

THE BOOK OF MICAH
Lesson 2, Chapter 1 Continued

To continue our study of Micah chapter 1, I want to first quote something from the Gospel accounts to use as an illustration.

CJB Mark 2:5-11 ***⁵ Seeing their trust, Yeshua said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Some Torah-teachers sitting there thought to themselves, ⁷ "How can this fellow say such a thing? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins except God?" ⁸ But immediately Yeshua, perceiving in his spirit what they were thinking, said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹ Which is easier to say to the paralyzed man? 'Your sins are forgiven'? or 'Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk'? ¹⁰ But look! I will prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." He then said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I say to you: get up, pick up your stretcher and go home!"***

The illustration is this: in these 6 verses, Yeshua switches His audience twice. First, He's speaking to the paralytic, then to the Torah-teachers (the Pharisees), then back to the paralytic. It isn't hard to discern because the parties are identified and it is easy to follow when Yeshua is talking to the one, then to the other. A similar thing is happening in Micah 1:2-7, only it's not as easy to spot it.

Let's re-read only that portion for the moment. Open your Bibles to Micah chapter 1.

RE-READ MICAH 1:1 – 7

To review a bit from last week, we need to place a mental partition between verse 1 and all the remainder of Micah's prophecy that makes up his entire book. Verse 1 is the superscription, which has the sole purpose of identifying the writer, the prophet, who is source of the oracle, and the subject, tone and context that will form and govern the entirety of the prophetic message. Only in verse 2 does the body of the message or oracle begin.

Very likely, because of the way things were in the 8th century B.C., messages were given to Israel by the prophet by means of speech... orally... mouth to ear. They were either written down immediately, or some time later, and only later still were they transmitted to future generations in text... that is, in book form. Equally as likely, what we are reading was Micah speaking at some public place (typically at the courtyard just inside the gates of a city). The audience was Israel... originally just a few people that were Judeans; but they were meant to represent all Israelites, much like a USA President will speak before a relatively small crowd at some specific place, yet the message he delivers is almost always for the entire nation.

So, the prophet is addressing an audience of Israel, but then directs his message to the world in a rhetorical way (obviously “the world” is not there for him to speak to), and then back to Israel. And, he says to Israel (represented by the Judeans listening to him speak) that God is accusing you! The prophet has just attacked Israel... almost as an ambush. The people before him must have been shocked and some probably angered in disbelief. It is very hard for we, 2800 years later, to even imagine the dramatic effect it would have created... but that is one way to get people to listen. Although, just as often, close their ears and minds to what the speaker has to say.

The 8th century B.C. was a world in transition. In the Holy Land, it was a level of prophetic activity unmatched for any other century. But, it was also an era for Israel that saw scores, if not hundreds, of false prophets running around proclaiming God’s pleasure with His chosen people, and that good times were about to arise over the horizon. The last thing they expected was a prophet that comes along with a message of severe chastisement for Israel, and that disaster was looming.

Yet, what we find biblically is that God never sends prophets to tell His people how well they’re doing. Always it is to warn and threaten. Modern prophets are Pastors, Rabbis, and Bible teachers. Seminary professors. Of course, they are prophets in the way they were after the prophecies of Malachai... the final Old Testament prophet. That is, prophesying still was to be giving people God’s Word, but it was to be what had already been given and handed down (the

Bible) and not a bunch of new revelations and oracles, or a series of new commands. If I might interject for just a moment, a little more honest assessment of the New Testament is that it is probably better characterized as a midrash on the Old. And, modern prophets especially in the West, who nearly unanimously deliver a message of God's pleasure with His new people... the gentile Church... and that happy days are here and even better is to come. In other words, prophets who speak popular words meant to please the audience because who wants to give to and support a Debbie-downer like Micah?

We paused at verse 5 last time, which reads:

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?*

My speculation from the way and the order the cities in this passage are given, is that Micah was speaking in Jerusalem. So, one can only imagine the incredulous response from those Judeans hearing him, and especially from the priests that were likely there in his audience. The bottom line is that despite the finger-pointing that had been going on between Samaria and Jerusalem, God is holding ALL accountable, and so His wrath is going to fall on ALL.

Verse 6 is:

CJB Micah 1:6 *"So I will make Shomron a heap in the countryside, a place for planting vineyards; I will pour her stones down into the valley, laying bare her foundations."*

What is described here is the destruction of Samaria. Again: Samaria is the capital city of the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel. Samaria is therefore representative of that entire kingdom. The speaker is clearly Yehoveh. The first word of this sentence is **we** (or **ve**), which is variously translated into English as so, or therefore, or for. The important thing to understand is that the word is used in a causal sense. That is, what is about to be pronounced is the effect of what came before it. Because of the sins of the House of Israel...

beginning with Samaria... then God is going to make Samaria a heap as punishment. That is, He is going to destroy her.

There are some scholars who say that Micah erred in this prophecy. When Sargon of Assyria attacked Samaria and other parts of the northern kingdom, it was not all brought to a "heap". However, he did deport thousands of Israelites to various of Assyria's satellite states all over Asia, and then bring in people to repopulate who were from elsewhere. The former northern kingdom along with its capital city had more damage done to it around 20 years later (by Assyria) but still it cannot be said that Samaria became a "heap", meaning uninhabitable ruins. Really, it only became a ruin that was suitable only for planting vineyards in 107 B.C., at the hand of no other than the High Priest and leader of the Jewish Maccabees, John Hyrcanus. This event was well documented by Josephus. In his book Antiquities, he says the following:

And when Hyrcanus had taken that city (Samaria), which was not done 'til after a year's siege, he was not contented with doing that only, but he demolished it entirely, and brought rivulets to it to drown it, for he dug such hollows as might let the water run under it; nay, he took away the very marks that there had ever been such a city there.

This is yet another proof that (most typically) prophecies are fulfilled in stages. Each stage is a partial fulfillment, and then each succeeding stage widens the scope of the previous effect. What the Assyrians began, the Jews of Judah led by their royal and priestly family, finished. Until we can accept this obvious biblical reality throughout history, then we'll have a distorted view of how prophetic fulfillment even works. It is rare that a prophetic fulfillment is a single, decisive event or blow, and that is why the Day of the Lord, Judgment Day, will not be a single event but rather a series of stages.

It is interesting the precision of this prophecy of verse 6, in that because of the way the final fulfillment of this destruction of Samaria occurred (with water being used to undermine the very foundations of the structures) that we read "laying bare her foundations". When invaders destroyed cities, rarely were the foundations ever destroyed. First, it was too difficult; and second, there was no need for it. The thing is, with the foundations still there, structures could

more easily be rebuilt, eventually. But when even the foundations are gone, there is no hope to rebuild. It must be done as though it had never existed. Thus, even to this day in the 21st century, Samaria has never been rebuilt. It remains a ruin (that can be visited, by the way, for those with a little courage since it is located in the Palestinian West Bank).

CJB Micah 1:7 *All her carved images will be smashed to pieces, all she earned consumed by fire; and I will reduce her idols to rubble. She amassed them from a whore's wages, and as a whore's wages they will be spent again."*

This is a case in which verses 6 and 7 never should have been separated. They are one continuous thought, as it continues the prophecy of just how thoroughly Samaria is to be reduced to dust. Thus, all the religious icons and apparatus are to be destroyed. Unlike the CJB, most English Bibles will open this verse with the word idol, and then it is used it again at the end of the first sentence. The CJB is right to use two different English words because two different Hebrew words are used. The first is **pesilim**, and the second is **'asabbim**. **Pesilim** are not carved wooden idols, but rather are stone. **Asabbim** more means images than idols, so it can include the idea even of description of the deity and functions it represents. The notion is that **pesilim** and **asabbim** form a merism. That is, it is the two ends of the spectrum of icons and images used in this pagan worship system, and everything in between. All of it. Nothing physical is to be left of this abhorrent religious worship system employed by the Samaritans, which their religious leadership claimed recognized the biblical Yehoveh as their God, and supposedly followed God's Word.

There is such sad irony, here. Israel was supposed to be a light to the world, not an extension of it. They were supposed to be those who rectified the wrongs of this earth, by means of showing what is right, and then the amazing blessings that come from it. Their covenant with God that made Israel, Israel, told them to stay away from other gods, and from idolatry. Instead, they quickly fell into idol worship, but rationalized it as a way to have good relations with their neighbors. I mean, what could be wrong with loving their neighbors in the way their neighbors understood? And what better way than in joining

them with their pagan religious festivals, respecting their gods, even adopting some of their idols and images, only just re-using them in ways that said this was really for their own God, Yehoveh?

I cannot begin to tell you the number of Christians from all branches who tell me that while they recognize that all the symbols and icons used for Christmas and Easter are unequivocally pagan (even the dates chosen to celebrate them), that “Jesus has baptized those things”, so now they are free and suitable to be used for Christian God-worship. This is precisely how the Israelites of the northern kingdom thought about their religions structure and there seemed to be no talking them out of it. God’s prophets tried and failed. Judah, the southern kingdom, was also on this same destructive path such that they would suffer the same fate as their northern kingdom about 130 years later.

Smashing the idols to rubble was the recommended method to getting rid of them. God gave this order to the Israelites during Moses’s time shortly before they crossed the Jordan into Canaan.

CJB Deuteronomy 7:3-5 ³ *Don't intermarry with them- don't give your daughter to his son, and don't take his daughter for your son. ⁴ For he will turn your children away from following me in order to serve other gods. If this happens, the anger of Yehoveh will flare up against you, and he will quickly destroy you. ⁵ No, treat them this way: break down their altars, smash their standing-stones to pieces, cut down their sacred poles and burn up their carved images completely.*

In the Torah, perhaps the chief concern for God’s people centered on avoiding becoming entrapped into the idolatry of their pagan neighbors. Not only did Israel NOT obey this command, they embraced doing idol worship themselves! Instead of smashing their idols, they adopted and adapted them for their own. So, why were they being punished? Because they were giving God a bad name. They weren’t being a light to the world; they were joining the world. And, yet, because Yehoveh is a husband to Israel, He refused to abrogate the covenant He had made with Israel’s Patriarchs. Instead, He invoked the curses... the punishments... for the covenant violations.

Here is how God sees the use of idols and icons that His worshippers use. Here is how God views all the religious procedures, observances, and rules made by His people. They do nothing but represent a whore's wages. Israel is a whore and so whatever they get from their sordid profession is called a whore's wages. And, in the same way whorers spend their wages... to do more whoring... so it will be for those who claim they worship the God of Israel but instead offer some kind of perverted hybrid. Strong language, but it isn't mine. It is God's. It was so easy for them to know the truth; it was right there in the Torah. But, they ignored it and preferred to believe what they wanted to believe. Those who have ears, listen.

CJB Micah 1:8 *This is why I howl and wail, why I go barefoot and stripped, why I howl like the jackals and mourn like the ostriches.*

This is another switch; not of audience, but of the one speaking. This is now Micah speaking his heart to the Israelite audience. He is terribly distressed by what he was obligated to say. Yet, it was the truth. He, personally, would likely be affected for what is being spoken about **is** a national judgment and not judgment on an individual-by-individual basis. I've spoken before about how everyone will experience God's judgment on 2 levels: communal and individual. The community we belong to, all the way up to the national level, excludes no one. Exclusions only happen on individual judgments.

The prophet, although a Judean, nonetheless goes into mourning for Samaria. It didn't have to be this way for the northern kingdom. Their leaders could have listened to the prophets sent to them to repent, and done so. Instead, they merely doubled down on their idolatry. It was King Josiah in Judah that gave Judah a few decades more of freedom because he took to heart what he heard, and led a big reformation of the religious and the civil. He started his reforms around 635 B.C. and the reforms lasted until his death in 609 B.C. When the next king took over (Jehoahaz), the reforms slowly began to revert through the next few kings until God had had enough and sent Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to invade Judah and end them as an independent and sovereign kingdom. This, of course, was warned about by Micah (as we

read in verse 5). The prediction itself indicated that this was 100% certain to happen eventually.

Micah saying he is going barefoot and stripped probably doesn't mean that he literally took off his sandals and stripped himself of his clothing. That is, this is not saying that he actually began to wander around naked. Rather it is an expression. It applies the idea of mourning on the occasion of being conquered and captured by a foreign nation. It was not uncommon for a victor to further humiliate the vanquished by literally stripping them naked and marching them off somewhere.

The howling is speaking about the noises made by jackals and ostriches that to the ears of the Israelites sound like wailing and great grief. All of this... expresses the depth of Micah's understanding about not only what is going to happen to Samaria, but in time to Jerusalem. Naturally he has no idea how immediate this could be. As it turned out, it was fairly immediate for Samaria, but long after he was dead for Jerusalem. These divine oracles told him that no repentance was coming for Samaria, and perhaps only a short-lived repentance was going to happen for Jerusalem. Micah was devastated.

CJB Micah 1:9 *For her wound cannot be healed, and now it is coming to Y'hudah as well; it reaches even to the gate of my people, to Yerushalayim itself.*

Just as verses 6 & 7 should not have been separated, so it is for verses 8 & 9. Verse 9 makes it clear that Samaria is beyond redemption. The divine decision has already been made and set into motion for them. Samaritans could cry out for grace and mercy all they wanted to, but at this point it was too little, too late. Similarly, destruction was also for Jerusalem but for some unexplained reason it would not come with immediacy; even so, it was plain to Micah that it would come.

Here is where we learn decisively that Micah is a Judean, and maybe even a resident of Jerusalem when he says, "even to the gate of **my** people, to Jerusalem itself." Here's the thing: the Judeans no longer considered Ephraim/Israel as true Israel. They had gone so far off course in their religious

practices that they were considered apostate. One of things that happened with Samaria is that they quit honoring Jerusalem as God's special place of dwelling, and they created their own temple in Samaria. An official decree forbade the people of Ephraim/Israel to travel to Jerusalem. Yet, Micah understands that indeed the people of Ephraim/Israel remain Israelites, which is why he mourns for them so severely.

Something that should be noted I mentioned last week. When it comes to the prophets speaking, we need to think of it as God speaking, even when that prophet is not quoting Him. When a prophet is giving an oracle we ought not press the issue of whether it is God or the prophets own words because both express God's will. Therefore, when we read about Micah's terrible sadness and foreboding, it is God's sadness and foreboding as well. God is not taking revenge; He is slow to anger... but He is a God of justice and so sins must be dealt with. God gets no perverse pleasure over decimating His own people. In fact, speaking in human emotional terms, it's the last thing He wants to do and it really wounds Him to do it.

I have told the story before of my sweet, adorable, affectionate mother who spanked me only 3 or 4 times that I can ever recall (and I'm amazed to this day that it wasn't far more). I wasn't the easiest kid to deal with. I was pretty mouthy, willful and determined. But in those few times she did spank me, *she* cried. Usually as much or more than I did. She was right and just to spank me and it was important for *my* development that she did. But it was the last thing she wanted to do, and it wounded her to have to do it. It's the best way I can think of to explain God's state of mind when He finally has to do something harsh to His people. And, it is reflected in the prophet's reactions to the news.

Beginning in verse 10 is a new unit. Verses 10 – 16 (the end of chapter 1) are spoken in the mood of a full-blown panic. Hysteria is the order of the day, so hyperbole is used to describe it. It is a terrifying vision. Micah, in his unique way, employs all sort of grammatical tricks and variances to make it as impactful as possible. There are wordplays and puns. He uses the way certain Hebrew words sound alike similarly to what in English grammar we call alliteration. It's not quite traditional poetry, but rather it is narrative that has a

poetic sound and nature to it. Because it is an unusual and not very traditional style, it can be most difficult to make heads or tails of. In fact, it seems likely that even the Hebrews of later times couldn't confidentially discern exactly what he was getting at, and so there are some inconsistencies on it was copied and passed along. This really shows up as we look to various translations in Latin, Aramaic, Coptic, and Old Greek. Put another way, we'll do what we can to unpack it, but what we have has been poorly transmitted forward even beginning in ancient times. I know that might be hard to digest; in fact, Kaiser was so short of words to describe it that he borrowed that of Peter Craigie's, who fashioned a brief fictional story of a Scottish pastor speaking to a Scottish audience about towns in Scotland. It goes like this:

Crieff will know grief. Forfar will forfeit. Crail will be frail. Wick will be burned. Stornoway will be blown away. Edinburgh will be no Eden. For Tain, there will be only pain.

It's a mix of sound alike, but also sometimes merely a play on words. But, I think he captures the essence of it well, and why if one didn't know anything about these Scottish towns, then it is all the harder to figure out just what it is he is describing and therefore the point he is making. Therefore, Micah's list of cities and towns and their fates operate similarly. There was something popularly thought or believed or known about a city or town in Micah's day, maybe their reputation (deserved or not) that was lost even a couple of centuries later to the Jewish people. David Noel Freedman chalks it up to Micah's very disturbed and turbulent state of mind upon God showing him this awful vision. Let's read this section.

RE-READ MICAH 1:10 – 16

Charles Feinberg sees in this list a geographical path and a logical progression. He claims that the first towns mentioned are in the hill country of Judah. Why? Because the enemy invaders are coming from the north and so will be dealing with cities and towns they encounter beginning with their most northern locations first. After those towns, the next are nearby to Jerusalem. While some of the exact locations are somewhat obscure, they all seem to be located in the lower lands of Judah, even adjacent to Philistia. These all seem to be

the names of real places and the disaster that will befall them real as well. And, it seems as though how the names of the towns sound in Hebrew probably have something to do with the description of what is said to happen to them. The problem is, it is very hard to detect in the only known manuscripts we have exactly what the relationship of the sounds that they have in common, and therefore what the point of each ultimately is.

The first city is called Gath. But is this the known Philistine city of Gath or is there another Gath somewhere in the southern kingdom of Judah? Therefore, why is it that news of the attack on Gath is not to be told? There are numerous guesses, but that's all there is. There is nothing to definitively say why. It might be because there never was a reason given, or the play on words (which nobody understands) was only discernable by the people who lived in Micah's day.

The next is Beth-le-aphrah. No one knows where this is, and there is no currently known mention of this town in any extant documents. A misspelling? A town that was created fictionally by Micah to make a point due to the way it sounds? A later copyist's alteration in an attempt to make sense of it? Nobody knows.

Shaphir. Again, unknown. Sa-anan. Unknown. In biblical Hebrew the word means "careless". So, possibly there was a town with a similar sounding name, but Micah slightly modified it in order to speak of why that place got attacked (that is, they were careless in some way). Beth-ha-esel. Some believe this must be a place known today as Tell Beit Misrim. The problem is that place is a little south of Hebron, almost in the Negev Desert, so that seems to break any possible location pattern of these cities and towns (if there actually *is* an intended pattern). Next comes Maroth. Again, unknown. So, it is hard for me to accept Feinberg's explanation as these places all being in the hill country of Israel and following a logical attack sequence by Assyria.

The first of only 2 known and confirmable place names in this list is Jerusalem, which we find at the end of verse 12. All that is said is that it is Yehoveh Himself who is sending disaster to the gates (meaning the city gates... the entrances) into the capital of Judah. Next, Lachish, the 2nd known city. Both of

these are walled fortress cities. Both are in Judah. Lachish was at first a Canaanite city captured by Joshua. It became an Israelite military installation and chariot city at the time of Solomon. In the 8th century B.C. Lachish was captured by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, and later the city still played an important role in Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem. In verse 13, Lachish is blamed as being the source of the sin that corrupted "the daughter of Zion". For all practical purposes, "daughter of Zion" is another title for the city of Jerusalem.

Next to be mentioned is a place called Moresheth-Gath. While we can't be certain, it is probable that this is Micah's hometown since he is called Micah of Moresheth. And, note the 2nd half of its name... Gath. There were a few Gaths scattered around, so it can be difficult at times to discern which one is being spoken about unless there is some more specific geographic description or perhaps mention of a specific historical event that happened there that has been remembered and documented. Next is Achzib. The Bible mentions 2 places with this same name. One is annotated by Joshua as being near a place called Mareshah, which lies on the border of the coastal plain in Judah. The other is in Galilee, but that can be ruled out as it was too far out of the way to be involved with this Assyrian invasion.

Mareshah was in Judah and settled by the descendants of Caleb (one of the 2 men who had urged Israel to go and take Canaan, after the 12 scouts had returned from reconnoitering the land). This place has been identified and today is called Tel Sandahanna. And finally, Adullam, who is said will receive the glory of Israel.

All these place names had significance to Micah and to Israel in the 8th century B.C., and each had certain characteristics and reputations that were commonly known to Micah's audience. But, for the most part, these became unknown in later centuries. Nevertheless, the center of it all, and ultimate goal of it all, is Jerusalem and the effects upon it.

Going back, now, to verse 10, and the subject of Gath. This is most probably the Philistine city of Gath. However, there was a long period of time when Gath had been taken away from Philistia and it became part of Judah...and

likely this is the situation, here. Therefore, God is saying that news of Assyria successfully attacking Gath is not to be reported... probably so that the Philistines won't be able to enjoy the news! At the same time, Israel is not to mourn it's taking. Why? It isn't said. However, it is reasonable to assume that it was because Gath not only remained thoroughly pagan after becoming part of Judah, but also, they corrupted the surrounding area with its pagan ways as Israel was always so easily led into idolatry.

Beth-le-aphrah is told to roll itself in the dust. This is typical mourning ritual. So, there will be great sadness in the city.

In verse 11, the inhabitants of Shafir are told to pass on their way in nakedness. This is a figure of speech that means the shame of being conquered captives. The issue with Za'anani is so cryptic that it is nearly impossible to understand, especially since when speaking of the residents there, the word is singular... that is, inhabitant... one. What this "going out" means is a mystery, and we'll not waste our time trying to figure it out. The wailing of Beth-ha-esel we can understand as mourning. The rest of the words make no sense.

Moving to verse 12, there is some connection between the town of Maroth and Jerusalem. What happens in Jerusalem seems to affect what happens to Maroth. It seems that Maroth expected some good thing to happen to them, but instead disaster befell Jerusalem and so their hope for something good vanished.

In verse 13, we get the important mention of chariots. Chariots were the ultimate war machines of those days. And because chariots were pulled by horses (and horses were not indigenous to the area), then they had to be imported... usually from Egypt. Since Lachish was a fortress city, then this clearly has something to do with the military. Yet, since the remainder of the matter of Lachish is about them exporting sin to Jerusalem and to Israel in general, it is tough to understand the connection between that and chariots. Outside of vague speculation, no explanation can be found.

Verse 14 changes up a wee bit. It opens with the Hebrew ***laken***, which means therefore. Used in its causal sense, it is saying that things previously said about other places is the reason... the cause... of why gifts are to be given to Moresheth-Gath. The Hebrew word usually translated as "gifts" is ***shilluchim***. It is mostly used in the Scriptures as the term used for the dowry given to bride as she departs her father's household. That is why many English translations will say "parting gifts". But, in certain forms, the root of the word can merely indicate to "send away". The other thing to notice is that whereas the narrative to this point is all about specific cities and towns, here we read "the houses of Achzib", which are said to be deceitful to the kings of Israel. Thus, it is hard to see that the parting gifts have anything joyful about them, nor can this have to do with marriage in some way. The mention of "houses" means families... probably the ruling families. So, it is that these royal families of the city of Achzib become traitorous to the kings of Israel. And, that's about all we can get from this... and it is hardly satisfying.

In the end, the best way Bible students can grasp verses 10 – 16 is to focus less on the details and more on the tone. The tone is mourning, grief, distress, and destruction. Nothing happy at all. I suspect that if such a message was brought into our modern-day houses of worship, and aimed at the religious institution, the leaders, pastors, and congregation, the presenter would not be invited back. And, if he was, the audience would be far smaller than the first visit. For going on a century, especially American churches have made a concerted effort to speak only of happy things, love, prosperity, and forgiveness. It is no wonder the Pastors run from the prospect of teaching the biblical prophets; or when they do, more often than not the words are spun to make them less foreboding or intended for others. This is exactly how it was in Micah's day, and it was what Micah was up against. Truth and facts are stubborn things, so it is easier to avoid them and just give the people what they want to hear. We'll stop here and continue in Micah next time.