had forbidden his people to deprive a person of his outer coat overnight, for this served as the poor person’s only means of keeping warm at night (Exodus 22:26-27). However, quite frequently we find the prophets reprove Israel for doing just that, oppressing the poor. Verse 8 quite possibly refers to this, that the rich would take advantage of the poor when they were not anticipating it.

Not only were the poor oppressed, but the widows and orphans became prey. The Lord had commanded, “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword, your wives will become widows and your children fatherless” (Exodus 22:22-24). When the people of Micah’s day took widows’ homes and deprived orphans of their inheritance, it should not have surprised them that God indicated he would send disaster on them. Thus, through Micah, he told the people to leave Palestine, for they had corrupted the land even as the

Canaanites had done. The Lord had warned. "If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you" (Leviticus 18:28).

In their sin-blinded state, the people could not bear to hear the word of the Lord. Rather, they longed for someone to tell them what they wanted to hear. The prophet who foretold continued prosperity, plenty of wine and beer, was the one they were willing to follow. The prophet who told them the truth they told to shut up.

### Verses 12-13

12. "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob: I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel.

13. I will bring them together like sheep In a pen, like a flock In Its pasture; the place will throng with people.

14. One who breaks open the way will go up before them, they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head.

The Lord had said, "I, the Lord your God, am a Jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:4). God had announced his judgment on his impenitent people. Yet, he also announced his grace and mercy to those who would turn to him. For after all, it is the Lord's purpose to convict of sin so that he also might save. As the Lord said through Ezekiel, "As surely as I live ...I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O House of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). God would again gather his people into his fold. This would not happen in the founding of the state of Israel, but would find its fulfillment in the church. Truly God would bring a remnant of his people back from Babylon. This was to happen that God's promise of the Savior might be fulfilled. It is through the preaching of the accomplished work of Christ, however, that the Lord has restored his people (Romans 2:28-29; 11:25-32; Galatians 3:29).

In the final verse Micah described the work of Jesus our Good Shepherd. By his substitutionary life and death Jesus broke the power of sin, death, and hell. He opened for us the gate of heaven. We have been freed to serve our Lord in time and in eternity. Our Lord and King will go before us and be with us as the Preserver and Protector of his church. These words certainly remind us of the description Jesus gave of himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10.

### Conclusion

We have reviewed the times and message of the prophet Micah. What lessons shall we take with us? In the first place, we can see that we live in times which are similar to those of Micah's. The same sins which were so prevalent in his day are also prevalent in ours. The people of Micah's day enjoyed prosperity. They benefited from a great number of material goods which were not absolute necessities for maintaining life. There was nothing wrong with these goods. They were good gifts of a gracious God. It was when these goods became gods for the people that they became sinful. In our day we also possess many items which we cannot classify as necessary for maintaining life. God in his grace has given us these gifts, and we may receive them with thanksgiving. Yet, we must always beware lest we take the Giver and his gifts for granted, lest we deem these gifts our right and due, lest we allow these gifts to take the place of the Giver in our hearts. When we look at the rampant materialism in our country today, we, indeed, have cause for concern.

In Micah's day there was a great deal of oppression of the poor by the rich. There was unjust seizure of property and perversion of Justice. Corruption was rampant among officials. We certainly do not want to lump all public officials and corporations in our country into one bundle and condemn them all. Yet, enough corruption and Injustice have come to light to reveal that the same sins are alive and well in our own country.

There was a great deal of dishonesty in business in Micah's day. Now we know this has been a problem since sin came into the world. Even the Romans had the maxim, "*Caveat emptor*". Yet, in our own country we have all learned by bitter experience that not all business people are honest. For that matter, not all the people who do business with merchants are honest either.

Micah and Isaiah both made mention of the people's love of drinking. What God made to be received in moderation and in thanksgiving was used to excess and to unleash the old Adam. Need we say anything of our own age and our own country? Alcohol is said to be the number one abused substance in America. Add to this the widespread abuse of drugs in our country, and we see the seriousness of the problem. When we consider the homes, the marriages, the careers, the children, the bodies and the souls ruined by the abuse of drugs and alcohol, it is a tragedy beyond comprehension.

Then there is the violence. Murder, bloodshed, a lack of respect for the sanctity of human life was common in Micah's day. Are things any different in our own? Daily we read of the unspeakable acts of violence which people in our country perpetrate against their fellowmen. Spouse abuse, child abuse, abuse of the aged, are common in our society. Violent acts are constantly held before us, by our athletic role models who flail away at each other at the least provocation, by our entertainment industry which grinds out a regular fare of films portraying acts of violence with gruesome realism, by our commuters on freeways who take potshots at each other because they are seeking revenge. One could go on and on, but we have all seen and heard enough to know that we live in a violent society.

Then there is the question, where does our help come from? In Micah's day the People trusted in Egypt or Assyria or their lineage for safety. In our day where is our trust placed? Is it in our God to whom we flee for forgiveness, in whose grace we rest secure? Or, is our trust placed in our bombs, our missiles, our strong national defense, our leaders, our allies, or on the idea that we are a Christian nation upon whom God must smile with favor forever?

There is also the immorality. In Micah's time the Lord condemned the cultic prostitution, the promiscuity, and the incest the people engaged in. Are matters different in our age? Where do we stand after the decades of free sex, of living together arrangements, of palimony, of the Kinsey and the Hite reports, of Masters and Johnson and Dr. Ruth, of pornography? Nationally we are paying a terrible price. Syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, AIDS, unwed mothers, broken homes, abused children and disintegrating family life are the price we have paid. Yet, is there a great concern over all of this? Is the concern to be chaste or to be able to sin with safety?

In the area of religion we have false prophets of our own age to deal with. In the form of cults or in the guise of the visible church they come to us with their messages. This is as our Lord and his apostles said it would be throughout the New Testament era. On the part of those who have the truth, a constant battle must be waged against "dead orthodoxy" or religious formalism. Personally we must always be on guard that we do not pay our God mere lip service but worship him with our hearts.

Religious syncretism is also a problem today. In the visible church we have the outward forms of Christianity with the expressed aim of serving Christ. But underneath we have the pagan ideas of the German philosophers which have pervaded so much of modern theology. Again, we cannot judge hearts, but we must judge doctrine. God commands us to do that.

Yet, someone might object and say that the people of Micah's day engaged in child sacrifice. Surely we are not that barbaric today! However, what is the difference between a child sacrificed at the altar of Baal or one sacrificed at the altar of self-interest? The millions of abortions being performed today are as abhorrent as was the child sacrifice of the Canaanites. Perhaps we do not burn infants in the hands of an idol. Instead, we slice them, salinize them, and suction them in the womb. At least the people of Micah's day gave the remains a respectable disposal in urns in a cemetery. We simply dump the remains into garbage pails or dumpsters behind abortion clinics.

As for occult practices, they also flourish in our day. Satanism, divination, spiritism, and witchcraft abound in our society. In the words of a well-known false prophet of today, "Satan is alive and well on planet earth."

Where does this leave us? Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). If God is merciful (and he is, for all his judgments are also carried out in the interest of his church), and if God is just (and he is), and if he is true to his word (and he is), then we must conclude that our nation cannot go on indefinitely the way it is.

We indeed are living in the eleventh hour. We have been living in the last days of the world since the coming of our Lord. We may debate over whether we are living in the time before the end when Satan is unleashed or not. Yet, we are still living in the last days of this world. We may also conclude that we are living at a crucial time in our nation's history. If we do not see the impending judgment of God on our nation, we do not take God's word seriously and we are blind to the lessons of history.

We have a mission. It is to act as salt and light and to reach out with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord has called us each to a specific locality, and there we are to labor faithfully. Let us individually sharpen our consciences, daily search God's word to seek his will, and draw strength from our forgiveness in the blood of God's Son. Let us also faithfully reprove sin, not with a softened law which avoids offending people, but with a clear presentation of the will of God. It is not only our task to comfort the afflicted but also to afflict the comfortable. As Paul said, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season: correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 3:2). Then let us also faithfully proclaim the good news that God for Jesus' sake has cleansed us from all our sins.

The results of our work will be up to the Lord. Perhaps hearts will be changed. Perhaps they will not. Only the Lord can accomplish conversion. He has simply told us to proclaim his message faithfully. When the Lord called Isaiah, he told him to go and preach. Isaiah asked, "For how long, O Lord" (Isaiah 6:11). The Lord answered,

Until the cities lie ruined  
And without Inhabitant,  
until the houses are left deserted  
and the fields are ravaged,  
until the Lord has sent everyone far away  
and the land is utterly forsaken. Isaiah 6:11-12.

Isaiah was to preach until there was no one left to whom he could preach. If we realize that the Lord grants results and he simply calls on us to be faithful, then we will not suffer the depression and identity crisis so many suffer when they see no value in their ministry. We are sent to proclaim. The results are up to God. May we draw strength daily from his word and grace. May he keep us faithful to him in these trying days. May he enable us always to be faithful to our calling, for it is only in the faithful proclamation of God's word that our nation has hope.