

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

MICAH

THEME

Author and Title

Rather than being identified by his father or family (cf. Joel “son of Pethuel” [Joel 1:1]; Jonah “son of Amittai” [Jonah 1:1]), this prophet is identified by a location, “Micah of Moresheth” (Mic. 1:1; for Moresheth-gath, see 1:14). It was about 22 miles (35 km) southwest of Jerusalem in the “lowland” or Shephelah region. Unlike the calls to prophetic office of some other prophets (e.g., Isa. 6:1–13; Jeremiah 1), Micah’s call is not recorded. Micah is never explicitly referred to as “prophet,” but the source of his power is explicitly attributed to the “Spirit of the LORD” (Mic. 3:8; cf. 2 Pet. 1:20–21). The name “Micah” may be translated as a simple rhetorical question: “Who is like Yahweh?” Similarly, the book concludes with an inquiry: “Who is a God like you?” (Mic. 7:18). These questions underscore the unrivaled character and actions of the Lord.

Date

Micah prophesied during the reigns of the Judean kings Jotham (750–735 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715), and Hezekiah (715–687). The time span roughly parallels those of other eighth-century prophets like Hosea (Hos. 1:1) and Isaiah (Isa. 1:1), though Micah 1:1’s omission of the name of King Uzziah (767–739 B.C.) may place Micah somewhat later. It is difficult to assess the length of Micah’s public activity with any precision. At a minimum, the 16-year reign of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:2), in combination with the presumed transitions at the end of the reign of Jotham and the start of the reign of Hezekiah, provides a ministry length of 20 to 25 years. In Jeremiah 26:18 the elders of the land note the influence of Micah’s words on Hezekiah (directly quoting Mic. 3:12).

Theme

The theme of Micah is judgment and forgiveness. The Lord, the Judge who scatters his people for their transgressions and sins, is also the Shepherd-King who in covenant faithfulness gathers, protects, and forgives them.

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Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Micah writes in order to bring God's "lawsuit" against his people (3:8). He indicts Samaria and Jerusalem for their sins (1:2–7), with both Assyria (5:5–6) and Babylon (4:10) looming as instruments of the divine sentence.

Free from Assyrian interference in the first half of the eighth century, the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel (782–753 B.C.) and the Judean kings Uzziah and Jotham (see [Date](#)) witnessed the emergence of a wealthy upper class. Yet this brought with it significant corruption. As Amos had condemned the economic and legal injustices prevalent in the northern kingdom in the first half of the eighth century ([Amos 2:6–7; 5:10–12; 6:4–5](#)), so Micah catalogs specific sins of both the northern and southern kingdoms. These sins included idolatry ([Mic. 1:7; 5:12–14](#)); the seizure of property ([2:2, 9](#)); the failure of civil leadership ([3:1–3, 9–10; 7:3](#)), religious leadership ([3:11](#)), and prophetic leadership ([3:5–7, 11](#)); the belief that personal sacrifice satisfies divine justice ([6:6–7](#)); and corrupt business practices and violence ([6:10–12](#)).

The reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, along with the increasing threat of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, provide the broad background for Micah. First, Ahaz stands out among the three Judean kings for his idolatry ([2 Kings 16:1–4; Mic. 6:16](#)) as well as for the help he sought from the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 B.C.) in the face of Syro-Ephraimite aggression against Jerusalem ([2 Kings 16:5–9; 2 Chron. 28:16–21](#)). Second, Samaria, the northern Israelite capital, experienced exile as it fell ([2 Kings 17; Mic. 1:6–7](#)) to the Assyrian Shalmaneser V (727–722 B.C.). Finally, Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.) captured numerous cities and villages of the Shephelah controlled by Hezekiah ([1:10–16](#)), but ultimately failed to capture Jerusalem in 701 ([2 Kings 18:13–19:37](#)).

Key Themes

1. The character of the sovereign Lord and the sins of his people demand judgment ([1:2–5; 2:3; 6:1–2, 9–11](#)). The sentence of God's "lawsuit" comes in the form of an oppressor ([1:15; 4:11; 5:1, 5–6](#)) and by means of covenant curses ([6:13–15](#)) rendered for covenant unfaithfulness ([6:16](#)).
2. A Shepherd-King gathers and delivers a remnant ([2:12–13; 4:6–8; 7:14, 18](#)). This deliverer, functioning as a new David, will come from the very region under Assyrian control ([5:2–5a](#)).
3. Covenant faithfulness consists not merely in ritual but in the proper expression of the primary forms of love: justice, mercy, and faithfulness ([6:8](#); cf. [Matt. 23:23](#)).

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4. The Lord is the focus of worship. The nations will no longer “flow” to false gods (cf. [Jer. 51:44](#)) but to Zion to learn of the true Lord and to live in peace ([Mic. 4:1–5; 7:12](#); cf. [Isa. 2:2–5](#)).
5. The liberating light of grace flowing from the Lord’s steadfast love ([Mic. 7:18–20](#)) overcomes the ominous sentence due to sin ([7:8–9](#)). Forgiveness is grounded in God’s faithfulness to his promises ([7:20](#)).
6. God’s saving acts in the past ([6:4–5; 7:14–15](#)) are interpretative analogies for his saving acts in the future ([7:19–20](#)).

History of Salvation Summary

In every age God wants his people to respond to his love by doing justice, practicing loving-kindness, and walking humbly with God ([6:8](#)). This is genuine humanness, and by it Israel was called to commend God’s goodness to all mankind. Israel and Judah in Micah’s day were corrupted by their refusal to embrace God’s purpose, and thus would suffer judgment; but there would yet be a remnant who would experience God’s forgiveness and be part of his plan to bless the world through the Messiah’s rule. (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see [Overview of the Bible](#). See also [History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ](#).)

Literary Features

Micah comprises a series of oracles (prophetic pronouncements) delivered in a variety of historical and political contexts. The overall genre is prophecy. While Micah uses a variety of forms such as disputation ([2:6–11](#)) and lament ([1:8–16](#)), the two leading prophetic forms in Micah are the oracle of judgment ([2:1–4](#)) and the oracle of salvation or redemption ([5:2–5](#)). The oracles of judgment follow the rules of satire: they have one or more objects of attack, a vehicle in which the attack is embodied, a stated or implied norm by which the criticism is conducted, and a prevailing tone that is either biting or laughing. Some of the oracles of salvation picture a future golden age (which can be taken either as messianic visions of the first coming of Christ or as apocalyptic visions of Christ’s second coming). Much of the book’s content is embodied in poetical language, requiring the reader to unpack the meanings of images and figures of speech such as wordplay (see note on [1:10–15](#)), metaphor, and simile ([1:4, 8; 2:12; 3:3, 12; 4:9–10; 5:8; 7:1, 4](#)).

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The Near East at the Time of Micah

c. 740 B.C.

Micah prophesied to Israel and Judah during the decades just before the fall of Samaria through the time of King Hezekiah of Judah. Micah witnessed the destruction of Israel by the rising Assyrian empire, yet he probably also witnessed the Lord's dramatic rescue of Jerusalem from the Assyrians during Hezekiah's reign.



Outline

The current arrangement of the text permits a number of possible outlines. One that has garnered much support, and that is followed here, centers on the pattern of judgment and salvation found throughout the book. In each of three large units, the use of the plural imperative “hear” begins a major section on judgment, and each unit moves toward hope and deliverance (1:2–2:13; 3:1–5:15; 6:1–7:20).

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- I. Superscription (1:1)
- II. The Announcement of Judgment on Israel and Judah (1:2–2:13)
 - A. God’s punishment of Samaria and Judah (1:2–16)
 - 1. Judgment on Samaria (1:2–7)
 - 2. Judgment on Judah (1:8–16)
 - B. Abuses and abusers of Yahweh’s land (2:1–11)
 - 1. Indictment and future punishment (2:1–5)
 - 2. Rejection of the prophetic word (2:6–11)
 - C. The divine promise to gather Jacob (2:12–13)
- III. The Present Injustice and the Future Prospect of Just Rule in Jerusalem (3:1–5:15)
 - A. Present leaders denounced (3:1–12)
 - 1. Judgment against the heads of Jacob (3:1–4)
 - 2. Judgment against the prophets (3:5–8)
 - 3. Judgment against the heads of Jacob (3:9–12)
 - B. Jerusalem’s restoration among the nations—promised (4:1–7)
 - 1. Nations approach Zion in peace (4:1–5)
 - 2. Divine promise to gather Zion (4:6–7)
 - C. Jerusalem’s restoration among the nations—accomplished (4:8–5:15)
 - 1. Restoration of Zion’s dominion (4:8)
 - 2. Nations approach Zion for battle (4:9–13)
 - 3. The Shepherd-King arrives and the remnant is restored (5:1–15)
- IV. The Lord’s Indictment and Restoration of His People (6:1–7:20)
 - A. Israel accused: covenant violation (6:1–8)
 - 1. The prophetic summons (6:1–2)
 - 2. Divine interrogation and saving acts (6:3–5)
 - 3. People’s response and prophetic reply (6:6–8)
 - B. Crisis in relationship (6:9–7:7)
 - 1. Divine indictment of treachery (6:9–12)

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2. Divine sentence for treachery (6:13–16)
 3. Consequences of disobedience: social upheaval (7:1–7)
- C. Zion's repentance and renewed faith in Yahweh's help (7:8–13)
- D. Restoration of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh (7:14–20)¹

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (pp. 1693-1695). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.