

## **THE BOOK OF MICAH**

### **Lesson 3, Chapters 1 and 2**

We have just a couple more verses to go before we conclude Micah chapter 1, and transition to chapter 2. Perhaps this is good time, then, to put what we have read and examined to this point in a context and summation.

Micah has been expressing a nearly inconsolable, deeply felt grief over what God has told him to pass along to His people, Israel. He knew from the past Prophets the gravity of what this oracle meant. While on the one hand, in the spirit-world of Heaven, God's plans are already made and have, in a sense, been realized, on earth it is only when He gives those plans in the form of a prophetic oracle to a Prophet to announce that they are actually set into motion. They go from a vaporous thought or intent formerly unknown to any human, to a dynamic physical reality that is inalterable and unstoppable. Yehoveh's physical Universe along with its many created creatures will be affected in one way or another and to varying degrees.

Therefore, imagine if the Lord told you today that in 6 months your family and community are going to be wiped out, and there is nothing anyone will be able to do to stop it. When it happens, it is going to be awful, painful, and no one will escape. You would immediately be grief stricken; your stomach turning into a nauseated knot, your mind racing as it tries to process all that this means. I've watched many people in my life encounter terrible losses and tragedies and in the immediacy of the moment unable to utter more than incomplete sentences, darting from one incomplete thought to the next, their words at times almost reduced to unintelligible groans. This, to me, is the way I mentally picture Micah and his state of mind.

Therefore, after he has spoken the words, and then sits down to write them (at least I think it happened in that order), he is not a dispassionate observer... he is a participant. Not only that, but (as I just related to you), he understands that his uttering of these words makes him the inertial force that sets these events into motion. He cannot remove himself from bearing a certain psychological level of responsibility for what is going to happen. This is reflected in his often abrupt almost A.D.D. style, which makes many

translators and Bible scholars so uncomfortable that they want to re-write his words to make them more coherent and well structured, which necessarily removes so much of Micah's emotion.

What we find in his book, however, is perhaps less a structure and more a pattern in his words. That is, there is a rational, and rather typical, progression in this first chapter from a calling to the world and to Israel to listen, to an appearance of God Himself, to the accusation towards His people by God acting as prosecutor, to the verdict (the judgment of the cosmic judge), to the mourning and grief of Micah and of all those who will be affected. Because prophecy has a pattern, then in addition to the new information Micah will reveal, similar things given to the previous prophets are used to explain what is to happen. Even some direct quotes are borrowed and reused.

The cause of the calamity being foretold is due to Israel's idolatry and rebellion. Samaria is the chief perpetrator, but Jerusalem gets into the act as well. All Israel is to blame, so all Israel will suffer... though, as history attests, not all at the same time. God has no choice in the matter. If He is a God of righteousness and justice, then He must enact the justice pronounced in His covenant with Moses upon His chosen people. He is reluctant to do this, but His integrity is too perfect to do otherwise. The hope is that Israel will finally see their sin and wrong, repent, and return to the ways of their God and Father, Yehoveh. And, that the nations (Gentiles) will see just how powerful and just is the God of Israel and turn their allegiance to Him.

Let's read the final 2 verses of Micah chapter 1.

**CJB Micah 1:15-16** ***<sup>15</sup> Inhabitants of Mareshah, I have yet to bring you the one who will [invade and] possess you. The glory of Isra'el will come to 'Adulam. <sup>16</sup> Shave the hair from your head as you mourn for the children who were your delight; make yourselves as bald as vultures, for they have gone from you into exile.***

Mareshah is too often confused with Moresheth, Micah's hometown. It should not be so as Mareshah is a well-known place, which I brought to light in our previous lesson. It is also quite plain that the next part of the sentence says

that although an invader will pounce upon that city, it hasn't happened yet (that is, it is in some indefinite future). As it turns out, this invader was Assyria. What is not at all straightforward is the next statement which is: "The glory of Israel will come to Adulam". Adulam is a city to the south. But what is the "glory of Israel"? For a very long time Bible scholars have assigned the meaning as the leadership or the elite or the ruling nobles of Israel.

Some of this comes from a story in 1Samuel 22, when David fled and went to a cave in Adulam to hide out. When his family heard about it, they too joined him there. Later in 2Samuel 23, David along with a contingent of family and others were still there. It was harvest time and 3 of the chiefs of Judah went down to visit David. So, the bulk of Bible scholars think that the glory of Israel is a term derived from this episode of David, when the leadership went to him in Adulam. I must say, I struggle with this. This seems far-fetched; nothing more than a guess and a consensus, and I have nowhere else encountered the notion that the glory of Israel was wrapped up in its noblemen.

The term for glory is **kavod**, and it is regularly applied to God. In fact, The Glory is as much a special name and individual manifestation of God as is the Shekinah or the Angel of Yehoveh. That said, when used that way it is typically rendered **kavod Yehoveh**. Therefore, here in Micah this might be referring to The Glory (of God) that moves itself to Adulam. And, it could even be some kind of expression or idiom that was used for a time and disappeared, and so, we have no idea what it means.

In verse 16, it sounds as though an instruction is being given: "Shave your heads!" Why? It can only be as a cultural sign of mourning. Mourning over who? The children of your delight. The immediate question we need to ask is: is this command to shave one's head a command from God? Is it Micah telling this people to get ready to mourn? What is this? And who are the children of your delight? Interestingly, Deuteronomy says this:

**CJB Deuteronomy 14:1** ***"You are the people of Yehoveh your God. You are not to gash yourselves or shave the hair above your foreheads in mourning for the dead..."***

Because of this, I do not think this instruction is coming from God. Rather it is from the thoughts of Micah. We must never let it pass by us that the great Prophets of old, or the great kings or other Bible heroes, never followed God perfectly. And, even after receiving the Torah, Israel still coveted many customs they had picked up from the pagan world (and never seemed to have stopped picking up more); customs that had been made part of their culture for so long that their existence and practice were never questioned. Without doubt, Micah was no different. He wasn't a Torah scholar. He was a fairly common Israelite whom God chose to be His prophet. So, we learn from this that the customary mourning process for Israel at that time involved men shaving their heads, although it was against the Torah.

That brings us to the question of, who are the "children of your delight?" There are two possible choices, as I see it. Either this is God talking and "children of your delight" means all of Jacob's offspring... all Israel. Or, this means the children of the Israelite families. Sons and daughters in their society. Because I take it that this is NOT God speaking in verse 16, then my choice is the latter. It is just a way of speaking of the children of families. And the tragic calamity that they are to mourn for, is that they have been taken captive by an invader. That invader was eventually to be Assyria, and hundreds of thousands from the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel... with Samaria as its capital... were taken captive and dispersed all over Asia and Northern Africa. These have become the people that are called The 10 Lost Tribes of Israel. Let's move on to chapter 2.

### **READ MICAH CHAPTER 2 all**

The opening verse of Micah chapter 2 is essentially an allusion to, and minor rewording of, Psalm 36. There we read:

**CJB Psalm 36:5 *He devises trouble as he lies in bed; so set is he on his own bad way that he doesn't hate evil.***

The first few verses of this chapter are rightly called an oracle of woe. It but continues the tone and mood of chapter one that is anything but happy. Just as in the 10 Commandments that we have the 10 principles by which all laws

and commands of God are based upon, there are those that describe sins against Yehoveh, and those that describes sins that men commit upon their fellow humans. Chapter 2 is primarily about those human-to-human transgressions. Another way to say it is that the focus is on injustice and oppression. The New Testament uses a different word for the same thing: tribulation.

The first verse opens as God's prophetic warnings to Israel often do, with addressing the leadership and the elite. We know that's the case because the verse ends with: "because it is in the power of their hand". Yeshua expressed the same principle.

**CJB Mark 7:21** *For from within, out of a person's heart, come forth wicked thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery...*

Most evil is not spontaneous; it has been contemplated, mulled over, and decided upon. In this verse what is being referred to is the Commandment not to covet. It is that coveting that is what is talked about here as lying in bed and thinking up evil things to do. The evil-doer covets and then plots how to get what he covets. Again, let's listen to the words of our Savior about this same process.

**CJB Matthew 5:21-24** *<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that our fathers were told, 'Do not murder,' and that anyone who commits murder will be subject to judgment. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who nurses anger against his brother will be subject to judgment; that whoever calls his brother, 'You good-for-nothing!' will be brought before the Sanhedrin; that whoever says, 'Fool!' incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of Gei-Hinnom! <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the Temple altar and you remember there that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift where it is by the altar, and go, make peace with your brother. Then come back and offer your gift.*

Sin occurs first in our minds. Only after deciding to do wrong is this actually brought about physically. Whatever evil occurs in our minds is a sin against the Father. Whatever evil we then carry out is a sin against our fellow human.

What Micah 2:1 describes is Israelite leaders and the elite of society who are in power and it seems to be their favorite pastime to lie in bed at night and think up ways to satisfy their covetous nature. How do I get more? More wealth. More power. More control. More status. Sadly, these evil-doers often win because they have the power to win. For them, might is right. None of this is new to Israel, because none of this is new to humanity in general. But, just as with shaving their heads bald in a sign of mourning (something forbidden by God), so the leaders assume that they have the right to have whatever they want using the power that comes from their privileged position. An idea that propels the pagan world. They think, God put me here, so I can increase my wealth because that's what He wants for me. It is kind of the ancient version of the Prosperity Doctrine.

**CJB Proverbs 3:27-28** ***<sup>27</sup> Don't withhold good from someone entitled to it when you have in hand the power to do it. <sup>28</sup> Don't tell your neighbor, "Go away! Come another time; I'll give it to you tomorrow," when you have it now.***

As much as our intentions matter in life, that isn't necessarily the basis for whether Yehoveh considers our thoughts and deeds as something deserving merit or something deserving His disapproval. Rather, obedience to God's covenant laws and commands is the determiner. And just as doing evil begins in our minds with our thoughts, so does doing good. Thus, obedience begins with the mental determination to do obedience to God's commandments. Our bodies follow our minds, not the other way around. This is why we are to think on God's commandments day and night. Because so as we occupy our minds, will our behavior reflect it.

Verse 2 says:

**CJB Micah 2:2** ***They covet fields and seize them; they take over houses as well, doing violence to both owner and house, to people and their inherited land.***

Two very specific crimes are highlighted: the forceful taking of someone's field (their inherited land), and the forceful taking of someone's house from people

who are helpless to prevent it. The term “house” carries a dual meaning in the Bible. It doesn’t only mean a building where people live, it means the family itself. And that is how we are to understand it here. Biblically, when we get mention of someone’s fields and houses the understanding is that this is land held by the family going back to the time of Moses and Joshua. In an agrarian society, land and family form a kind of organic unit. This is the land that God allotted to a specific family. A Torah principle is that such land is never to be lost from that family. If you lose the land your home and family are on, you also lose the unity of residence and family. It is not as if there are not legitimate times that such things happen. Someone might seek a loan based on the collateral of his expected land production but not be able to pay it back. God’s remedy for this is that the man (and his family, at times) may become bondservants to the lender (and bondservants are only in servitude for a set amount of time... they are not now owned by their master). But the foreclosed land is not to stay in the possession of the new owner in perpetuity. Rather, in the Year of Jubilee, The Year of Release, the land must be returned to its original owner and whatever is left of the loan to repay must be forgiven. This is because the land was meant to always stay in the possession of the family who originally received it as their allotment. Thus, to take away a man’s land by deception or force was not only despicable, but it was also a direct offense to God as it broke the terms of the covenant God made with Israel.

We need to be a bit careful not to carry this too far in modern society. An owner of a farm does not get his inheritance from God. An owner of a residence doesn’t have perpetual rights to it if he can’t pay for it. Yet, neither should a landlord unjustly evict a tenant, nor a lender unjustly foreclose on a farm or a home just because they have might and power to do so. The contract we have to rent or own property is NOT a covenant; and certainly not a covenant with God.

Verse 3 says:

**CJB Micah 2:3 *Therefore this is what Yehoveh says: "Against this family I am planning an evil from which you will not withdraw your necks; nor will you walk with your heads held high, for it will be an evil time."***

Micah's on and off poetry is "off" again in verse 3. This is but a terse message of warning... a threat... of what will happen to people in power who do this dastardly thing to helpless people that is elucidated in the previous verse. Micah makes it clear these are God's warnings and words, not his. However, one doesn't always have to be rich and powerful to lord over another in an unjust way. While this message emphasizes the powerful, it also applies to the Israelite nation in general.

If verse 1 – 5 are looked at as a literary unit that is an oracle of woe and warning, then verse 3 is like the fulcrum of a teeter-totter. It is the pivot point and focus of this unit. And notice the use of the word "family" as opposed to he or she... an individual. Not only is this what makes this a universal warning, but it also implies that the family of the powerful person who might think to do such unjust things will suffer. In a kind of Lex Talionis.... proportional justice... response by Yehoveh, because the unjust taking of land affects the entire family... even the descendants of that family into the future... then the punishment will equally affect the perpetrator's family. But now, let's look at this in Hebrew to take it to the fuller scope intended.

What is usually translated into English as "family" is in Hebrew ***mishpachah***. While it can mean family, in the Western world of modern times, for us a family is a mother, father, and their children. It is fairly encapsulated into something more describe as "immediate family". However, in the ancient Hebrew sense, the scope of the word is larger. So, it is better translated as clan, giving it the sense of a large, extended (even blended) family group. And, considering that in this narrative God spoke of "inherited land", then it might be even more appropriate to think of it in terms of meaning tribe. This is because the land allotment by Moses and Joshua (each tribes' inheritance) on God's behalf was done tribe-by-tribe. Only after that, would each tribal chief allot land according to his several clans. The point being that the extent of who would be affected by God's punishment is much bigger than how it seems to appear from the typical English translations.

When God says He is planning to do an evil upon them, it means it quite literally. God is not merely going to lift His hand of blessing or protection and

let human nature take its course; He is going to divinely devise and then *cause* some disaster to befall them. The word “evil” that we find here is in Hebrew *rah*. It has a wide range of meaning and usage, more than only wicked as opposed to good. Disaster, calamity, misery, injury... all these are proper meanings depending on the exact context. The reason is that the ancients believed that some spirit or another causes bad things to happen. And, whereas gentile Christians have been taught to see God in an extremely narrow light of only acting in love and mercy and always for our best personal benefit, that is not what the Scriptures tell us, and it is not how the Hebrews thought of Him. They saw God as able and willing to bring forth both good and evil. Why would they think that?

<sup>YLT</sup> **Isaiah 45:7** *Forming light, and preparing darkness, Making peace, and preparing evil, I am Jehovah, doing all these things.'*

I chose to present the YLT version because it is the closest thing to fully literal. English versions tend to water down what Yehoveh said through Isaiah. Notice how in Isaiah the actual wording speaks of God “preparing” evil; and how that compares to Micah that says God is “planning an evil”. It is premeditated and not spontaneous. It is all part of God’s plan. However, do not misread this and think this evil is speaking of wickedness. Rather it means to reduce order to chaos, to make somebody miserable, to create a calamity.

This “yoke” that Yehoveh is placing upon this clan or tribe for their lack of justice and compassion on the weaker members of their society, means the outcome. The consequences. Sometimes a resulting obligation. “Yoke” is NOT a negative word; it is neutral. A yoke can be good and light, or it can be oppressive and heavy (and degrees in between those extremes). This yoke is the worst kind. It is heavy and harmful. It is all negative. And God says that this clan or tribe will not be able to remove it from their own neck, because it is He who put it there. The disaster and subsequent misery are not avoidable.

We know from history that this great evil... this calamity... happened. First it happened late in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel, with its capital of Samaria, as it was invaded and conquered by Assyria. A little over a century later it would happen to the southern

kingdom of Judah, with its capital of Jerusalem, as it was invaded and conquered by Babylon. Therefore, the nobles of Israel who walked around proudly no longer would. They would be reduced to common captives and all their wealth confiscated. They had used their power to do evil against their own people, and now God was reciprocating by bringing evil against them and removing their power due to its misuse. It will be an extended time of misery and catastrophe. For the northern kingdom, only now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has a door been opened for the members of Ephraim/Israel to end their misery, and to come back to their land, Israel, and be restored. The 10 Lost Tribes are coming home in a growing trickle from all over Asia and northern Africa, that will someday become a flood. That yoke of evil had been on their necks for 2700 years, and we, today, stand as witnesses that it is at long last being removed! Let's move on to verse 4.

**CJB Micah 2:4** *On that day they will take up a dirge for you; sadly lamenting, they will wail, "We are completely ruined! Our people's land has changed hands. Our fields are taken away from us; instead of restoring them, he parcels them out."*

Back to some poetry. Unfortunately, the English masks not only the poetry but a play on words. Admittedly, it is awkward sounding when said more literally, but when seen as it really is, then we can see the Prophet's intent. So, better is "on that day they will take up a lament, with a lament of lamentation". Three Hebrew words are used, all coming from the same root. They are **nahah, nehi, nihyah**. It helps to give the hearer or reader the sense of a monotonous wailing of grief. And, since most prophecies and oracles were passed on mouth to ear, poetry and word play were catchy and easier to remember and pass along than just straight prose.

The term "on that day" is always the same as The Day of Judgment. But the Day of Judgment is not a one-time event that is still in our future. There will be a future Day of Judgment, but there have already been days of judgment in the past. It conforms to the regular prophetic protocol that prophecies happen and then happen again later, sometimes even a 3<sup>rd</sup> time. Each time the scope and size of the effect grows larger until the final fulfillment that brings it to its fullest intent.

Now for a little twist. Grammar matters. And the grammar of the first several words of this verse cause the English translation that we typically find to be pretty doubtful. Francis Anderson points out that the focus of the verbs used indicates two different subjects and circumstances. That is, we probably have two different speakers, and the words uttered at two different times (again, from a prophetic standpoint). The first lament will be uttered on the occasion of “on that day”. The second complaint of “we are completely ruined” has a tense of something that had already been spoken by the person who is complaining but may be spoken again at a later time. In other words, unlike what it can seem when we hear it, we don’t have here a taunt of the victor or the scornful onlookers, quite satisfied with the sad condition of the defeated Israelites. Rather the “they” is those who are going to speak these laments. The “they” is Israel.

This is once again the kind of difficult, awkward wording that we find throughout Micah, which causes some translators to virtually substitute what is said with restructured words and phrases that they think are better. It is only looking at things like verb tenses that helps us to sort it out and get a better and intended sense of it, but even then, there can often be more than one possible outcome. The “they” in this passage are ruined because “our people’s” land has changed hands. That is, the land meant to be occupied by Israel has now been taken from them by Assyria, and so Assyria lays claim to it. The statement “our fields are taken away from us”, is the Israelites speaking. When we next read “instead of restoring them, he parcels them out” the question becomes, who is the “he” who does the parceling out? I think while the structure of the passage is most difficult, we can look at the previous verses to lead us to the answer that the “he” is Yehoveh. So, the meaning is that while the enemy (Assyria) takes the fields away from the Israelites, instead of God riding to their rescue (that is, instead of hurriedly restoring those fields to Israel by taking them back from Assyria), God (shockingly) parcels them out to someone else... an entirely different people...non-Hebrews.

Bottom line: the northern kingdom of Ephraim/Israel is going to lose their nation and their inherited land and farms to the Assyrians, on account of God causing it. And, instead of perhaps this being only a rather short-lived

situation, God is not going to take the fields and land back from the new possessors and give it back to the former Israelite residents of the northern kingdom. And indeed, until this century in which we currently live, Yehoveh has not restored them. But the process is now underway. God always prophecies doom but then later restoration. Think of how many generations of Israelites have come and gone since the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. And now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century since any identifiable tribal connection between a tribe or a clan and some specific piece of land in the Holy Land that in ancient times their ancestors may have possessed, such an arrangement is long gone. There is no way at all to prove any kind of certain land plots belonging to certain clans of Israelites whose ancestors were kicked out some 2700 years ago! So, the restoration will happen on a different basis, as it is happening now, with an ambivalent world not even bothering to understand its significance (and by the way, not much of Israel understands it, either). On to verse 5, which finishes up this first oracle of woe.

***CJB Micah 2:5 Therefore, you will have no one in the assembly of Yehoveh to stretch out a measuring line and restore the land assigned by lot.***

This verse has been explained in 2 or 3 ways, but I think those ways are a stretch. Rather, it more or less says what I just explained. That is, if the time ever should come for a restoration, no Israelite will be able to measure or survey and determine any property boundaries nor have any means to determine ownership. And please note the final remark, “the land assigned by lot”. So, indeed, this is not speaking of some kind of typical land transaction of buying and selling. This is speaking of how the tribes were originally allotted land “by lot” during the time of Moses and Joshua. This is the ancient Israelite ancestral land. Not a replacement or a substitute land coming from any kind of land swap. And, by speaking this as he did, Micah makes it clear that any hope for restoration will be long after anyone that was exiled was still alive to help to identify which families lived where. That is, a long (although undetermined) time is going to pass before any hope of restoration should be contemplated, and it isn’t going to happen because of some kind of land designations that were recorded.

Please notice, there is nothing sympathetic towards Israel here. Israel has brought this long-term catastrophe, this evil, upon itself. Israel is guilty and Israel is paying the price as called for in the Mosaic Covenant. Assyria was not wicked per se in doing what they did to Israel; rather they were used by God as His hand of judgment on His people. While the return of the 10 Lost Tribes is assured, the return of their individual land portions is not.

Let's move on to verse 6, and a new prophetic literary unit.

**CJB Micah 2:6** *"Don't preach!"- thus they preach! "They shouldn't preach about these things. Shame will not overtake us"-*

Verses 2:6 – 11 becomes that new literary unit. It helps a little to look to the YLT to add some perspective.

**YLT Micah 2:6** *Ye do not prophesy -- they do prophesy, They do not prophesy to these, It doth not remove shame.*

Using the word "prophesy" is much preferable to using the word "preach". The Hebrew word is *nataph*, and it certainly can mean preach. However, the objects of God's glare in this unit are prophets. And prophets of old prophesy; they don't preach. The only reason I make this point is that in the Western world of today, there is a distinct difference for us between the meaning of preach and prophesy. For us, to preach means to make a religious speech. To prophesy, means to speak of something in the future that others don't know about. But even the word prophesy had a different meaning in ancient times than what it does today, at least in how the Bible means it.

In the Old Testament, to prophesy meant to bring a new revelation that God has given to a Prophet and pass it along to someone or to the public. In the New Testament, to prophesy is more akin to teaching. It is about telling people what was long ago written in the Old Testament. So, the context of this verse of Micah demands that we use the word "prophesy" and mean it in the Old Testament way.

What is actually happening in this unit is Micah is having a confrontation with other prophets in and around Israel in his day. He makes them a separate category, but they are part of the conspiracy of the religious leaders and the noblemen of Israel to tell the people lies. So, these prophets carry much guilt and shame for what they are doing.

This was an era of prophetic activity that probably has no peer. Scores of prophets were running around Israel, in competition with one another, for an audience that would reward them for what they had to say. It's not unlike a person going to a spiritualist or a fortune teller today, and paying money for something the person wants to know. Nearly always, the spiritualist will probe and find out what it is that person is hoping to hear and then giving it to them. The reasoning being that is that people don't want to pay for bad news. It was no different in Micah's era.

These prophets were often graduates of prophet academies. It was a lucrative occupation for some. So, just like Pastors have for a few hundred years been taught in seminaries about standard ways of doing things as heads of churches, so did these prophets learn about what garb to wear, what gestures to make, what words to say and how to say them, etc. The people looked at them and believed them because they had the proper prophet credentials. The prophets who were vying for attention would of course argue that they had the truth, but the other guy didn't. In reality, they learned how make up messages in their own minds and then sell them to an unsuspecting public. But God's true Prophets were something else entirely. They didn't go to an academy. They didn't use their own thoughts or words. They didn't prophesy as an occupation or as a way to making a living. And they didn't choose themselves to be prophets. They were hand-picked by God, usually plucked away from some other life or occupation, and it was always unexpected. Inevitably it was costly to them, many losing their lives in order to serve God in such a way.

We'll pause here and continue next time.