

SESSION ONE

THE BOOK OF MICAH

Synthesis and Highlights of the Book

I. INTRODUCTION

The name Micah (Heb. מִיכָה) means "who is like Yahweh?" According to 1:1, he ministered as a prophet during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. This would date his ministry generally to the time 740-710 BC, and the writing of the book just before the invasion and destruction of Samaria in 722. Micah is apparently a prophet from the Southern Kingdom (see 1:1,14), but he writes to both kingdoms. Characteristic of many of the prophets, there is an announcement that judgment is ripe because of covenant disobedience, a warning that the LORD is (*or* will be) disciplining His people, and that He will bring about an exile from the land of promise. In similar fashion to Hosea, the book alternates between a "judgment" section and a "salvation" section. By "salvation" section, I mean a looking to the future when God will fulfill His promises to the nation: regathering them from exile, restoring the land and bringing about a righteous kingdom under the rule of the Messiah.

II. STRUCTURE

A clue to the structure of the book is detected in the repetition of the word "Hear!" (שִׁמְעוּ) in 1:2, 3:1, and 6:1. This corresponds to the threefold division of the book, namely, 1:2—2:13, 3:1—5:15, and 6:1—7:20.¹ Confirming this basic layout is the fact that in each of these three sections we have "judgment" followed by one or more "salvation" sections:

Judgment	Salvation
1:2—2:11	2:12-13
3:1-12	4:1—5:15
6:1—7:7	7:8-20

Although these are not equally proportioned, the pattern is clear. In the middle of the book, we have the most extensive "salvation" section. Significantly, this salvation section is the most thorough treatment about the future kingship of Israel's Messiah.

In the first major section of the book (1:2—2:13), judgment is announced for God's unrighteous nation. In this section, there is an indictment against both kingdoms in the form of a divine covenant lawsuit, and a clear statement that God is going to destroy Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom (e.g., 1:6). Exile is foretold, and God's severe judgment is vindicated by a description of the corruption of His people (2:1-11). Nevertheless, in the brief "salvation" section (2:12-13), the hope of a regathered remnant with whom God can fulfill His covenant promises is assured.

¹For a helpful presentation of the structure and development of thought based on this three-part division of the Book of Micah, see Kenneth L. Barker, "A Literary Analysis of the Book of Micah," *Bib Sac* 155:620 (Oct-Dec 1998): 437-48.

The second and middle section of the book (3:1—5:15) revolves around the concern of leadership for the nation. Chapter three surveys the present leadership and denounces it as corrupt, whether rulers, (false) prophets, or priests. If the leadership of the nation is corrupt, the nation itself will certainly be corrupt. Chapters four and five form a stark contrast to this, in which Micah looks into the distant future of the nation ("in the last days," 4:1) to view the time when the nation will have a righteous leader. This, of course, will be when the nation is ruled by her Messiah in the Millennial Kingdom. A description of life at the time when Messiah rules is portrayed in 4:1-8. This focuses upon His ministry and the blessings that will come to the nation at that time. When the details of this passage are compared to other Scripture, it is evident that this will come about after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. A description of the Messiah Himself is given in 5:2-4.

The final major section of the book is more emotional in tone, for it looks at God's loyalty to the nation in spite of the judgment that He must bring. Notice God's grieving of heart in 6:3-5. Nevertheless, the evidence warrants judgment (6:9-16). Micah himself laments what must take place (7:1-7), but the book closes with a "salvation" section that God will forgive His people and restore them (7:8-20). In the final three verses, we have a "Hymn of Praise" to God in light of His forgiveness, compassion and faithfulness to Israel. This hymn begins with the rhetorical question, "Who is a God like Thee?" (מִי־אֱלֹהִים כְּמוֹךָ), appropriately penned by the prophet whose name *Micah* (מִיכָה) means "who is like Yahweh?" The final verse makes mention of Abraham, because God's eventual goodness to Israel will be in keeping with the Abrahamic covenant.

For an overview of the structure, see the chart (page "*Suppl. 1.1*").

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KINGDOM

A. The millennial temple will be prominent in the world.

"And it will come about in the last day
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
will be established as the chief of the mountains.
It will be raised above the hills." 4:1

B. The peoples of the world will be attracted to Jerusalem to be personally instructed by the LORD.

"And the peoples will stream to it.
And many nations will come and say,
'Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
And to the house of the God of Jacob,
That He may teach us about His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.'" 4:1b-2

C. Divine revelation will go forth from Jerusalem.

"For from Zion will go forth the law,
Even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." 4:2b

D. The LORD will serve as Judge from Jerusalem.

- "And He will judge between many peoples
And render decisions for mighty, distant nations." 4:3a
- E. Peace will be universal.
"Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they train for war." 4:3b
- F. Israel will dwell in security and peace.
"And each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken." 4:4
- G. Israel will be regathered.
"In that day,' declares the LORD,
'I will assemble the lame,
And gather the outcasts,
Even those whom I have afflicted.'" 4:6
- H. The regathered remnant will be a strong nation under the LORD's personal reign.
"I will make the lame a remnant
and the outcasts a strong nation,
And the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion
From now on and forever." 4:7
- I. Jerusalem's dominion will be restored.
"And as for you, tower of the flock,
Hill of the daughter of Zion,
To you it will come--
Even the former dominion will come,
The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem." 4:8

IV. PREDICTION OF ISRAEL'S MESSIAH (5:2-4)

There is a significant time gap between 5:1 and 5:2. Micah 5:1 closes the subsection that began in 4:9. This unit (4:9—5:1) reflects both bad news and good news for the nation. The bad news is that Babylon will lead them away into exile (4:10). The good news (vv 12-13), however, is that Judah will be rescued from exile and eventually gain victory over all her enemies (at the time of some future eschatological attack upon the city). In the final verse of this unit (5:1), the focus returns to the near future of the nation, and the reader is left with the sad note of Jerusalem being under siege. In 5:1c we

are told, "With a rod they will smite the judge (שֹׁפֵט) of Israel on the cheek." This probably refers to Judah's king who would be assaulted at the time of siege. Hence, this may be a reference to Zedekiah who was the king of Israel at the time of Jerusalem's downfall in 586 BC.

Chapter 5:2 is a great leap forward in the nation's history. Though Judah's king in 586 would be severely disciplined, this would not thwart God's plans or nullify His promises. He will raise up a king with whom the Davidic covenant promises can be fulfilled. 5:2 makes the astounding prediction that from Bethlehem Ephrathah, God is going to raise up one who will be ruler (מְשִׁיחַ) for the nation of Israel. Ephrathah was an ancient name for Bethlehem (see Gen 35:19). Even though Bethlehem was such a small little clan of the tribe of Judah, nevertheless she would have this great honor of being the birthplace of the nation's future ruler. Of course, this was in keeping with the Davidic covenant that a future ruler would come from the line of David (who also came from Bethlehem). This was not a veiled prophecy either, for in the days of Jesus the people anticipated that Messiah would come from Bethlehem, and they based this belief on Micah 5:2:

"Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.' Still others were saying, 'Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? 'Has not the Scripture said that THE CHRIST COMES FROM THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID, AND FROM BETHLEHEM, the village where David was?'" (Jn 7:41-42; cf. Matt 2:5-6).

"His goings forth" (NASB) is a translation of the Hebrew participle מְצַאֲתָיו (root צִא). This is related to the previous line which declared that "One will go forth (צֵא) for Me" (from the same root צִא). Just as this future king will go forth to serve YHWH as ruler of Israel (to be fulfilled after the Second Coming), so he has gone forth on behalf of YHWH at other times in the distant past.² This pictures the preincarnate Christ and His work on YHWH's behalf throughout history. The phrase "From the days of eternity" as rendered by the NASB is better translated "from ancient times," for this does not look at eternity past but rather the distant past.³

Verse 3 states,

"Therefore, He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel."

This is a prediction that God will give His people up to discipline and being scattered among the nations until the time of labor is finished. The woman in labor is a reference to Israel, but the bearing of the child is not a reference to the incarnation of Christ. To understand the point, we must look back to the previous unit which began with the figure of childbirth (see 4:9). The labor of childbirth is a picture of Israel's discipline, and the giving of birth is the relief that comes when the discipline is completed. So, Micah 5:3 is looking forward to the time that Israel's labor (discipline) will cease. This will come about at the time of the Second Coming, when her Messiah will come forth to be ruler as the previous verse anticipated (5:2).

Verse 4 goes on to picture the universal extent of Messiah's rule: "at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth." Not only will He be the ruler for Israel, but He will even be the ruler for all the earth. This, of course, is in keeping with God's universal intentions in the Abrahamic covenant.

²An alternative interpretation is to translate 5:2d as the NIV: "whose origins are from of old." This would refer to His roots in David and the covenant promised him.

³The phrase מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם means the distant past. A study of מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם (only found in Isa 63:9; Amos 9:11; Mic 5:1; 7:14; and Mal 3:4) reveals that this never means eternity but "ancient days." It is true that Christ has existed throughout eternity past, but that is not the point of Micah 5:2.

This is the one that Israel waits for: "And this One will be our peace (שָׁלוֹם)." The one to be born in Bethlehem will be the ruler that will bring שָׁלוֹם to the nation, i.e., a righteous rule of peace and blessing. This will be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom described previously in Micah 4:1-8.

V. A LESSON FOR OUR LIVES

Chapter three of Micah is very instructive about corruptions on the part of those in leadership, including spiritual leadership. Notice 3:5,

"Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; when they have something to bite with their teeth, they cry, 'Peace,' but against him who puts nothing in their mouths, they declare holy war."

For some who operate "in the LORD's name," their message is conditioned upon their personal gain. Feed them well, and they will say what you want to hear! Remember, men and women, we speak in the sight of God without respect to man. We speak the truth of God, without regard to whether or not it will pay off for us. There will be many times when your adherence to God and the proclamation of the truth of His Word may put you at odds with men, even fellow men of the body of Christ. But our goal is not to say what others want to hear; we don't accommodate our message for the sake of making a living and having a nice income. Even if our stand for God's truth should cost us our job, our responsibility is to be loyal to Him who put us into His service. Personally, I have seen men in the ministry suddenly change theology, not because they had come to new convictions by reason of study in the Word, but because it was necessary to get a job in a certain denomination or to work in a certain school. The weakest man in the ministry is the man who has lost a clear conscience before God!