

## The Prophets, Book 11

### Micah

Micah was one of the great quartet of 8th Century BC prophets, which included Amos, Hosea and Isaiah; and he was the last. He was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) during the reigns of Jotham (a good king), Ahaz (an extremely wicked king) and Hezekiah (a good king); and so, during his career he saw the kingdom prosper under a godly king, descend into sin under a wicked king, and then prosper again under a righteous king. Thus, in his lifetime, Micah saw in miniature the dismal up-and-down pattern of the Israelites, from the exodus to the captivity--their history of sinfulness, repentance and revival, and then backsliding into more sinfulness. He saw the Northern Kingdom conquered and reduced to an Assyrian province; and he experienced repeated incursions by the Assyrians into Judah, until they were conquered and replaced by Babylon as the region's super power.

Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, and he probably knew Hosea. His book has been compared with Isaiah's; in fact, Micah 4:1-3 is almost identical to the parallel passage in Isaiah 2:2-4. Micah's book is, of course, much, much shorter; the late Bible teacher, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, who had an incisive mind and a gift for summarizing and modern metaphor, called Micah "Isaiah in shorthand." He might have added that Micah wrote much of his prophecy in vivid, powerful, compressed metaphor. While Isaiah ministered primarily in Jerusalem, Micah seems to have ministered over a much wider area, from Jerusalem to Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom.

Like Amos, who preceded him, Micah preached and prophesied in both the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel. His message also included warnings to the pagan Gentile nations around him; thus, like Amos, he demonstrated that his God was indeed God of all the world, and had a plan for all the nations to come into eventual fellowship with Him (and those who did not, ceased to exist). He prophesied the conquering and destruction of the Northern Kingdom, which he lived to see, with its capitol, Samaria, literally reduced to "an heap of the field."

His prophecy also reached far into the future, speaking of the coming of the Messiah, and farther still into the future, to the Second Advent, a time when all the World will be in blessed submission to the Heavenly King, with God's people living in eternal prosperity and peace. Here again his message was a confirmation of Amos's message.

Micah's prophecies concerning the coming destruction of Jerusalem were quoted about 150 years later by the elders in defense of Jeremiah, when the wicked priests and false prophets in Jerusalem demanded his death (Jeremiah 26:18-19).

Micah's Mixed Messages. Micah's small book must be read with care, because his visions of the future were sometimes mixed with his concern for things around him in his time. It was not uncommon among the OT prophets to mix passages about the future with statements about the present and past; but this is particularly true of Micah, so read carefully, with this in mind.

**A. Author.** The human author was the prophet Micah<sup>1</sup>. His home was in Moresheth, 30 miles south of Jerusalem, on the Philistine border near Gath (home town of the giant brothers, Goliath and Lahmi).

**B. Place and Date.** The Book of Micah was written in Judah, about 725 BC.

**C. Theme.** The theme of Micah is the certainty of judgment for sin, and the promise of redemption for the repentant. God is perfectly just, yet perfectly loving and gracious: He hates the sin, but loves the sinner, and He has a grand plan for us all, including those who reject it and perish.

**D. Highlights.** Highlights of Micah include the following:

1. Judgment to Come for Both Israel and Judah. (Chapter 1)

In powerful poetic language, Micah prophesies judgment on the Northern Kingdom for its idolatry, including the total destruction of its capital, Samaria (to become "an heap of the field"). He also accuses Judah of the same sins of paganism, and prophesies that the Assyrians, who will conquer and destroy Israel, will also conquer northern Judah and advance even to the gates of Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>.

*NOTE: He apparently stripped himself naked (v 8) as did Isaiah, for 3 years, and wailed before the people to illustrate his message--the life of an OT prophet was never an easy one!*

2. Condemnation of the Powerful Who Victimize the Poor. (2:1-11)

Micah condemns the rich and powerful who cruelly seize the land and homes of the poor and defenseless, even widows and their children. This is one of the things God particularly hates, and is a revelation of his tender heart where the poor and defenseless are concerned<sup>3</sup>.

3. Suddenly--Future, Ultimate Redemption. (2:12-13)

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<sup>1</sup> "Micah" is a short form of "Micaiah." This short form of his name distinguishes him from an earlier prophet named Micaiah, the one who prophesied the defeat of the combined armies of Israel and Judah under Ahab and Jehoshaphat, by Syria (I Kings 22:8f). In the Latin Vulgate, he is called "Michas."

<sup>2</sup> This latter prophecy will be literally fulfilled during the reign of Hezekiah when the Assyrians reach the gates of Jerusalem but are then destroyed by the angel of the LORD (II Kings 19:32-36).

<sup>3</sup> For just a sampling of this attitude of God's see Proverbs 14:31; 22:16, 22-23.

Suddenly, in v 12, Micah changes the subject. In one verse, he jumps from condemnation of the greed and oppression of the poor by the powerful in his day, and makes a beautiful prophecy of the future restoration of **all** of Israel, under the benevolent kingship and protection of "the breaker" (the Messiah). He pictures the reunited kingdom in the End Times as "the sheep of Bozrah." Bozrah was a place in ancient Edom, noted for its plentiful supply of water, abundant pasture, and natural protection from its enemies--a paradise of plenty and safety. Today it is in Jordan, and is called "Buseirah."

**NOTES:**

*a. Verse 12 promises that "all of thee" will be gathered in the end-time restoration of Israel. Here is further evidence that there was no such thing as the "ten lost tribes." For more information on this erroneous doctrine see Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

*b. The Hebrew word translated "breaker" here is "paras" and it means to break forth, to burst upon the scene, like the Sun, breaking through a cloud. It is used nowhere else in the Bible. This is a fascinating hint at what the second coming of the Christ will be like.*

4. Wicked Rulers and False Prophets Bring Doom. (Chapter 3)

Wicked rulers who "hate the good and love the evil" bring doom to Judah--the certain, future, judgment of God<sup>4</sup>. These wicked rulers, and the false prophets they gather to themselves, will bring about the ultimate destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. The part of the prophecy that predicts, because of this corruption of the government of God, "Zion for your sake shall be plowed as a field," will be literally fulfilled when Titus, after conquering Jerusalem in 71 AD, has the Temple dismantled, the materials hauled away, and the site plowed with oxen. The site will be like any barren hilltop.

5. Millennial Peace and Prosperity. (4:1-7)

Immediately after the prophetic statement about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Micah looks into the even-more-distant future, to the time "in the last days" when the city will be restored. The Temple will be restored (supernaturally--not built by the efforts of man) and it will be the center of teaching of the Word of God, which will flow from Zion into all the World in an endless time of ultimate peace and prosperity "for ever and ever." This idyllic culmination of the plan of God is yet to be fulfilled in our present time, but there are signs that some of us may live to see it.

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard see the generally misunderstood passages in Rom 13:3-4 and I Pet 2:13-14. Authorities that we are commanded to obey are those who love good and hate evil--those who reward righteousness and punish evil. We are **not** commanded to obey those who are, and do, the opposite.

***NOTE:** The first four verses of Micah 4 are almost identical to the first four verses of Isaiah 2, and they are often quoted.*

6. A Prophecy of the Babylonian Captivity and Return. (4:8-13)

In another abrupt change of topic, Micah speaks in three verses of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the captivity in Babylon, and the return from Babylonian captivity.

Then, just as abruptly, he speaks of a time which could very well be today (or the future, final, battle of Revelation 19). In the last three verses of Chapter 4 he sees a time when Israel will be back in the land, surrounded by hostile nations which seek to destroy God's people. Yet these enemies will fail in this, because He will make the Israelites powerful and dominant.

7. Prophecies of the Messiah. (5:1-2)

By far the most familiar passage in Micah's book is the beginning of Chapter 5. Here, in only the first two verses, three terribly important things about the future Messiah are found: (1) He will be abused, i.e. a suffering Messiah ("shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek"); (2) He will be born in Bethlehem; and (3) He will be divine ("from everlasting"). About 700 years later, when the Messiah finally appears, the priests and scribes will know, without even consulting their scrolls of Micah, that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem (Matt 2:3-6); but they will completely fail to realize, from the same prophecy of Micah, that He is to be divine, and will be a suffering Messiah--not a human, conquering, military hero. Such is the power of pre-conceived opinions.

***NOTE:** Regrettably, the NIV and other modern versions substitute here, "from ancient times," or "from the distant past," which simply means "a long time ago," (a phrase which could be validly applied today to Alexander the Great, George Washington or, perhaps at my age, even to me). There is a vast (immeasurable) difference between "existed a long time ago" and "has always existed." Thus, these translations undermine the vital fact of the pre-existence and divinity of Christ<sup>5</sup>. For a summary of facts about the Messiah's divinity, see "The Divinity of Jesus the Christ" in Part IV (Selected Topical Summaries).*

8. It Isn't Complicated. (6:6-8)

In a glimpse into the future, when God's people will live under a new and better covenant of grace, the prophet describes in a rhetorical question the complex religious exercises and sacrifices that people think are necessary in order to please God. Then, in a few simple words, he summarizes the right answer--what will

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<sup>5</sup> Mrs Siewert, in her Amplified Bible, working from the modern Greek texts, follows them in writing "...from of old, from ancient days." However, she clearly understood this flaw in the modern texts and (characteristically) added in parentheses ("eternity"), to make clear the divinity of the Christ child.

actually be necessary for us to be rightly related to God; and it isn't complicated. All that will be required of us will be to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. Verse 8 is one of the most often-quoted verses in the Bible.

9. The Faithful Will Ultimately Prevail. (7:8-13)

Speaking as the personification of the faithful of God's people, the prophet challenges the wicked, saying that if he falls, yet he will rise. And, if he is forced to sit in darkness (as in a dungeon with no natural light), yet the LORD will be his light. Although I have sinned, and will bear the consequences of my sins, yet ultimately, when I repent, He will bring me out of the darkness of sin and chastening, into the light of his presence and perfect righteousness. Then my enemies, the enemies of righteousness and servants of wickedness, will see the triumph of the righteous. The LORD will restore the walls of our protection, and will nullify the decrees of the enemy against us. In that day He will bring righteousness even from the places of the bitter enemies of God's people, like Assyria and the powers of "the river" (Euphrates Valley), even from all places, regardless of the wickedness that has caused the land to be desolate.

10. The Blessedness of the Righteous (and the opposite for Their Enemies).  
(7:14-20)

The last seven verses of Micah's book open with a prayer to the Lord to use his limitless power and authority to feed and bless his people, with forests like those of Mt. Carmel, with rich pastures and abundant water like Bashan, which produced the largest and finest of cattle, and with healing, as with the balms of Giliad. Then there follows a prophecy of just the opposite future for the enemies of God's people. And Micah closes his book with praise to God for forgiving the sins of his people and blessing them so richly, at some point in the future.