

**THE BOOK OF MICAH**  
**Lesson 1, Introduction and Chapter 1**

The Prophet Micah lived, prophesied, and wrote in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. That century was one of much prophetic activity. It was the century of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jonah, with Micah living in final third of the 8<sup>th</sup>, and at the very beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. He must be among the least studied prophets in the Church era except that part of his book which was, 1000 years ago, designated as chapter 4 that has become of great interest in the past half-century as Christendom awakens to the coming reality of the End Times and Armageddon. Yet, he was much read and taken seriously by the kings of Judah and Ephraim/Israel in his day, and was revered enough that the later Prophet Jeremiah even quoted him.

In that era, the united Israel of David and Solomon had long ago disappeared to be replaced by two separate kingdoms... one called Judah, and the other called Ephraim or Ephraim/Israel. These kingdoms, though recognizing their common heritage, were so separate that they warred with each other off and on, and were generally thought of by their neighbors as unassociated countries. Due to the direction and influence of Jeroboam, the first king of Ephraim/Israel upon united Israel's dissolution, the ancient Hebrew faith of the Patriarchs that each country practiced had strongly diverged. The Jerusalem centered faith of the Torah remained only for Judah. Ephraim/Israel had established its own Temple and priesthood based in the city of Samaria. King Jeroboam eventually went so far as to essentially prohibit the people of Ephraim to travel to the Jerusalem Temple for holy observances. He even erected a Golden Calf as a representation of Yehoveh, and much worship was directed towards it.

The name Micah means "who is like Yehoveh". He gets confused with another prophet of a similar name: Micaiah Ben Imlah. Where an extended name for our prophet is used, it is Micah of Moresheth or Micah of Moresheth-Gath (because there was more than one town called Moresheth). His home town was located around 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, in a region called the Shephelah... the coastal plain. We read of Micaiah Ben Imlah in the Book of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, as a prophet who prophesied about a century prior to our Micah, and

was a prophet to the Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel. There are a few similarities between the two prophets, but the differences in writing and style are so significant that it is too much to entertain the idea that these were the same person, even though some scholars still maintain that they are one in the same.

Micah was a Judean. Although he had much to say about the northern kingdom of Ephraim (for the sake of brevity most times I'll refer to the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel as just Ephraim). The Kings of Judah that he served under were Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Quite a number of short-lived kings ruled over Ephraim during this same time...each king murdered by the succeeding one. This, of course, led to massive instability of Ephraim, making it ripe for being overtaken by the unquestioned regional power of that era: Assyria. When Micah speaks about Ephraim, it is mostly about its coming destruction and the fall of its capital city, Samaria, which finally occurred during the years of 723 – 721 B.C. So, Micah (like Isaiah) lived during the time of world-shaking events that largely followed the flow of the growing imperial ambitions of the Assyrian kings.

Without getting too specific, we can rightly say that the Middle East saw the close of one era, and the beginning of a new, upon the death of King Uzziah of Judah in 740 B.C. What leads up to, during, and immediately following such great transitions and changes in geopolitics and world order are messy and chaotic. Much territory changed hands in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Formerly sovereign nations suddenly became vassal states of Assyria. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, and then Ephraim were included. Judah paid much tribute to Assyria to remain a little more independent for a time, but eventually they too became totally dominated.

When empires like Assyria's overtake nations and regions, they bring with them their culture, religion and religious institutions. This had much to do with accelerating Ephraim's already corrupted faith, and began to greatly affect Judah's (although not quite as significantly as Ephraim). It was the thorough corruption of Ephraim's faith and faith institutions that led to God directing Assyria to conquer them as punishment, and to scatter the 10 tribes of

Ephraim/Israel to the wind to the point that they eventually were given the unofficial moniker of The 10 Lost Tribes of Israel.

I find it helpful to put such events as this into the historical context of what was going on elsewhere in the world. During Micah's era Greece was in a period of transformation, exiting their dark ages. It was now when the Grecian system of city-states began. That is, large cities became their own states with their own kings. This *polis* system as it was called, became the main structure of Greek government and expansion. They expanded by colonizing along the Mediterranean and Black Seas. This was the same timeframe in which the renowned Greek poet Homer wrote, and when the Olympic Games were first established.

In that same century the city of Rome was founded by Romulus. In Northern Africa, the Kingdom of Kush was on the rise and soon would dominate Egypt. India was in a transition, led by its religious leadership, which would go on to shape the philosophical foundations of Ancient India. The picture we need to see is of a dynamic world, and most of it in a time of great transitions that would forever alter its trajectory. What was going on with Judah, Ephraim, and the Middle East was indicative and representative of the state of known world of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C... not at all unique to it. It is no wonder that we find so many biblical Prophets sent by God to His people to warn, correct, and direct during that century. Although it might not appear so, even 2800 years ago the world was connected enough that a rebellion in one place would give rise to rebellion in another. Ideas spread rapidly, as did moods and aspirations.

The most complete Book of Micah text that we have in Hebrew is the Masoretic Text. The oldest complete Bible among the several texts scribed by the Masoretes is the Leningrad Codex from 1000 A.D. The oldest fragment of Micah is from the Dead Sea Scrolls, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C, and what little we do have of it matches very well with the Masoretic Text. So, we can confidently assume that what we have today in the Bible versions that are based on the Hebrew Masoretic texts (versus being based on the Greek Septuagint) is authentically very close to the original. That said, there are other copies of it in other languages. We have it in the Greek Septuagint in what is called Old Greek. Also, the Aramaic Targum, the Syriac Peshitta, and

the Latin Vulgate. There are variances within the Micah text among all these, although not so serious as to invalidate any of them. Any time a translation from the original language to a different language occurs, a very natural redaction happens because every language is wed to the culture from which it came. So, it can be difficult, at best, to sometimes bring across important nuances of meaning from one language to the next. Many more times than I'm comfortable with, educated guesses must be used.

Bible scholars and teachers usually prefer to divide Bible books into sections that they see as forming the literary structure of any particular book. Then they assign names to these sections. Nothing wrong with that as long as we don't adhere to it too rigidly, since these are manmade divisions created mostly for the sake of establishing some logical systematic means of study. I'm not sure one system is any better than another.

So, I'll just sort-of outline the book as a way to approach it. Micah consists of seven chapters, the contents of which are (generally) as follows: chapter 1: The idolatry of Samaria and Jerusalem are denounced. The prophet laments their coming fall and exhorts the people to mourning to prepare for what is soon to happen. Chapter 2: Denunciation of oppression and worship corruption along with a prediction of the punishment of God's people on account of it. The eventual restoration of Israel is also foretold. Chapter 3: The prophet rebukes first the leaders for their cruelty, then the false prophets who lie for money as the primary causes of all the evil that has overtaken the Israelites. He continues to reprove the leaders for their oppression, which, he says, will cause the ruin even of Jerusalem. Chapter 4: In poetical language Micah speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem and of the returned glory of the house of Yehoveh. A latter days victory of Israel over the nations is foretold. Chapter 5: A prediction that a powerful king of Judah will vanquish the gentile nations, particularly Assyria and will destroy idolatry among God's people. Chapter 6: All Israel is reproved for its sins, particularly its injustice. For this injustice punishment is prophesied. Chapter 7: The lack of righteous men and the corruption of Israel are lamented; the prophet comforts Israel, promising that it will, in the future, be restored to its land and will triumph over its enemies.

For the sake of using simple labels as we go along in our study, I think Andersen's and Freedman's way of dividing up Micah into but 3 sections is the most helpful. They call chapters 1 through 3 The Book of Doom. Chapters 4 and 5, The Book of Visions. And chapters 6 and 7 The Book of Contention and Conciliation.

Although the words aren't that challenging on the surface, nonetheless Micah's style of writing has caused a wide scope of differences as how to understand and translate large sections of it. It boils down to this: as opposed to Isaiah, for example, who goes to great lengths to explain himself in quite complete ways, Micah is the opposite. Micah is abrupt, rough, and speaks almost a kind-of shorthand. Prepositions are often left out. Verb genders don't always match with their objects. Subjects suddenly change in mid-sentence. He employs plays on words, some of which are only recently being discovered and better understood. He switches quickly from symbolism, to simile, to literal narrative. He mixes poetry with narrative, so (as happens regularly in Hebrew poetry) hyperbole elevates the tension in his statements. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if it is Micah speaking his own words, or if He is simply relating God's words. Although, I think literary and text critics make far too much of that factor because as a prophet, the message given is always assumed to be God's whether or not it comes from the prophet's own mind or from the word-for-word oracle divinely given to him.

The other result of scholarly criticisms of the book is that they think many words have been wrongly transmitted through copyist errors, editorial redactions over the centuries, even words or phrases entirely omitted. So, this group of commentators and academics prefers to virtually re-write sentences, or to re-order them, to display what they think ought to appear. Some of this comes from a rigid Western academic way of assuming that the Bible ought to be structured the way they would have done it, or that the biblical writers were all following some common intellectual grammatical protocol and so it should be consistent among all the books. Then, if we don't find it that way what we're seeing are errors in transmission or textual corruption. Naturally, since the Bible was hand copied until the invention of the printing press a little over 500 years ago, there would always be some minor errors introduced... many of which aren't terribly hard to identify. However, the level of change

that some Bible scholars propose to Micah's book isn't warranted. Those ancient literary protocols did not exist in reality in any formal form that has ever been found, and besides, over the centuries, not only styles but the nuanced meaning of words evolved. Bottom line: for the most part, I'm going to leave Micah alone, and take it as we find it. Although, at times I might offer an alternative to consider if I think it warrants it.

And finally, in the Hebrew Bible Micah is the 6<sup>th</sup> in the order of the 12 Minor Prophets. Who these 12 are, and in what order they appear, seems to be original and unchanged as no other prophets and no other order of their books in the Hebrew language has ever been found. With that as a backdrop, let's open up Micah chapter 1.

### **READ MICAH CHAPTER 1 all**

Verse 1 offers the all-important superscription. That is, verse 1 is not the beginning of the body of the prophetic message. Rather, it is there to explain who the author is, what the mood and tone of his work is going to be, usually it includes a time reference, and an overall context is presented to help us discern his intent. The serious matter of a Bible book's superscription is nearly always jumped over by Christian Bible commentators and pastors, assuming it is self-explanatory and nothing more needs to be said. Thus, typically, verse 1 is read, but the commentary or sermon doesn't begin until verse 2. Micah's superscription is this:

**CJB Micah 1:1 *This is the word of Yehoveh that came to Mikhah the Morashti during the days of Yotam, Achaz and Y'chizkiyah, kings of Y'hudah, which he saw concerning Shomron and Yerushalayim:***

I want to remind you all of something I've said in my teaching of other books, but I think is significant enough to warrant the repetition. The whole of the Torah, and by extension the entire Bible, has a superscription that is never thought about as such. And because it isn't recognized for what it is, it is just thought of as the beginning of the body of the scripture. That particular superscription is this:

**CJB Genesis 1:1** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

I hope you can see how when we understand this as what it is.... a superscription... then we get away from arguing over old earth, young earth, gap theories and the like. The context for the Book of Genesis, and for the Torah, and for the Hebrew Bible, and for the New Testament is set by that fundamental superscription. It tells us that there *was* a beginning. The timeframe for what we're going to hear about starts at that beginning. God was there at the time of the beginning, and He is the one who created the heavens and the earth. All that follows it... all 66 books... is based upon that context supplied by that brief superscription, and therefore is the first, and the most important and foundational pillar of the Bible. That is the power and importance of a superscription, including the one we find that begins the Book of Micah. We must never just glide right by those as we come across them.

Micah's superscription commences by connecting Yehoveh with the Prophet Micah. That is, no one else was involved or present to receive this divine oracle. It was a personal and intimate interchange. That method of how prophecy is given to prophets is the standard biblical pattern as we will not find any prophecy from God that is given to 2 or more people; it is always only to one person. The further claim contained within the superscription is that all that follows is the "word of Yehoveh". This is an important characterization in that the reader is alerted to the fact that whatever he finds in this book, it is the authentic word of God. The authenticity was especially important during the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. because there were scores, if not a few hundred, of false prophets running around all proclaiming messages of abundance and security. Yet, do not misunderstand. The "word of God" doesn't necessarily mean "the words of God". That is, it is not as though Micah was a courtroom reporter that merely wrote down every word God spoke to him and then repeated them verbatim in his book. Some words were, some weren't. The parts that were not Yehoveh's direct words were, then, Micah's words. But as Yehoveh's prophet, we are to take his words as being truthfully and accurately representative of the message he received. Micah was acting as God's personally authorized agent.

The importance of which prophet, exactly, is the authorized recipient of Yehoveh's word is highlighted because of the inclusion of the extended identity of Micah as "the Morashite". Micah was not a unique name in Israelite society; many men were named Micah. Morashite means a resident of the town of Moresheth, so the prophet is further identified by means of connecting him to his hometown. We must also not overlook that Micah is a man... a male. None of the 12 Minor Prophets are females.

Next he is identified as prophesying during the reigns of the Judean Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. This gives us the historical timeframe. Just as earlier in our introduction I gave you a quick overview of the goings-on in the Middle East and in other parts of the world during Micah's day, so for the Israelites by citing the kings that Micah served under, it delivered that same kind of historical information to Micah's readers for the next few hundred years because the Jewish people knew the sorts of things that happened during the reigns of the different kings (a lot of it recorded in other books of the Tanakh... the Old Testament).

And finally, that the superscription reveals that the main subjects of this prophecy would be Samaria and Jerusalem... the capitals of the two kingdoms. That is, both the northern and southern kingdoms... all Israel... would be dealt with... although separately. With that context now set, the main body of the prophetic message begins in verse 2.

**CJB Micah 1:2 *Listen, peoples, all of you! Pay attention, earth, and everything in it! Yehoveh ELOHIM will witness against you, Adonai, from his holy temple.***

Verses 2 through 7 are a poetic opening to the book. Therefore, the emotion that poetry is meant to evoke is every bit as important as the message it brings. So, words to heighten the tension are used. The opening word in Hebrew is **shema**. It is an emphatic word that means to listen or hear that includes a response of action. To complete the poetic parallel, the Hebrew word to open the next stanza is **qashab**, and it has a more literal meaning of incline your ears. To listen carefully. Who are the peoples that are to hear and respond? The Hebrew word used is **ammim**, and it is often parallel in

meaning to **goyim**, especially when used in poetry. Both terms mean nations. So, this is God calling to all the nations and people groups on the planet to pay attention to what He is saying since the judgment that He is going to announce concerning Israel is going to be the cause of a planetary-wide common experience of the greatest discomfort.

When he calls on the earth to pay attention, he means it as the planet itself... this big ball of dirt and water that we all live upon. That is because this physical planet is the common home to all these peoples and thus (again poetically), it too cannot help but being involved and affected by what will happen. That is, the planet's geography and substance will be part of the consequences of the coming judgment. This fact is alluded to in other books of the Bible, but none so powerful as in Zechariah.

**CJB Zechariah 14:3-4** ***<sup>3</sup> Then Yehoveh will go out and fight against those nations, fighting as on a day of battle. <sup>4</sup> On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies to the east of Yerushalayim; and the Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, to make a huge valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.***

To say that God is going to witness against them means He is going to bring accusations of wrong doing for everyone. The Hebrew phrase of **le-ed** means "be witness", but this is the technical language of a judicial trial. So, the mental picture being formed is of God sitting in a court room to hold a hearing and render a verdict. The place He will bring this witness from is His holy Temple. Does this mean God's heavenly holy temple? Or does it mean his Temple in Jerusalem? Scholars typically choose one or the other as the correct meaning (each making good points in their arguments); however, I think there is an alternative.

When we study the Torah rather thoroughly, we come to realize that God's cosmic "temple" in heaven, the structure of Mt. Sinai into 3 distinct areas where God came to give the Torah to Israel and establish an everlasting covenant with them, and the design of the Temple in Jerusalem are the same, even serving essentially the same purpose. God judges from his heavenly

temple, He judged from Mt. Sinai, and He will judge from the place of His presence on earth, the Temple in Jerusalem. So, the meaning of “holy temple” in this verse is intentionally vague, and meant to be inclusive of them all. Therefore, we need not be forced into distinguishing one from the other. We should merely understand it as the place from which Yehoveh judges at different times in varying circumstances.

Amidst all this in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse, God is called by another title. The CJB says “Adonai Elohim”. Other English versions say “Lord God”. None of these are correct. Rather, it is literally “Adonai Yehoveh”... Lord Yehoveh. A title of utmost respect that includes God’s personal name. What this means is that it is the God named Yehoveh that is calling the earth and everyone on it to judgment. It means that He alone is the universal god that has the authority and power to do so. He has no territorial boundaries and no association with “other gods”. He is sovereign over all people and all places. It is a declaration of absolute monotheism, even if the Hebrews didn’t get that understanding due to the beliefs among cultures that were ubiquitous in Bible times.

This is also bringing to us an image of God eventually coming to earth in a theophany. In all His awesome power and majesty His arrival will not only shatter peoples and nations, but the earth itself will convulse. And, as we’re soon to find out, it all has to do with Israel. He is coming to chastise sin, as well as to seek retribution on all those who have harmed His people. But, first, the nations are to witness what happens to Israel... God’s set apart people... who are being judged. Over and over in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, the common theme threads through it from beginning to end: all will be judged. But first, God’s own people will be judged. God’s people always mean all those who claim, and reply upon, His covenants. So, Believers, that includes us. Nearly all prophetic books that allude to this say it will happen at some climactic End Time event. Verse 3 continues with this same thought.

**CJB Micah 1:3 *For- look!- Yehoveh is coming out of his place, coming down to tread on the high places of the land.***

Again, the concept of theophany... an actual appearance of God on earth... is being revealed. Therefore, the exclamatory term **hinneh** is the first word of

the statement. **Hinne** here means to behold, but it also adds the sense of immediacy or (in this case) suddenness. When God's arrival happens, it will be least expected by anyone... Israel or the nations. Ezekiel brings this to light and we should not be remiss to include what he says as further information that provides a greater context for what we are reading here in Micah.

**CJB Ezekiel 38:1-12** *The word of Yehoveh came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Human being, turn your face toward Gog (of the land of Magog), chief prince of Meshekh and Tuval; and prophesy against him. <sup>3</sup> Say that Adonai Yehoveh says, 'I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshekh and Tuval. <sup>4</sup> I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with all your army, horses and horsemen, all completely equipped, a great horde with breastplates and shields, all wielding swords. <sup>5</sup> Paras, Ethiopia and Put are with them, all with breastplates and helmets; <sup>6</sup> Gomer with all its troops; the house of Togarmah in the far reaches of the north, with all its troops- many peoples are with you.<sup>7</sup> Prepare yourself, get ready, you and all your crowd gathered around you; and take charge of them. <sup>8</sup> After many days have passed, you will be mustered for service; in later years you will invade the land which has been brought back from the sword, gathered out of many peoples, the mountains of Isra'el. They had been lying in ruins for a long time, but now Isra'el has been extracted from the peoples and all of them are living there securely. <sup>9</sup> You will come up like a storm, you will be like a cloud covering the land- you and all your troops, and many other peoples with you.' <sup>10</sup> "Adonai Yehoveh says: 'When that day comes, thoughts will well up in your mind, and you will devise a sinister scheme. <sup>11</sup> You will say, "I am going to invade this land of unwallled villages; I will take by surprise these people who are at peace, living securely, all in places without walls, bars or gates. <sup>12</sup> I will seize the spoil and take the plunder." You will attack the former ruins that are now inhabited and come against the people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and other wealth and are living in the central parts of the land.*

Notice the unexpected nature and suddenness of what happens. This is why we must not overlook the important emphasis that is revealed in the word ***hinneh***.

Since we have been previously told that God judges from His holy Temple, then in verse 3 it means we are to picture Him coming down from His holy heavenly Temple to earth (coming out of His place) in order to tread on the high places of earth. Where are these high places? The CJB wording implies the high places are in Israel. But, the Hebrew grammar used more indicates the earth as a whole.

High places are words that mean the locations where various peoples and leaders place their shrines, altars, and temples to worship their gods. We read of Asherahs (fir trees) planted on high places as symbolic of the fertility goddess. These high places could vary from natural hills, to merely piled up earth to form a mound, or even to things such as engineering marvels like Ziggurats of Nimrod's era. In the modern era, while these still exist and are used in some places, more usual are just opulent buildings, some with spires and obelisks. So, this is just indicative of all of the special places of worship to false gods.

When we hear of God treading on these high places, it comes from the Hebrew ***darak***. This is a term used largely in a military context. It means to trample upon, to subjugate, to smash. It is violent, and it is intentional. It carries a tone of incursion into enemy held territory. It is God coming in His wrath and decimating those who are against Him.

**CJB Micah 1:4 *Beneath him the mountains will melt, the valleys split open like wax before fire, like water poured down a steep slope***

The imagery of God's arrival on earth continues with what happens to the earth itself. The earth swoons and sways beneath His immense weight. Yehoveh comes like a super-heated fire that melts mountains and causes their molten rock to flow like wax. Can we not see that such an image comes from volcanic eruptions and earthquakes? Continuing the poetic parallelism, the simile changes from melting like wax to flowing like water. Even nature is

terrified at God's appearance. Mountains reducing to rubble, the opening of vast fissures in the ground, fire spewing out of hilltops...this is the expected response. What better way for people of any age to understand the unlimited, awesome power of Yehoveh than what we're reading here?

But then comes the cause of all that is happening. So, let's play close attention.

**CJB Micah 1:5** *All this is because of the crime of Ya'akov and the sins of the house of Isra'el. What is the crime of Ya'akov? Isn't it Shomron? And what are the high places of Y'hudah? Aren't they Yerushalayim?*

All of this judgment and wrath and eruptions of nature are because of the crime of Jacob and the sins of the house of Israel. It is Yehoveh reacting to this; that is the "why" of it all. As Peter said: "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God". The names Jacob (**Ya'acov**) and Israel as synonymous terms. What this means is that where we read "the crime of Jacob", it is but the first part of a poetic parallelism, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> part being "the sins of the house of Israel". The crime is the sins they commit... the offenses and transgressions against God's Torah. The entire nation... both kingdoms... were guilty and so both would feel His wrath.

To make this even clearer, the capital cities of the two kingdoms are named: Samaria and Jerusalem. It is in the capital city Samaria, especially, where the corruption is the greatest. Why name the capitals? Because they are representative of their entire nation and because they are the center of government, and of their perverse doctrines, religious leaders, and pagan worship practices. It is little wonder that a most appropriate name for this first part of the Book of Micah is the Book of Doom.

We'll stop here for today and continue with this next time.