

MICAH

Introduction:

Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "To the writings of this great prophet his book bears a close resemblance both in form and in contents, although he did not, as was the case with Isaiah, come into personal contact with the kings and make his influence felt in political affairs." In some instances statements in both prophetic books are so similar, it is difficult to establish who is the author and who the copier.

From *The Faussets Bible Dictionary* we copy the following about the prophet and his book: "Sixth of the minor prophets in the Hebrew canon, third in the Septuagint. Micah prophesied in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah somewhere between 756 and 697 B.C. Contemporary with Isaiah in Judah, with whose prophecies his have a close connection (compare Mic 4:1-3 with Isa 2:2-4, the latter stamping the former as inspired), and with Hosea and Amos during their later ministry in Israel. His earlier prophecies under Jotham and Ahaz were collected and written out as one whole under Hezekiah."

Jeremiah quoted Micah in his book, saying: "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets. Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the LORD and seek his favor?' "¹

On the Name Micah:

The name Micah is derived from Mikaiahuw, which means "who is as Jah?" In ch. 7:18, the prophet refers to his own name when he says: "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?"²

Time of writing:

Micah prophesied "during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah," which was from about 738 to 690 B.C. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "These three kings reigned about threescore years; and Micah is supposed to have prophesied about forty or fifty years; but no more of his prophecies have reached posterity than what are contained in this book, nor is there any evidence that anymore was written. His time appears to have been spent chiefly in preaching and exhorting; and he was directed to write those parts only that were calculated to profit succeeding generations." It seems that chapter 1 was discourse spoken already under Ahaz, and that chapters 2 to 5 contain prophecies pronounced during the reign of King Hezekiah. There is no mention of Samaria in the chapters 2 to 5. That city was probably already destroyed, or at least it was besieged. Micah's discourses in those chapters were probably pronounced after the year 722 BC, but earlier than 701 BC, as the reformation of Hezekiah had not yet been entirely completed.

The Historical Background of the Book:

Micah began his ministry on the reign of Jotham. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* notes, "During Jotham's regency, a formidable combination of the Northern Kingdom and the Syrian state, with Damascus as capital, began to show signs of hostility to Judah. For 4 years before Jotham's death, Pekah occupied the throne of Samaria. The Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser III, was then pushing his arms westward, and a Syrian league was formed to oppose them. Jotham may have refused to join this league. The political situation at his death is thus described: In those days Yahweh began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah (2 Kings 15:37)."

Micah denounced the idolatries of King Ahaz. The same *Encyclopaedia* writes about Ahaz: "Ahaz seems at once to have struck out an independent course wholly opposed to the religious traditions of his

¹ See Jer. 26:18

² ch. 3:18

nation. His first steps in this direction were the causing to be made and circulated of molten images of the Baalim, and the revival in the valley of Hinnom, south of the city, of the abominations of the worship of Moloch (2 Chron 28:2-3). He is declared to have made his own son pass through the fire (2 Kings 16:3); the chronicler puts it even more strongly: he burnt his children in the fire (2 Chron 28:3)."

Micah's prophesy in vs. 6 of the first chapter about Samaria "I will make Samaria a heap of rubble," indicates that he began his ministry before the year 722 BC, since Shalmaneser and Sargon took Samaria in the sixth year of Hezekiah in that year.

The Faucets Dictionary observes: "The high places (Mic 1:5) probably allude to those in Jotham's and Ahaz reigns (2 Kings 15:35; 16:4). The horses and chariots (Mic 5:10) accord with Jotham time, when Uzziah's military establishments still flourished (2 Chron 26:11-15). Mic 5:12-14; 6:16, the statutes of Omri are kept and all the works of the house of Ahab, accord with the reign of Ahaz who 'walked in the way of the kings of Israel' (2 Kings 16:3)."

Contents of the Book:

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia notes: "The thrice repeated phrase 'Hear ye' (Mic 1:2; 3:1; 6:1) divides the whole into three parts. The middle division (Mic 3-5) has Messiah and His kingdom for its subject. The first division prepares for this by foretelling the overthrow of the world kingdoms. The third division is the appeal based on the foregoing, and the elect church's anticipation of Gods finally forgiving His peoples' sin completely, and restoring Israel because of the covenant with Jacob and Abraham of old. The intimations concerning the birth of Messiah as a child and His reign in peace, and Jacobs remnant destroying adversaries as a 'lion,' but being 'a dew from the Lord amidst many people' (Mic 4:9-5:5), correspond to Isa 7:14-16; 9:6-7. This middle section is the climax, falling into four strophes (Mic 4:1-8; 4:9-5:2,8-9,10-15). Mic 6:7 form a vivid dialogue wherein Jehovah expostulates with Israel for their sinful and monstrous ingratitude, and they attempt to reply and are convicted (Mic 6:6-8). Then the chosen remnant amidst the surrounding gloom looks to the Lord and receives assurance of final deliverance. Zacharias (Luke 1:72-73) reproduces the closing anticipation (Mic 7:16-20), 'Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.' Sennacherib's invasion is foreseen, Mic 1:9-16; especially Mic 1:13-14, compare 2 Kings 18:14-17. Jerusalem's destruction in Mic 3:12; 7:13. The Babylonian captivity and deliverance in Mic 4:10,1-8; 7:11, confirming the genuineness of the latter half of Isaiah his contemporary, with whom Micah has so much in common and who (Isa) similarly foretells the captivity and deliverance. The fall of Assyria and Babylon are referred to (Mic 5:5-6; 7:8,10)."

Outline of the Book:

- The Nelsons Illustrated Bible Dictionary* gives the following outline of the book:
- I. The Prediction of Judgment 1:1--3:12
 - A. Introduction to the Book of Micah 1:1
 - B. The Judgment on the People 1:2--2:13
 - 1. Judgment on Samaria 1:2-7
 - 2. Judgment on Judah 1:8-16
 - 3. Cause of the Judgment 2:1-11
 - 4. Promise of Future Restoration 2:12-13
 - C. The Judgment on the Leadership 3
 - 1. Judgment on Princes 3:1-4
 - 2. Judgment on Prophets 3:5-8
 - 3. Promise of Future Judgment 3:9-12
 - II. The Prediction of Restoration 4:1--5:15
 - A. The Promise of the Coming Kingdom 4:1-5
 - B. The Promise of the Coming Captivities 4:6--5:1
 - C. The Promise of the Coming King 5:2-15
 - 1. Birth of the Messiah 5:2
 - 2. Rejection of the Messiah 5:3
 - 3. Work of the Messiah 5:4-15

III.	The Plea for Repentance	6:1--7:20
A.	The First Plea of God	6:1-8
	1. God Pleads	6:1-5
	2. Micah Replies	6:6-8
B.	The Second Plea of God	6:9--7:6
	1. God Pleads	6:9-16
	2. Micah Replies	7:1-6
C.	The Promise of Final Salvation	7:7-20

In his book *Explore The Book*, J. Sidlow Baxter proposes the following short but excellent division:

1. Imminent Judgment Declared (i.-iii.).
2. Ultimate Blessing Promised (iv.-v.).
3. Present Repentance Pleaded (vi.-vii.).

I.	The Prediction of Judgment	1:1--3:12
A.	Introduction to the Book of Micah	1:1

1 The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah-the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

As stated above, this covers the period of 38 years from 738 to 690 B.C.

B.	The Judgment on the People	1:2--2:13
1.	Judgment on Samaria	1:2-7

2 Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.

3 Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth.

4 The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope.

5 All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?

6 "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations.

7 All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used."

The opening word is *shama`*, which means, "to hear intelligently." The same word is used in what is commonly called the *shema*, followed by the great commandment: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."³

Most commentators make the connection between Micah's words and the words of another Micah who prophesied during the reign of King Ahab of Israel. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament* observes: "The introductory words, 'Hear, ye nations all,' are taken by Micah from his earlier namesake the son of Imlah (1 Kings 22:28). As the latter, in his attack upon the false prophets, called all nations as witnesses to confirm the truth of his prophecy, so does Micah the Morashite commence his prophetic testimony with the same appeal, so as to announce his labors at the very outset as a continuation of the activity of his predecessor who had been so zealous for the Lord. As the son of Imlah had to contend against the false prophets as seducers of the nation, so has also the Morashtite (compare Mic 2:6,11; 3:5,11);

³ Deut. 6:4,5

and as the former had to announce to both kingdoms the judgment that would come upon them on account of their sins, so has also the latter.”

The prophet calls upon the whole of the human race and all of creation to hear this proclamation. This reminds us of Moses’ great and final speech in Deuteronomy: “Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.”⁴ The words are also reminiscent of the beginning of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken...”⁵

Micah’s prophecy is not only directed to Judah and Israel but it calls all of creation to the witness stand. The sins of man have polluted the whole earth. When Adam sinned, God cursed the ground on which he stood: “Cursed is the ground because of you.”⁶ The apostle Paul acknowledges both the all inclusiveness of the curse and the wholeness of salvation when he writes in Romans: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”⁷

There can be no salvation without conviction of sin. We have to understand that the purpose of this prophecy is not merely a proclamation of judgment. We are all born in a world that was fallen before we committed any sin ourselves and we added to our condemnation by our own sinful acts. Recognition of this fact is important before God can offer us His grace. The condition we inherited at birth as well as our personal guilt place us on the bench of the accused. Conviction of sin is needed for us to take hold of the hand that offers us pardon.

Micah’s proclamation brings us, first of all, to the courtroom. It is there, after the guilty verdict is reached that the Lord says: “Come now, let us reason together... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”⁸

The palace of justice is “the holy temple.” This is not only the great white throne where, ultimately, justice will be meted out but also the replica on earth, the temple in Jerusalem. During the reign of Ahaz the temple worship had been polluted by idolatry. Micah’s proclamation, therefore, restores the temple in Jerusalem to its proper function as the place where God revealed Himself on earth.

The ultimate judgment of man’s sin fell upon “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”⁹ In the words of Isaiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”¹⁰

Micah paints a very graphic picture of the coming of the Lord and the effect it has upon creation. “The high places” are probably the peaks of the mountains and not the hills on which idolatry was practiced, which are mentioned afterwards. The Bible often uses the image of melting wax in connection with God’s touch upon the mountain peaks. David thus depicts this effect of the coming of the Lord in His wrath as well as in His coming as a Savior. We read in the Psalms: “As smoke is blown away by the wind, may you blow them away; as wax melts before the fire, may the wicked perish before God.”¹¹ And, “The mountains melt

⁴ Deut. 32:1

⁵ Isa. 1:2

⁶ Gen.3:17

⁷ Rom. 8:19-22

⁸ Isa. 1:18

⁹ John 1:29

¹⁰ Isa. 53:5,6

¹¹ Ps. 68:2

like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth.”¹² But also: “The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because he was angry. Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him--the dark rain clouds of the sky. Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered [the enemies], great bolts of lightning and routed them. The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.”¹³ In this prophecy, however, the effect of the Lord’s coming is, first of all, related to the sinful condition of the nation.

The fact that Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out does not imply that the rest of the land goes free. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “Spiritual distempers are most contagious in persons and places that are most conspicuous. If the head city of a kingdom, or the chief family in a parish, be vicious and profane, many will follow their pernicious ways, and write after a bad copy when great ones set it for them. The vices of leaders and rulers are leading ruling vices, and therefore shall be surely and sorely punished. Those have a great deal to answer for indeed that not only sin, but make Israel to sin. Those must expect to be made examples that have been examples of wickedness. If the transgression of Jacob is Samaria, therefore shall Samaria become a heap. Let the ringleaders in sin hear this and fear.”

Micah addresses his prophecy to both Samaria and Jerusalem. The sin of the Northern Kingdom is not identified. It is simply called Samaria. The Hebrew word translated “transgression” is *pesha*, which means, “revolt.” Some commentators use the word “apostasy.” Micah still addresses Judah and Israel as if they were one nation, (Samaria and Jerusalem are used as poetical parallels) although the breaking up of the country into two separate kingdoms had taken place centuries earlier. The first king of the Northern Kingdom, Jeroboam I, broke with God’s revelation in creating two places of worship, in Dan and in Bethel, and instituting a manmade religion. “The sins of Jeroboam”¹⁴ became a coined expression to describe Israel’s apostasy. Jeroboam did not directly engage in idol worship. He simply ignored the fact that God had chosen to reveal Himself in Jerusalem. He moved the seat of God’s revelation on his own initiative, acting as if a human being can manipulate the Almighty and dictate to Him where He is to be worshipped. Bringing God under the control of human beings would eventually lead to idolatry. King Omri built the city of Samaria and made it the capital of the Northern Kingdom. In later years Samaria became the seat of idolatry where King Ahab built a temple to Baal. The city was a formidable stronghold, which it took Shalmaneser and Sargon, kings of Assyria, three years to conquer.

Micah’s prophecy was obviously uttered before the destruction of Samaria. The city was destroyed circa 710 BC, which was the seventh year of Hezekiah’s reign. We can, therefore, probably place this prophecy during the reign of King Ahaz, because Hezekiah, unlike his father Ahaz, sought to please the Lord. The sins of Samaria and Jerusalem had, at that time become identical. The Bible informs us about Ahaz that: “He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and also made cast idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.”¹⁵

Vs. 6 reads in the NIV: “Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble.” The Hebrew reads literally: “Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field.” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* suggests that it could be a heap of dung. That would make sense since, in the same sentence, the planting of a

¹² Ps. 97:5

¹³ Ps. 18:4-18

¹⁴ See II Kings 13:2

¹⁵ II Chron. 28:2-4

vineyard is mentioned. It would also express some of the Lord's disgust over the sinful condition of the city. Samaria, which was one of the best built and most defended cities of its time, would become a heap of rubble. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Today Samaria is heaps of stone, not only on the hill summit but also in the fields below. Archaeological expeditions have extended the uncovering of the foundations to the very palaces of Omri and Ahab."

The phrase: "Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used" can be understood in different ways. Some commentators believe that this speaks of physical prostitution that was practiced on the high places and in the temple is meant. But *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states: "The acquisition of all this is described as the gain of prostitute's wages, according to the scriptural view that idolatry was spiritual whoredom. There is no ground for thinking of literal wages of prostitution, or money which flowed into the temples from the voluptuous worship of Aphrodite, because Micah had in his mind not literal (heathenish) idolatry, but simply the transformation of the Jehovah-worship into idolatry by the worship of Jehovah under the symbols of the golden calves. These things return back to the wages of prostitution, i.e., they become this once more (cf. Gen 3:19) by being carried away by the enemies, who conquer the city and destroy it, and being applied to their idolatrous worship." The transformation of the Jehovah-worship did, however, end up in outright idol worship with all its occult involvements. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, therefore, observes: "Multitudes of women gave the money they gained by their public prostitution at the temples for the support of the priesthood, the ornamenting of the walls, altars, and images. So that these things, and perhaps several of the images themselves, were literally the hire of the harlots: and God threatens here to deliver all into the hands of enemies who should seize on this wealth, and literally spend it in the same way in which it was acquired; so that 'to the hire of a harlot these things should return.'"

Just as all genuine love, as expressed in a marriage relationship, is a reflection of the love relationship between God and man, so prostitution is an image of spiritual infidelity. The Bible consistently uses the word "prostitution" for idol worship. Asaph sung: "For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry."¹⁶ *Barnes' Notes* makes the profound observation: "All forsaking of God being spiritual fornication from Him who made His creatures for Himself, the hires are all which man would gain by that desertion of his God, employed in man's contact with his idols, whether as bribing his idols to give him what are the gifts of God, or as himself bribed by them. For there is no pure service, save that of the love of God. God alone can be loved purely, for Himself; offerings to Him alone are the creature's pure homage to the Creator, going out of itself, not looking back to itself, not seeking itself, but stretching forth to Him and seeking Him for Himself. Whatever man gives to or hopes from his idols, man himself is alike his object in both. The hire then is, alike what he gives to his idols, the gold whereof he makes his Baal... the offerings which the pagan used to lay up in their temples, and what, as he thought, he himself received back. For he gave only earthly things, in order to receive back things of earth. He hired their service to him, and his earthly gains were his hire. It is a strong mockery in the mouth of God, that they had these things from their idols. He speaks to them after their thoughts. Yet it is true that, although God overrules all, man does receive from Satan (Matt 4:9), the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4), all which he gains amiss. It is the price for which he sells his soul and profanes himself. Yet herein was the pagan more religious than the Christian worldling. The pagan did offer an ignorant service to they knew not what. Our idolatry of mammon, as being less abstract, is more evident self-worship, a more visible ignoring and so a more open dethroning of God, a worship of a material prosperity, of which we seem ourselves to be the authors, and to which we habitually immolate the souls of men, so habitually that we have ceased to be conscious of it."

2. Judgment on Judah 1:8-16

8 *Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl.*

9 *For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself.*

10 *Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all. In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust.*

¹⁶ Ps. 73:27 (NKJV)

11 Pass on in nakedness and shame, you who live in Shaphir. Those who live in Zaanan will not come out. Beth Ezel is in mourning; its protection is taken from you.

12 Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem.

13 You who live in Lachish, harness the team to the chariot. You were the beginning of sin to the Daughter of Zion, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you.

14 Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Aczib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel.

15 I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam.

16 Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile.

Verses 9 and 10 express, first of all, the reaction of the prophet to his own prophecy. God never allows His servants to proclaim His Word without any deep personal involvement. The Word of God is sweet in the mouth but bitter in the stomach. John describes this experience in Revelation: "So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, 'Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.' I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour."¹⁷ We can never proclaim judgment from a pedestal. Passion for souls is always accompanied by compassion for souls. God will do everything needed to bring us to the point where we feel in our bodies what it means to be lost without hope and without God in this world.

Ezekiel went through a protected period of paralysis when acting out the siege of Jerusalem. God even fed him the same diet as those who were in the city ate.¹⁸ To Jeremiah's anguish over the fulfillment of his prophecies, we owe the Book of Lamentations.

The apostle Paul testified: "I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."¹⁹

We read Jesus' reaction at the sight of human need: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."²⁰ And: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it."²¹

Micah's words reflect, most of all, the sorrow of God Himself over the suffering of His beloved people. If there ever was a case in which the punishment meted out to the son hurt the father more, it was here. In all the instances in which prophets express their grief in Scripture it is the Holy Spirit who inspires them. Peter's words also apply to Micah's prophecy: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."²² God's tears over the lot of Judah and Samaria were bigger than Micah's.

In Elli Wiese's book *Night*, the author describes the execution of a little, angelic looking boy in a Nazi concentration camp. The inmates were forced to witness the poor kid's twenty-minute long death struggle. Wiese asks the question: "Where is God." And he answers: "He is hanging there." Wiese means to convey that, as far as he was concerned, his Judaic concept of God had died. Wiese was actually more correct than he would ever be willing to admit. It was God who died in the form of that little boy. In the words of

¹⁷ Rev. 10:9,10

¹⁸ Ezek. 3:24-4:16

¹⁹ Rom. 9:1-4

²⁰ Matt. 9:36

²¹ Luke 19:41

²² II Peter 1:20,21

Isaiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.”²³

Micah’s weeping and wailing is compared to animal sounds, the howling of a jackal and the moaning of an owl. The suggestion is not only a comparison but it points to the involvement of all of creation in the consequences of man’s sin. It has been observed that all birdsong is in a minor key. The whole of creation, in Paul’s words “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”²⁴ Deep pain can sometimes bring people to howl like animals. I remember one of my students in the Bible school in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, howling like a wounded beast when his wife died in an attack of malaria.

Micah’s prophecy also contains a reference to the lot that awaited the citizens of Samaria who would be led away in captivity to Assyria. Micah borrowed Isaiah’s words who prophesied about the shame of those who were taken away naked in order to emphasize the shame of the judgment that befell them: “In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it-- at that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz. He said to him, ‘Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.’ And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. Then the LORD said, ‘Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared--to Egypt’s shame.’”²⁵ “Egypt’s shame” is probably a reference to the fact that Egypt was considered to be Israel’s ally and protector and that the nation failed miserably when it came to Israel’s assistance.

Barnes’ Notes observes: “It is remarked by Belzoni (‘Operations and Recent Discoveries in Egypt and Nubia’), that in the figures on the remains of their temples, prisoners are often represented as naked, or only in aprons, with disheveled hair, and with their hands chained. He also remarks, that on a ‘bas-relief,’ on the recently-discovered graves of the kings of Thebes, a multitude of ‘Egyptian and Ethiopian prisoners’ are represented--showing that Egypt and Ethiopia were sometimes ‘allied,’ alike in mutual defense and in bondage (compare Isa 47:2, and Nah 3:5).”

God has given us our clothing as a cover for the shame of sin. Nakedness expresses the fact that we shamefully missed the goal of God’s glory in our lives. The ultimate nakedness was experienced by Jesus when He hung on the cross. In the words of the Flemish poet, Guido Gezelle: “All rights denied, naked Christ died.” Micah’s prophecy is full of hints of God’s grace. We can only understand this when we read the book from a New Testament perspective.

Micah’s prophecy, as we saw, must have been pronounced before the fall of Samaria. What would happen to the Northern Kingdom served as a warning to Judah. God sees the Southern Kingdom as wounded incurably. Judah probably considered itself to be in good health. It did not evaluate itself as dying or even as sick. Its condition was similar to the church in Laodicea to which the Lord Jesus would later say: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”²⁶ It is symptomatic for sin that people refuse to recognize its presence. When Micah prophesied, the Babylonian Captivity was still almost one and a half centuries away, but Judah’s wound was already incurable.

The cities mentioned in verses 10–16 were, with the exception of Gath, all in the territory of Judah. Gath was in Philistine country. Micah’s words remind us of David’s eulogy at the death of King Saul. He wrote: “Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.”²⁷ It is terrible for a person to be exposed as a sinner. Sin and defeat go together. A sinner is a defeated human being who has lost the glory of the image of God in his life. At the death of Saul, who was killed in a war with the Philistines, the thought was unbearable to David that the enemy would rejoice in the defeat of God’s people. The same pertains to the defeat of Israel as a kingdom of priests. The failure to be what we ought to be is the equivalent of nakedness.

²³ Isa. 53:5

²⁴ Rom. 8:23

²⁵ Isa. 20:1-4

²⁶ Rev. 3:17

²⁷ II Sam. 1:20

The Adam Clarke's Commentary sees a play on words in the mention of "Beth Ophrah." Ophrah is derived from the Hebrew word *`aphar*, "dust." The meaning is then: "Roll in the dust in the house of dust." Some think that with "Beth Ezel" Jerusalem is meant. It may also be a place close to Jerusalem.

Lachish was one of the cities that entered in a confederacy against the Israelites during the conquest of Canaan, to attack Gibeon after it had made a covenant with Joshua.²⁸

Barnes' Notes has the following comment on Lachish: "Lachish was always a strong city, as its name probably denoted, (probably 'compact'). It was one of the royal cities of the Amorites, and its king one of the five, who went out to battle with Joshua (Josh 10:3). It lay in the low country, Shephelah, of Judah (Josh 15:33,39), between Adoraim and Azekah (2 Chron 11:9), 7 Roman miles south of Eleutheropolis... and so, probably, close to the hill-country, although on the plain; partaking perhaps of the advantages of both. Rehoboam fortified it. Amaziah fled to it from the conspiracy at Jerusalem (2 Kings 14:19), as a place of strength. It, with Azekah, alone remained, when Nebuchadnezzar had taken the rest, just before the capture of Jerusalem (Jer 34:7). When Sennacherib took all the defended cities of Judah, it seems to have been his last and proudest conquest, for from it he sent his contemptuous message to Hezekiah (Isa 36:1-2). The whole power of the great king seems to have been called forth to take this stronghold. The Assyrian bas-reliefs, the record of the conquests of Sennacherib, if (as the accompanying inscription is deciphered), they represent the taking of Lachish, exhibit it as... 'a city of great extent and importance, defended by double walls with battlements and towers, and by fortified riggings. In no other sculptures were so many armed warriors drawn up in array against a besieged city. Against the fortifications had been thrown up as many as ten banks or mounts compactly built-and seven battering-rams had already been rolled up against the walls.' Its situation, on the extremity probably of the plain, fitted it for a depot of cavalry. The swift steeds, to which it was bidden to bind the chariot, are mentioned as part of the magnificence of Solomon, as distinct from his ordinary horses (1 Kings 4:28, English (5:8 in Hebrew)). They were used by the posts of the king of Persia (Est 8:10,14). They were doubtless part of the strength of the kings of Judah, the cavalry in which their statesmen trusted, instead of God. Now, its swift horses in which it prided itself should avail but to flee. Probably, it is an ideal picture. Lachish is bidden to bind its chariots to horses of the utmost speed, which should carry them far away, if their strength were equal to their swiftness. It had great need; for it was subjected under Sennacherib to the consequences of Assyrian conquest. If the Assyrian accounts relate to its capture, impalement and flaying alive... were among the tortures of the captive-people; and awfully did Sennacherib, in his pride, avenge the sins against God whom he disbelieved. [She is the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion] Jerome: 'She was at the gate through which the transgressions of Israel flooded Judah.' How she came first to apostatize and to be the infectress of Judah, Scripture does not tell us... She scarcely bordered on Philistia; Jerusalem lay between her and Israel. But the course of sin follows no geographical lines. It was the greater sin to Lachish that she, locally so far removed from Israel's sin, was the first to import into Judah the idolatries of Israel. Scripture does not say, what seduced Lachish herself, whether the pride of military strength, or her importance, or commercial intercourse, for her swift steeds; with Egypt, the common parent of Israel's and her sin. Scripture does not give the genealogy of her sin, but stamps her as the heresiarch of Judah. We know the fact from this place only that she, apparently so removed from the occasion of sin, became, like the propagators of heresy, the authoress of evil, the cause of countless loss of souls. Beginning of sin to-, what a world of evil lies in the three words!"

These comments indicate that Lachish was a bridgehead of the enemy. It was the gate through which the corruption of the Northern had entered the Kingdom of Judah. Consequently the city and its inhabitants became the brunt of God's wrath.

The words of vs. 14: "Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Achzib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel" are evidently laden with symbolism and plays on words. *Barnes' Notes* explains: "Therefore! Since Judah had so become a partaker of Israel's sins, she had broken the covenant, whereby God had given her the land of the pagan, and she should part with it to aliens. The bridal presents, literally the dismissals, were the dowry (1 Kings 9:16) with which the father sent away (Judg 12:9) his daughter, to belong to another, her lord or husband, never more to return. Moresheth, (literally, inheritance,) the inheritance which God gave her, was to be parted with; she was to be laden with gifts to the enemy. Judah should part with her, and her own treasure also."

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary points out that there is another play on words in the phrase: "The town of Achzib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel." The Hebrew reads literally: "the houses of Achzib will become Achzab to the kings of Israel." *Achzab* is derived from the word *'akzab*, which means

²⁸ See Josh. 10:1-33

“falsehood.” The play on words suggests “a stream which dries up in the hot season, and deceives the expectation of the traveler that he shall find water.”

Most commentators interpret “He who is the glory of Israel” as the nobility of the nation. The use of the singular, however, would argue against this. Some take it to refer to Sargon, the Assyrian king who conquered Samaria. He would then also be the “heir” mentioned in the same verse.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary correctly observes: “There is much obscurity in the concluding verses of this chapter. They undoubtedly refer to the captivity of Israel, and to circumstances of distress, etc., which are not mentioned in any of the historical books, and therefore their reference and meaning can only be conjectured.” We could, therefore, *conjecture* that there is contained, in the threat against the Philistine cities, a note of comfort and hope for restoration for Israel. “I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam.” “He who is the glory of Israel” can be seen as the promised Messiah. There is a thread of hope that is woven through this whole book. Judgment is never the final condemnation and the final punishment never falls on those who have earned it but on Him who was made sin for us all.

The mention of Adullam evokes images of early scenes in the life of David. We read: “David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father’s household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.”²⁹ We find, in Scripture, other places where King David is presented as an image of the King of kings.

The last verse of this chapter, undoubtedly, speaks of mourning because of the disaster of the captivity that would befall on Israel and Judah alike. The mixed metaphors are vivid and thought-provoking but also difficult to analyze. The shaving of the head was a sign of mourning. Amos uses the same expression in a way that put the whole of captivity in a New Testament perspective. We read: “I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.”³⁰ The reference to “an only son” in that prophecy evokes the image of the return of Christ of which John speaks in Revelation: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”³¹ John’s quotation is from Zechariah who said: “They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”³² Micah’s prophecy makes no explicit reference to the crucifixion of the Messiah but when we compare Scripture with Scripture there is a strong suggestion that the Holy Spirit wants us to see beyond the captivity to the cross on which Jesus experienced the ultimate captivity for us all when He cried in a loud voice: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”-which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’³³

The shaving of the head is compared to the molting of a bird. The NIV uses the word “vulture.” Other translations say, “eagle.” The Hebrew word is *neshet*, which can mean “the eagle (or other large bird of prey).” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The molting of the eagle involves some degree of weakness, with which he compares Judah’s mournful and weak condition amid the loss of their children, gone into captivity.” David refers to the process of molting and growth of new feathers when he writes in the Psalms: “...who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” If Israel’s deportation in captivity is compared with the molting of the eagle, then the return from captivity is the renewing of its strength. This found its ultimate expression in the death and resurrection of our Savior.

So we see that, all through Micah’s prophecy, there is hidden under the surface, a truth that lifts Israel’s holocaust from its horror to a level of final fulfillment in the atonement in Jesus Christ, that none of

²⁹ I Sam. 22:1,2

³⁰ Amos 8:10

³¹ Rev. 1:7

³² Zech. 12:10

³³ Matt. 27:46

the Old Testament believers could have grasped. In the words of the apostle Paul: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."³⁴

B. The Judgment on the People 1:2--2:13

3. Cause of the Judgment 2:1-11

1 Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.

2 They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.

3 Therefore, the LORD says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity.

4 In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: `We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors.'"

5 Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot.

6 "Do not prophesy," their prophets say. "Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us."

7 Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things?" "Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?"

8 Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle.

9 You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever.

10 Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy.

11 If a liar and deceiver comes and says, `I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,' he would be just the prophet for this people!

This chapter deals with social injustice. Our outline wrongly singles out these verses as the main reason for God's judgment. The essence of sin is usually a two-edged sword. The prodigal son recognized that he sinned against God and against his father. In the parable, he says: "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."³⁵ Jesus identifies Himself with our neighbor. To those who commit social injustice, He says: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."³⁶ The apostle John links social justice to the love of God. We read: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"³⁷ The crimes of social injustice are rooted in the people's apostasy.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary comments on this chapter: "After having prophesied generally in ch. 1 of the judgment that would fall upon both kingdoms on account of their apostasy from the living God, Micah proceeds in ch. 2 to condemn, as the principal sins, the injustice and oppressions on the part of the great (vv. 1, 2), for which the nation was to be driven away from its inheritance (vv. 3-5). He then vindicates this threat, as opposed to the prophecies of the false prophets, who confirmed the nation in its ungodliness by the lies that they told (vv. 6-11); and then closes with the brief but definite promise, that the Lord would one day gather together the remnant of His people, and would multiply it greatly, and make it His kingdom (vv. 12, 13). As this promise applies to all Israel of the twelve tribes, the reproof and threat of punishment are also addressed to the house of Jacob as such (v. 7), and apply to both kingdoms. There are no

³⁴ I Cor. 2:9

³⁵ Luke 15:18

³⁶ Matt.25:45

³⁷ I John 3:17

valid grounds for restricting them to Judah, even though Micah may have had the citizens of that kingdom more particularly in his mind.”

Micah addresses people who are in authority, who have the power to enforce what they want to do. According to Lord Acton’s dictum, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Few human beings realize that God is the source of all power and that all human authority is delegated and entails accountability. Hitler stated that when a scheme was successful, no one would ask how it was accomplished. Mao Dze Dung asserted that power came from the barrel of a gun. Guns, however, do not regulate moral behavior. If God is not the standard of morality, Satan will enforce his standards.

When fellowship with God is absent people always lull themselves to sleep with the thought that they will never be held accountable. God gives people power to do good, not to do evil. If evil is done, the Day of Judgment will bring it to light.

Micah’s words expose the hideousness of the evil schemes Israel’s and Judah’s leader concoct. Bereft of the benefits of sleep, they plot the evil of the next morning, confident that they have the power to execute it. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments here: “Might, not right, is what regulates their conduct. Where they can, they commit oppression; when they do not it is because they cannot.” What Micah describes is corruption in government circles. The phenomenon is not new and it is also very modern. People use their position of power to increase their private wealth. Micah may have had in mind the case of King Ahab who coveted Naboth’s vineyard and obtained it by having Naboth killed.³⁸

The ownership of land in Israel was strictly regulated by laws that went back to the time of Moses. When Israel conquered Canaan, the land was divided among the twelve tribes by the drawing of lots. Each parcel was to remain in the tribe and in the family that had originally acquired it. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* observes: “The Pentateuch distinguishes clearly between real and personal property, the fundamental idea regarding the former being the thought that the land is God’s, given by Him to His children, the people of Israel, and hence, cannot be alienated (Lev 25:23,28). In order that there might not be any respecter of persons in the division, the lot was to determine the specific piece to be owned by each family head (Num 26:52-56; 33:54). In case, through necessity of circumstances, a homestead was sold, the title could pass only temporarily; for in the year of Jubilee every homestead must again return to the original owner or heir (Lev 25:25-34). Real estate given to the priesthood must be appraised, and could be redeemed by the payment of the appraised valuation, thus preventing the transfer of real property even in this case (Lev 27:14-25).” Crossing the boundary lines and confiscating land that had been in a certain family since the division of the land was more than committing social injustice, it was stealing land that belonged to God. The people Micah accused had lost their vision of God as the source of the authority that had been delegated to them and on God as the real owner of the land. This double error would cost them dearly.

In verses 3 and 4, God turns the tables. Following the same line of behavior, God plots against them as they had plotted against their fellowmen. In the same way as they had confiscated real estate and had acquired what rightfully belonged to another tribe or family, the Lord takes away their land and gives it to a foreign nation that had no right to be in Israel.

Insult is added to injury by a funeral dirge that will be sung about the people when they received their judgment. The NIV reads: “In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song.” The KJV renders the verse: “In that day shall one take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation.” The Hebrew uses the word *maschal*, which *Strongs* defines as: “a pithy maxim, usually of metaphorical nature; hence, a simile.” *Barnes’ Notes* observe: “No mockery is more cutting or fiendish, than to repeat in jest words by which one bemoans himself. The dirge which Israel should use of themselves in sorrow, the enemy shall take up in derision, as Satan does doubtless the self-condemnation of the damned. Ribera: ‘Men do any evil, undergo any peril, to avoid shame. God brings before us that deepest and eternal shame,’ the shame and everlasting contempt, in presence of Himself and angels and devils and the good (Ps 52:6-7; Isa 66:24), that we may avoid shame by avoiding evil.”

The text does not elaborate who the traitor is to whom the land is given. The word rendered “traitor” by the NIV is *showbeb*, which has a variety of meaning. The KJV renders the verse: “Turning away he hath divided our fields.” But *showbeb* is more often translated “apostate,” or even “backsliding.” As such Jeremiah uses it in: “O unfaithful daughter, you trust in your riches and say, ‘Who will attack me?’”³⁹

³⁸ I Kings 21:2-19

³⁹ Jer. 49:4

Showbeb can, therefore, refer to God, who turned away from Israel, or to people who have turned away from God. Most modern translations choose the latter meaning.

Vs. 5 is clear as far as the meaning of individual words is concerned but it is difficult to ascertain the application. The NIV reads: "Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot." TLB paraphrases the verse with: "Others will set your boundaries then. 'The People of the Lord' will live where they are sent," applying it to the captivity.

Barnes' Notes sees in it a reference to the time of the return from captivity and the exclusion of those who persevered in disobedience. God would eventually restore Judah but those who continued in their sin would have no part in it. The *Commentary* applies this to the New Testament church, using Peter's answer to Simon of Samaria as an example: "You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God."⁴⁰ We read: "They, the not-Israel then, were the images and ensamples of the not-Israel afterward, those who seem to be God's people and are not; members of the body, not of the soul of the Church; who have a sort of faith, but have not love. Such was afterward the Israel after the flesh, which was broken off, while the true Israel was restored, passing out of themselves into Christ. Such, at the end, shall be those, who, being admitted by Christ into 'their portion,' renounce the world in word not in deed. Such shall have... 'no portion forever in the congregation of the Lord.' For 'nothing defiled shall enter there, nor whatsoever worketh abomination or a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life' (Rev 21:27)."

Other prophets in Israel or Judah address Micah with the words: "Do not prophesy... do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us." The Hebrew word for "prophesy" is *nataph* which has the interesting connotation of "to ooze," "to fall in drops," or figuratively, "to speak by inspiration." The same word is used in the Song of Deborah: "The earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water." The hidden meaning of this Hebrew word gives more depths to Moses' last words: "Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants."⁴¹

Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: "The original is singular, and expressive of sorrow and sobbing. Literally, 'Do not cause it to rain; they will cause it to rain; they cannot make it rain sooner than this; confusion shall not depart from us.' To rain, often means to preach, to prophesy; Ezek 20:46; 21:2; Amos 7:16; Deut 32:2; Job 29:22; Prov 5:3, etc."

Micah's cryptic style makes it hard to understand who speaks at certain times. The prophets in vs. 6 are, undoubtedly, false prophets. False prophecy was a well-known phenomenon in Israel's history and in the history of revelation in general. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about false prophecy: "The distinction between the true and the false prophecy and prophets is very difficult to state. Broadly speaking, the false prophesying related itself to the national ideal independently of any spiritual quality, while the true prophesying ever kept uppermost the spiritual conception of the national life. Among those given to false prophesying were the ones who spoke after 'the deceit of their own heart' (Jer 14:13-14); those who without real prophetic gift borrowed a message and assumed the speech of prophecy (Jer 23:28,31); and those who sought the prophet's role in order to gain the material gifts which came from the people to their prophets (Mic 3:5). These, when discovered, were counted worthy of punishment and even death. There were, however, false prophesyings from men who honestly believed themselves to have a message from Yahweh. These prophecies from self-deceived prophets often led the people astray. The dream of national greatness was substituted for the voice of Yahweh. It was against such prophesying that the true prophets had to contend. The only test here was the spiritual character of the utterance, and this test demanded a certain moral or spiritual sense which the people did not always possess. Consequently, in times of moral darkness the false prophets, predicting smooth things for the nation, independent of repentance, consecration and the pursuit of spiritual ideals, were honored above the true prophets who emphasized the moral greatness of Yahweh and the necessity of righteousness for the nation. In New Testament times false prophesying did much injury in the church."

The prophet Jeremiah had to contend with false prophets who added hardship to his already difficult ministry. We read that he lamented: "Ah, Sovereign LORD, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.' Then the LORD said to me,

⁴⁰ Acts 8:21

⁴¹ Deut. 32:2

'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.' „⁴²

In Micah's case the prophets represented the consensus of the general public. Those prophets spoke in the name of the people, not in the Name of the Lord. TLB reflects this clearly in its rendering of this passage: “ ‘Don't say such things,’ the people say. ‘Don't harp on things like that. It's disgraceful, that sort of talk. Such evils surely will not come our way.’ ”

The thought that a loving God could never consider to punish His children is not an invention of modern liberal theology alone; it is as old as the Old Testament. Some people sear their conscience with the thought that God would be incapable of wrath. There is no place in the theology of many for God's anger, as expressed in the title of Jonathan Edward's sermon: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” The Bible calls God: “God of vengeance.” We read in the Psalms: “O LORD, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth!”⁴³

Vs. 7^b seems to be God's answer to those who could not accept the fact that God could be angry with them: “Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?” Those who obey the Word of God have nothing to fear from it. But now God calls His people His enemies. Micah pictures people who call themselves God's people as highway robbers. Their revolt is expressed in the way they treat their neighbors. In His answer to the scribes, Jesus linked the love of God to the love for one's neighbor: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”⁴⁴

The Hebrew word rendered “Of late” is *'ethmowl* which literally means “yesterday.” God's people must have suffered from a short-term memory loss; or maybe, they thought that God could not remember their sins of the day before.

The Hebrew is, evidently, difficult to translate. Vs. 8 reads literally: “With the garment the robe ye pull off from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. TLB renders this very lucidly: “For you steal the shirts right off the backs of those who trusted you, who walk in peace.” *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “It is not stated against whom the people rise up as an enemy, but according to the context it can only be against Jehovah. This is done by robbing the peaceable travelers, as well as the widows and orphans, whereby they act with hostility towards Jehovah and excite His wrath.”

Their sin did probably not consist of acts of violence, as we would think of them when reading Micah's words. They were guilty of sharp business practices in the way they treated their debtors. They sinned against the command Moses had ordained: “If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.”⁴⁵

Vs. 9, obviously, speaks of widows and orphans whose houses were confiscated, probably, because they were unable to make rental payments. The words “You take away my blessing from their children forever” suggests that there is an inherent blessing that rests upon widows and children and that it is in the power of men to interfere with that blessing. God calls Himself “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows.”⁴⁶ And the Bible says: “The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow.”⁴⁷ People who obstruct God's promise for orphans and widows will have to give account on the Day of Judgment. The sins of Israel defiled the Promised Land and this led them into captivity. The inhabitants of Canaan had defiled the land and, consequently, they were destroyed. God had warned Israel: “Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants,”⁴⁸ and “Keep

⁴² Jer. 14:13,14

⁴³ Ps. 94:1 (NASU)

⁴⁴ Matt. 22:37-40

⁴⁵ Ex. 22:26-27

⁴⁶ Ps. 68:5

⁴⁷ Ps. 146:9

⁴⁸ Lev. 18:25

all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.”⁴⁹

Vs. 11 is a continuation of vs. 6. With biting sarcasm, Micah reveals the attitude of the people toward God and His revelation. Alcoholism must have been rampant in the days of the prophet. The Hebrew uses the words *yayin* and *shekar*, translated in the NIV “wine” and “beer.” This may be misleading since beer is the less intoxicating of the two but the beverage meant here was had a higher alcohol percentage. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: “Yayin clearly represents an intoxicating beverage. This is evident in its first biblical appearance: ‘And Noah began to be a husbandman, and he planted a vineyard: and he drank of the wine, and was drunken...’ Gen 9:20-21. Shekar in early times included wine Num 28:7 but meant strong drink made from any fruit or grain. Num 6:3.”

The underlying thought is that people didn’t mind prophecy as long as it did not interfere with their conduct. Recognition of God’s right to set a moral standard for His creatures was out of the question. The apostle Paul warned his son Timothy of this attitude: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”⁵⁰ What is said about the oral revelation of God’s Word is, of course, also valid for the written form of it. In Paul’s words: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”⁵¹ Prophecy, whether oral or written, is intended to keep us on the straight path of righteousness. It will involve rebuking and correcting, which is not a pleasant experience but the end justifies the means. All human efforts to avoid rebuke and correction by the Holy Spirit are forms of intoxication. Some people flee from reality into alcohol or drugs but we all flee from God’s discipline unless we confess our sins and turn to Him. If we do not acknowledge the Scriptures as authoritative and allow the Holy Spirit to convict us by them, we are not different from the people in Micah’s days who looked for drunken prophets.

4. Promise of Future Restoration 2:12-13

**12 “I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people.
13 One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.”**

The theme of restoration is found throughout the whole Bible. Moses prophesied: “Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.”⁵²

The sudden transition from judgment to grace in these verses is typical for Micah’s prophecy. The verses contain a clear promise of the coming of the Messiah who will lead them out of their captivity.

The Hebrew text is more picturesque than the rendering of the NIV indicates. It reads literally: “I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; together I will put them as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and shall pass on the head of them.” *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* quoting Hengstenberg states: “The three verbs, they break through, they march through, they go out, describe in a pictorial manner progress which cannot be stopped by any human power.” Much more is involved in this prophecy than the return from the Babylonian Captivity. The Holy Spirit reaches in these words beyond the realm of Israel’s physical history to a breakthrough on a cosmic level. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes correctly: “The Breaker, who hath burst through the gates of hell and death for them,

⁴⁹ Lev. 20:22

⁵⁰ II Tim. 4:3

⁵¹ II Tim. 3:16,17

⁵² Deut. 30:3

and broken the fetters of Satan, shall, as their Lord going before them, make a safe and easy passage for them through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection. Be this our continual hope and confidence!"

There is a great deal of divine emotion bottled up in these verses. The triumph of these verses is an indication of the sorrow of God that accompanied the previous announcement of judgment. This makes us understand how much hurt God experiences in the pain this world suffers. The horror of all the holocausts in the history of the world was concentrated and amplified to an infinite scale when Jesus died on the cross. The shout of victory of Him who has broken through the gates of death and hell rings through the ages as it rings in Micah's words.

Jesus' statement about the Good Shepherd is, obviously, based upon this prophecy. We read in John's Gospel: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."⁵³

In the phrase: "I will bring them together like sheep in a pen," we find in Hebrew the word *Bozrah*, or *botsrah*, which is the word used by the KJV in this verse. Bozrah was a city of Edom, but the meaning of the word is an enclosure, or sheep fold.

C. The Judgment on the Leadership

3:1-12

1. Judgment on Princes 3:1-4

1 Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice,

2 you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones;

3 who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?"

4 Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done.

This chapter switches back to the theme of judgment with the same suddenness as the previous chapter ended on a note of grace and hope. Micah takes on one by one the three classes of leaders that influence the nation: the princes (verses 1-4), the prophets (verses 5-7), and the priests (vs. 11). All three classes that ought to have led the people in setting the standards of moral behavior have become totally corrupt.

The princes have turned into spiritual cannibals. Their cannibalism is worse than that practiced by primitive tribes who kill their victims first. Spiritual cannibalism is worse than the physical kind as emotional abuse is worse than physical violence. Cannibalism is the deepest form of human depravity. We can understand that predators eat animals of other species (after all, humans eat the meat of animals) but when animals eat their own species, we feel abhorrence.

The Bible teaches that hatred and murder are closely related and that the same punishment can be expected for both. The apostle John writes: "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."⁵⁴ In the context of John's epistle we see that, not only hatred leads to murder, but that absence of love is equal to hatred. The command of the Lord is to love our neighbor as ourselves.⁵⁵

The Book of Proverbs has the following to say about the kind of people Micah describes: "There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers; those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth; those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful; those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from

⁵³ John 10:7,9, 11

⁵⁴ I John 3:15

⁵⁵ See Lev. 19:18

among mankind.”⁵⁶ And: “If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.”⁵⁷

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes about Micah’s attack on the leaders of the nation: “The metaphor of the flock is still carried on. The chiefs of Jacob, and the princes of Israel, instead of taking care of the flocks, defending them, and finding them pasture, oppressed them in various ways. They are like wolves, who tear the skin of the sheep, and the flesh off their bones. This applies to all unjust and oppressive rulers. Suetonius tells us, in his *Life of Tiberius*, that when the governors of provinces wrote to the emperor, entreating him to increase the tributes, he wrote back: ‘It is the property of a good shepherd to shear his sheep, not to skin them...’ This is a maxim which many rulers of the earth do not seem to understand.”

Micah’s prophecy is another illustration of Lord Acton’s statement concerning the corrupting feature of absolute power. For many people a position of power creates the illusion that there will be no day of reckoning. God’s justice consists in paying man back in his own currency. Jesus, therefore, admonishes us: “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”⁵⁸ God does not answer the man who does not answer to Him. The ultimate application of this principle of justice is seen at the cross where Jesus came to the point of crying out: “‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’-which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”⁵⁹ Even in this part of Micah’s prophecy, we find a hidden reference to God’s infinite grace.

2. Judgment on Prophets 3:5-8

5 *This is what the LORD says: "As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim 'peace'; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him.*

6 *Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness, without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them.*

7 *The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God."*

8 *But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.*

The condemnation of the prophets in these verses is one of the most powerful statements of the whole book, particularly since Micah contrasts false prophecy with his own proclamation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah compares the difference between the prophet of the Lord and the false prophet to the difference between grain and straw. We read: “‘Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?’ declares the LORD.” This reminds us of Jesus’ Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds.⁶⁰ *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states about Micah’s strong condemnation: “Those who act honestly may act boldly; and those who are sure that they have a commission from God need not be afraid of opposition from men.”

False prophecy is allowed to flourish because many people lack discernment in spiritual things. They believe that all things spiritual have a common origin, not realizing that there are the Holy Spirit of God and the evil spirits of Satan. A New Testament example of this confusion is found in the Book of Acts, where we encounter Simon, the sorcerer. We read: “Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.’ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.” But

⁵⁶ Prov. 30:11-14

⁵⁷ Prov. 21:13

⁵⁸ Matt. 7:1,2

⁵⁹ Matt. 27:46

⁶⁰ Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43

when the apostle Peter met him, he confronted him with the words: “You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”⁶¹

The NIV renders vs. 5: “As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim ‘peace.’ ” The Interlinear Transliterated Bible reads: “Thus saith the LORD the prophets that make err my people that bite with their teeth and cry peace.” The Hebrew word for “to bite” is *nashak*, which means, “to strike with a sting or bite as a serpent.” *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “[The word] is used of no other biting than the biting of serpents. They were doing real, secret evil ‘while they cry, that is, proclaim peace;’ they bit, as serpents, treacherously, deadly. They fed, not so much on the gifts, for which they hired themselves to (Ezek 13:10) speak peace when there was no peace, as on the souls of the givers.”

The Hebrew is, evidently, difficult to translate. The NKJV renders the verse: “Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who make my people stray; who chant ‘Peace’ while they chew with their teeth, but who prepare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths.” TLB is has the most readable text: “You false prophets! You who lead his people astray! You who cry ‘Peace’ to those who give you food and threaten those who will not pay!”

Verses 6 and 7 seem to suggest that the false prophets did, in fact, at one point have the gift of prophecy. Their shame and disgrace when there is no answer from God are an indication that there were moments in the lives of those people when God had revealed Himself through them. It is possible to receive a gift from God and use it in such a way that it leads to one’s own destruction. These prophets were losing their light.

We all live in a world of darkness in which the prince of darkness reigns. If we open our hearts for God, the Holy Spirit will lead us out of darkness. The Book of Proverbs states: “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”⁶² The false prophet travels this path in the opposite direction. We either move toward the light or away from it, according to whom we give priority in our lives. The false prophets seem to have had personal profit in mind. Self-centeredness always brings us in the camp of the enemy. Paul speaks of “people [who] are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,”⁶³ and of those “who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.”⁶⁴

It is a sad experience for a person to gradually lose his sight; it is a disaster if we go blind spiritually because there is no awareness of it. The person who goes blind knows it; the one whose spiritual insight is dimmed is often unaware of it. The only trace of hope in Micah’s condemning prophecy is that those prophets will feel ashamed. There is hope in shame because shame presupposes understanding of what ought to have been, knowledge of a moral standard to which one has failed to measure up. Shame cancels out defiance. Yet, to have known the light and end one’s day in darkness is the greatest tragedy imaginable.

The denunciations Micah had to pronounce on the false prophets bring him to an evaluation of his own position and condition. The words: “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might...” sound like a trumpet blast. Those who are filled with the Spirit of the LORD are not always aware of the fact. But those who faithfully proclaim the Word of God know that they are dealing with things that are greater than they are. All true preaching surpasses human skill. In comparing himself with the false prophets of his time, Micah realizes, probably to his own amazement and joy, that it is the Spirit of God in him that makes him speak and act the way he does. Micah’s joy over his own boldness may be an indication that he was a shy person by nature.

This does not mean that Micah’s message was a pleasant one. The Spirit of the Lord prompted him “to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.” Micah himself was a sinner like all his compatriots. He could not pronounce judgments on his own people without falling under the judgment himself. The difference between him and the false prophets was that he was filled with the Holy Spirit and they were not. The most important difference was that he was aware of God’s forgiveness and they were not. This last point forms the bridge between these verses and the following.

⁶¹ See Acts 8:9-11,21-23

⁶² Prov. 4:18

⁶³ Rom. 16:18

⁶⁴ I Tim. 6:5

3. Promise of Future Judgment 3:9-12

9 *Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right;*

10 *who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness.*

11 *Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us."*

12 *Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.*

This second opens with the second “Hear (this)” of this prophecy.⁶⁵ The message is specifically addressed to the leaders of both nations “who despise justice and distort all that is right.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “and pervert all equity.” The Hebrew word translated “right” is *yashar*, which means “straight.” Justice and equity are the foundations of a society. Corruption of the fundamentals means the collapse of a society. As David says in the Psalms: “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”⁶⁶ A mansion that is built on a bad foundation has no more value than a heap of rubble.

It is an awesome responsibility to be in a position of power. People who occupy such a position have to realize that their responsibility is two-sided. They are accountable to God and they have liability to the people. Those who occupy a public office for the purpose of bettering themselves will ultimately destroy themselves.

In God’s original creation there were no public offices. Adam and Eve were to rule the animal world, not the world of humans. Public offices and the law entered the picture when sin entered the world. Leaders are appointed to stem the tide of sin. Those who go with the flow side with the enemy. The Bible calls those in a position of power “gods.” Asaph says in one of the psalms: “God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the ‘gods’: ‘How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked?’”⁶⁷

The rulers of Micah’s day not only neglected to apply God’s rule of justice to human life, they completely went the opposite way and pledged allegiance to the sadistic constitution of Satan, the murderer of man. They built Zion “with bloodshed.” Zion is historically the place of God’s revelation of Himself. It is the place where divine love was exemplified in the shedding of animal blood as atonement for human sin. Under their rule human blood was shed. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the words: “who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness”: “Blood is, as it were, the cement that binds the building together. They raise palaces with money gained by extortion, rapine, and judicial murders like that of Naboth (1 Kings xxi.; comp. Jer. xxii. 13, etc.; Ezek. xxii. 27 ; Hab. ii. 12). Cheyne thinks this to be a too dark view of the state of public morals, and would therefore consider ‘blood’ to be used for violent conduct leading to ruin of others, comparing Isa. i. 15; lix. 3; Prov. i. 11. In these passages, however, actual bloodshed may be meant; and we know too little of the moral condition of Judea at this time to be able to decide against the darker view.” The leaders of Micah’s day literally climbed to the top over the dead bodies of others.

The whole passage is addressed to the judges. The bloodshed, therefore, must have a judicial connotation. The judges condemned to death those they knew to be innocent, as in the case of Naboth, referred to above. Crime becomes more heinous when it is clothed in a cloak of justice. Justice is the application to human affairs of the divine attribute righteousness. Those who use one of God’s characteristics to promote the works of darkness will receive a special punishment.

Vs. 11 sums up the crimes of all three categories of leadership in the nation: “Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.” “Money” is the word that binds all three together. Paul advises Timothy: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See ch. 1:2; 6:2

⁶⁶ Ps. 11:3

⁶⁷ Ps. 82:1,2

⁶⁸ I Tim. 6:10

John the Baptist emphasized the role of money in relation to the coming of the kingdom of heaven. We read in Matthew's Gospel: "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'" ⁶⁹ Luke reports John's advice to those who indicated that they wanted to enter the kingdom. We read: "Tax collectors also came to be baptized. 'Teacher,' they asked, 'what should we do?' 'Don't collect any more than you are required to,' he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely-be content with your pay.'" ⁷⁰ Satan uses the false security money provides to lure many to their perdition.

Matthew Henry's Commentary observes about the sin of the prophets: "The prophets, it should seem, had honorary fees given them by way of gratuity (1 Sam 9:7-8); but these prophets governed themselves in their prophesying by the prospect of temporal advantage and that was the main thing they had in their eye: They divine for money. Their tongues were mercenary; they would either prophesy or let it alone, according as they found it most to their advantage; and a man might have what oracle he would from them if he would but pay them for it. Thus they were fit successors of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Note, though that which is wicked can never be consecrated by a zeal for the church, yet that which is sacred may be, and often is, desecrated, by the love of the world. When men do that which in itself is good, but do it for filthy lucre, it loses its excellency, and becomes an abomination both to God and man."

All the while the leaders of the nation proclaimed: "'Is not the LORD among us?'" Such blasphemous invocation of the presence of the Lord is a known diabolic invention. Hitler's army was outfitted with belt buckles on which the words *Got Mit Uns* ⁷¹ were embossed. The trust of the people was, however, not in the Lord but in the building where He used to live. Ezekiel saw in a vision how the Shekinah glory left the temple before Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed it. ⁷² What Nebuchadnezzar destroyed was the shell from which the Spirit of God had departed long before. Yet, the people clung to the relic as if it was identical to the presence of the living God Himself. Jeremiah would warn the people later, saying: "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'" ⁷³ When the spiritual relationship with the living God is turned into a fossil, evil will grow up like a jungle.

The presence of God on earth had made Zion into the most beautiful city on earth. The Sons of Korah sang about Zion: "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress." ⁷⁴

Nothing would be left of the place of which the people were so proud. Micah predicted: "Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets." This verse is quoted literally by Jeremiah some 70 or 80 years later: "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'" ⁷⁵ This, evidently, happened literally. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "The Talmud and Maimonides record that, at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus, Terentius Rufus, who was left in command of the army, with a plowshare tore up the foundations of the temple: so that this prophecy included in its fulfillment not only the destruction of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar, but that also under the Roman Titus." And *Barnes' Notes* quotes

⁶⁹ Matt. 3:1-3

⁷⁰ Luke 3:12-14

⁷¹ *God With Us*

⁷² Ezek. 9:3; 10:4,18,19; 11:23

⁷³ Jer. 7:4

⁷⁴ Ps. 48:1-3

⁷⁵ Jer. 26:18

Josephus who recorded about the Roman destruction of the temple: “[They] so leveled to the ground the whole circuit of the city, that to a stranger it presented no token of ever having been inhabited.”

II. The Prediction of Restoration 4:1--5:15

A. The Promise of the Coming Kingdom 4:1-5

1 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains;

it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.

2 Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

3 He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

4 Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

5 All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

Again, Micah reverts back in his characteristic way from the most severe judgment to the most glorious prediction of restoration. The prophecy pertains to “the last days,” which refers to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The rebuilding of the temple under Zerubabel did not mark the final fulfillment of this prophecy. The fullness of it is still to come. Whether this means a literal reconstruction of a temple building is very doubtful. A return to the Old Testament conditions of temple worship and ritual sacrifice would seem to be inconsistent with the flow of the history of salvation.

The first three verses of this chapter are an almost literal copy of Isaiah. There we read: “In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”⁷⁶ The occurrence of two almost identical prophecies in different books of the Bible raises the question of who copied whom. Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The question as to which prophecy is the earlier cannot be settled. Possibly both prophets borrowed the language of some earlier work, as Isaiah is thought to have done on other occasions, e.g. Isa. xv. and xvi., the community of ideas leading them to the same source of testimony.”

Some of the older version link this chapter to the previous one with the word “but.” *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* calls this “a very comfortable *but* with which this chapter begins, and very reviving to those who lay the interests of God’s church near their heart and are concerned for the welfare of it.” The plow that tore up Mount Zion, with which the previous chapter ended would bring the true believer to deep grief and despair. Jeremiah’s Lamentations testify to this. Opposite to this stands the landmark of hope, expressed in the words *but God*.

The image of Mount Zion as the highest mountain on earth is very striking. The high peaks of this world exercise an irresistible attraction on man. When asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, the British mountain climber Mallory answered: “Because it is there.” Mount Zion will be irresistible to every human being, not because of its altitude but because of its unearthly beauty and moral attraction. The nations will stream toward it because they want to be taught the ways of the Lord. Micah presents it as if it was the ambition of nations, not just individuals, to know the paths of the God of Jacob. Nations are, of course, made up of individuals and nationwide revivals consist in individual conversions. But seen in the context of the framework of God’s judgment in which one nation overruns another and imposes its rule, deporting its

⁷⁶ Isa. 2:2-4

inhabitants into exile, the mention of nations that want to follow God's law acquires new significance. Micah preaches the charter of the real United Nations, when he says that God "will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide." It is obvious that we are presently not living in that kind of Millennium.

In a very poetical way the change from war to peace is described as "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." The opposite of this promise of worldwide peace is expressed in Joel's prophecy: "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!'"⁷⁷ This seems to be more consistent with the mentality of the nations in the dispensation in which we find ourselves presently. Beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks is a utopian dream that has taunted not only us but people throughout the ages. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* quotes Roman poets with: "Agriculture has now no honor: the husbandmen being taken away to the wars, the fields are overgrown with weeds, and the crooked sickles are straightened into swords" and: "War has lasted long, and the sword is preferred to the plough. The bull has given place to the war-horse; the weeding-hooks to pikes; and the harrow-pins have been manufactured into helmets." Yet, God promises a time when "creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."⁷⁸

When we look at the picture of world evangelization as it presents itself to us now and compare the statistics of the number of Christians with the total world population, we tend to believe that most people who live now and who have ever lived in this world will end up in hell. Yet God's promise to Micah opens to us the overwhelming vista of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."⁷⁹

Vs. 4, "Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid," has become a proverbial picture of rest and undisturbed peace. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This image of plenty and security is derived from the account of the material prosperity of Israel in the days of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 25)⁸⁰, in accordance with the Mosaic promise (Lev. xxvi. 4, etc). It passed into a proverb expressive of peace and happiness." For the Israelite it was the fulfillment of the peace that God promised in the Land of Promise. Zechariah picked up the theme when he prophesied during the rebuilding of the temple. The return of the Shekinah would bring a condition of perfect peace and rest. " 'In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree,' declares the LORD Almighty."⁸¹ This is the ultimate cancellation of the curse Adam brought on himself when he sinned. God had said to him: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."⁸² Sitting under one's own vine and fig tree means that the painful toil is passed and the sweat of the brow is wiped off. Fear is gone. It also means the dignity of private possession. "His own vine... his own fig tree." The apostle John links this peace to the Gospel message in his report of Nathanael's encounter with Jesus. We read: "When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.' 'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.'"⁸³

This millennial peace is a spiritual reality for each person who has peace with God through Jesus Christ. For those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, there is a vine and a fig tree, a

⁷⁷ Joel 3:10

⁷⁸ See Rom. 8:21

⁷⁹ Rev. 7:9

⁸⁰ 1 Kings 4:25 - During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.

⁸¹ Zech. 3:10

⁸² Gen. 3:17-19

⁸³ John 1:47,48

place of peace and absence of fear. In the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”⁸⁴

Vs. 5- “All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever” brings us back from the future to the present. The nations have not yet decided to go up to Mount Zion in order to walk in the paths of the God of Jacob. But we have determined to walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

In Micah’s day no one determined to walk in the Name of the Lord their God. This made the captivity unavoidable. Yet, before that tragic and catastrophic event happened and the night closed in upon God’s chosen people, God presented them with a vision of healing after being broken, light following night, and resurrection after death. Vs. 6 mentions the lame, exile and grief. The paralysis of the lame would prevent their return from exile. Even before tragedy struck, God gave a promise of complete restoration. This promise was meant to carry them through the night. God gave to the teenager Joseph dreams that gave him enough hope to maintain his integrity during the night of his slavery and imprisonment. He gives His promise to each of us on the narrow, slippery and hazardous path to glory. We are given no guarantee of ease and success on the way but we have the assurance of a safe arrival. The end will be glory. If Jesus who, “for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame”⁸⁵ went ahead, we can follow Him on the same road.

The Hebrew says more graphically: “In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted I will gather ...” God takes responsibility for the pain He inflicted.

This fourth chapter of Micah’s prophecy is one of the most remarkable parts of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit not only moves back and forth between the near and distant future but also between the agony of judgment and the joy of restoration. We read in it, as it were, the mental and spiritual struggle of God Himself in His going over the events that would befall His chosen people. The events of the captivity of Israel and Judah and the return of the captives from Babylon span a period of approximately two centuries. The deportation of the inhabitants of Samaria took place during Micah’s lifetime but the fall of Jerusalem did not occur until well over a century after the prophet’s death. The return from the captives lay about 200 years in the future when Micah began to prophesy. We are told that Micah spoke between the years 738 and 690 BC. The fall of Samaria occurred in 722 BC, of Jerusalem in 587 BC and the return began in approximately 537 BC. The consolation in this prophecy was, therefore, more for the benefit of God than for man. This remark, of course, is made from a human perspective. We cannot search or understand the emotions of the godhead but, since we are created in God’s image and likeness, we may assume that our emotional reactions are a reflection of God’s character.

For those who were led into captivity it was little comfort to hope that one hundred years or more later the tide would turn. Yet, God predicted the events through His prophet for the benefit of human beings. He wanted them to look beyond the scope of their time and cling to rays of hope that were still not visible on the horizon. The period involved in Micah’s prophecy is longer than the whole history of the United States of America. When we look at this chapter and this book from that perspective, we understand how God wants us to stretch our vision beyond what we can see.

Micah’s prophecy reaches even beyond the Old Testament times. Mount Zion still has not become the center of the world from which God rules the nations. John shows us this vision in Revelation, where we read: “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a

⁸⁴ Heb. 13:6

⁸⁵ Heb. 12:2

loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'",⁸⁶

Zion is called a "watchtower of the flock." The Hebrew text uses the words *migdal-edar*. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "There was a village with a tower so called near Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv.21), and it is thought that Micah refers to it as the home of David and as destined to be the birthplace of Messiah." Some think that Jerusalem is meant here. *The Pulpit Commentary* continues: "Micah uses the two expressions to represent the power and dominion of Jerusalem. The propriety of the use of the term 'flock-tower' is seen when we remember that David was a shepherd before he was king, and that the Israelites are the sheep of the Lord's pasture."

God's making the lame a remnant reminds us of Paul's use of the term in Romans. He writes: "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.'"⁸⁷ And again: "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace."⁸⁸ This remnant, the lame and the defeated, are appointed to become the superpower in the world. Jesus prophesied in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."⁸⁹ It is difficult for us to see ourselves, as members of the church of Christ, as the ultimate power on earth. Paul explains the reason for God's reversal of roles in society. He wrote to the Corinthian church: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."⁹⁰

Vs. 9 switches back from victory to failure, both in depicting the emotions of the nation of Israel as well as the emotions of God. Crying aloud and writhing in pain describe the reaction of the people. Jesus compared His suffering and death to the labor pains of a woman. We read in John's Gospel: "A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world."⁹¹ Jesus' rejection and crucifixion can be taken as the time when Israel had no king. The whole period of Israel's captivity and return has been taken as an image of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. The words "no king" remind us also of the moral condition of Israel, as characterized in the Book of Judges, where we read: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."⁹² As a theocracy, Israel was never without a king. Their rejection of God as the supreme authority brought the people to a moral quandary. It was the ultimate reason for their going into captivity.

It sounds like a complete contradiction: "You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies." Their captivity was due to the fact that God had not redeemed them out of the hand of their enemies. The captivity symbolized the greatest defeat. It was the death of the nation. The principle of the Kingdom of Heaven is exemplified in the fact that God makes death the beginning of life. In Jesus' words: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."⁹³ God changed the death of a nation into the birth of a nation. He also made the death of the Messiah into the gate of life for all who want to follow Him in His death and resurrection.

⁸⁶ Rev. 14:1-7

⁸⁷ Rom. 9:27

⁸⁸ Rom. 11:5

⁸⁹ Matt. 5:5

⁹⁰ I Cor. 1:26-30

⁹¹ John 16:21

⁹² Judges 17:6; 21:25

⁹³ John 12:24,25

Labor pains are always part of the birth; they are not symptoms of a sickness but of health, not a part of death but of life. Yet, pain is linked to sin and death. When sin entered the world, pain and death came with it. There seemed to be very little hope of life when King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and carried away its inhabitants. None of the captives will have felt that they went to Babylon to give birth to a new nation. Yet, this is what God promises the people about a century before it would happen. Labor pains are pains of hope, not of despair. There is a difference between pains of death and pains of life. All pains a child of God suffers are pains of life.

Vs. 11 suggest that Israel's pregnancy is the result of a rape, not of conjugal intercourse. The image reinforces the element of shame in the condition of the people. Rape is one of the most traumatic and crushing experiences a woman can have. The rape of a nation is not different. God assures His people that He will take their ultimate defeat and change it into victory. This is what is expressed in the change of the image from a rape to a threshing floor. Both pictures portray a crushing, but the result of the threshing is that wheat is produced. There is a separation between wheat and straw and wheat and chaff. Yet, the captivity was the wages for Israel's sin. God, however, takes this tragedy and turns it into a victory. Joseph's kind words to his brothers, who had wanted to murder him, apply here: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."⁹⁴ Micah states: "But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD." It takes a lot of faith to see victory in apparent defeat. The hardest thing in life is to, in James' words: "Consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds."⁹⁵

Some commentators understand this verse to mean that the heathen nations, and not Israel, are the ones that are brought to the threshing floor. This is undoubtedly the case in the next verse. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "Various are the explanations of the prophet's reference in this prophecy. Many commentators see in it a reference to the destruction of the army of Sennacherib (2 Kings xix. 35); other discern a defeat of the Scythians after the return from captivity; others, again, place it in the times of the Maccabees; and other interpret it of the defeat of the mystical adversaries of God's Church adumbrated in Ezekiel xxviii.; Zech. xii.; and Rev. xx. But the prophet has not one definite event in view, but looks forward to the general conflict between the powers of the world and the Church, of which the historical events and material enemies were the types. Certain historical circumstances may exactly suit the prediction, but they do not exhaust it. And indeed we do wrong to seek for minute and definite fulfillment of particular predictions. Such utterances are often conditional and are modified by subsequent circumstances. The prophets are concerned with great moral truths and the righteous government of the world, and are not always to be interpreted with literal exactness."

If our view of the previous verse is correct, that is if Israel is the object of threshing, then the prophet changes the image in vs. 13 in making Israel the thresher instead of the one being threshed. The picture is of an ox, a powerful animal with horns of iron and hoofs of brass that tramples the nations. From the victim of oppression, God makes His children into judges of the world. As in the previous verse, there remains in the image a positive element since kernels of grains are being produced even from the judgment over the heathen nations.

The chapter ends with an amazing statement in which God receives the ultimate glory for what was intended to be man's greatest shame. "You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth." The gains and wealth of nation that had never taken God into account are made into instruments for the praise of God. Man gathers wealth for his own glory. On the Day of Judgment, man's wealth will turn out to be his shame but God's glory. This astounding turn of events is predicted all through Scripture.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states here: "Yet even then 'mercy rejoiceth against judgment' (James 2:13); because a remnant of the Gentiles shall be spared, whose 'gain shall be' henceforth 'consecrated unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth' (Mic 4:13). Israel is to be restored, not for her own selfish aggrandizement, but in order to be the instrument of blessing to the nations in 'the whole earth.' Our happiness is in proportion to our Christian usefulness. Israel shall be then most blessed when she shall be a blessing to others. And the nations shall thou be most blessed in their gains when, instead of hoarding them up for selfish ends, they shall 'consecrate them to the Lord of the whole earth.' The Lord grant us grace to find our happiness already in living for His glory and for the good of others, with all we have and all we are!"

⁹⁴ Gen. 50:20

⁹⁵ James 1:2

The first verse of chapter 5 is, obviously, still included in the previous chapter. Different versions translate the verse differently and Bible Commentaries interpret the verse in widely different and sometimes opposing ways. The NIV reads: "Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod." The NKJV translates the Hebrew word *bath*, "daughter," as does the KJV. The RSV reads: "Now you are walled about with a wall; siege is laid against us." This indicates that the Hebrew is not easily translated. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* believes that the picture is not of an organized army but that the Hebrew rather suggests "the thought of a crowd of people pressing anxiously together, as distinguished from ... an invading troop." There is an obvious play-on-words which is even clear in the English translation. "Marshal your troops, O city (or daughter) of troops" uses the same Hebrew words *gadad* and *geduwd*.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary takes the daughter of troops to mean "the Chaldeans, whose armies were composed of troops from various nations." The *Commentary* continues: "[He hath laid siege against us; they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.] 'He' refers to Nebuchadnezzar. 'Us' refers to Jerusalem. And, 'the judge' is King Zedekiah. They shall offer him the greatest indignity. They killed his sons in front of his face; and then put out his eyes, loaded him with chains, and carried him away captive to Babylon." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "Micah abruptly turns to an imminent experience. Israel, here meaning Judah, is to marshal her forces for a siege, in which the ruling king, who is judge, will be humiliated. This was fulfilled in part by the siege of Sennacherib in 701 B.C., by Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and his smiting of King Zedekiah, and by each succeeding siege until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70." But *Barnes' Notes* is of the opinion that: "This description has obviously no fulfillment, except in the infliction by the Romans. For there was no event, before the invasion by Sennacherib and accordingly in the prophet's own time, in which there is any seeming fulfillment of it. But then, the second deliverance must be that by the Maccabees; and this siege, which lies, in order of time, beyond it, must be a siege by the Romans. With this it agrees, that whereas, in the two former visitations, God promised, in the first, deliverance, in the second, victory, here the prophet dwells on the Person of the Redeemer, and foretells that the strength of the Church should not lie in any human means (Mic 5:8-15). Here too Israel had no king, but a judge only. Then the 'gathering in robber-bands' strikingly describes their internal state in the siege of Jerusalem; and although this was subsequent to and consequent upon the rejection of our Lord, yet there is no reason why the end should be separated from the beginning since the capture by Titus was but the sequel of the capture by Pompey, the result of that same temper, in which they crucified Jesus, because He would not be their earthly king. It was the close of the organic existence of the former people; after which the remnant from among them with the Gentiles, not Israel after the flesh, were the true people of God." I tend to side with *Barnes'* in his interpretation, although with some reservations.

It is obvious that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed and that its ruler was humiliated in the cruelest way when Nebuchadnezzar took the city. But the language suggests more than this terrible incident. Isaiah foretells the humiliation of the Messiah: "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."⁹⁶ Both Matthew and John record the fulfillment of this prophecy during Jesus' trial: "[The Roman soldiers] spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again." "They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' And they struck him in the face."⁹⁷

There is a bitter irony in the words "Marshal your troops, O city of troops." Even if *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* is correct in assuming that the second word "troops" is supposed to mean "a crowd of people pressing anxiously together," the thought of Jerusalem mobilizing its troops to defend itself against the judgment of God is ludicrous. But the Gospel message in this verse is that the One who was struck on the cheek with a rod, the real ruler of Israel, is the Lord Himself. The full brunt of God's wrath fell upon Him. In Paul's words: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."⁹⁸

C. The Promise of the Coming King

5:2-15

⁹⁶ Isa. 50:6

⁹⁷ Matt. 27:30; John 19:2,3

⁹⁸ II Cor. 5:21

1. Birth of the Messiah 5:2

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

This brings us to the most famous verse of this book, the prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ. The verse is quoted by Matthew, almost word for word: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."⁹⁹

The names Bethlehem and Ephrathah stand for more than the indication of a particular location. The meaning of Bethlehem is "House of Bread" and Ephrathah means "fruitfulness." *Barnes' Notes* quotes Jerome who wrote: "Truly is Bethlehem, 'house of bread,' where was born 'the Bread of life, which came down from heaven' (John 6:48,51)... 'who with inward sweetness refreshes the minds of the elect,' 'Angel's Bread' (Ps 78:25), and 'Ephratah, fruitfulness, whose fruitfulness is God,' the Seed-corn, stored wherein, died and brought forth much fruit, all which ever was brought forth to God in the whole world."

Bethlehem is first mentioned in the Bible as the place where Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin. We read in Genesis: "So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."¹⁰⁰ Bethlehem, however, obtained its fame from the fact that it was the birthplace of Israel's illustrious king, David.

The NIV renders vs.2: "you are small among the clans of Judah." The KJV, as do other older version, reads: "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." The Hebrew word translated "clans" is '*eleph*' which is the letter of the alphabet that is used to designate "a thousand." Commenting on Matthew's quote of this verse, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "There is much reason to believe that each tribe was divided into small portions called thousands, as in England certain small divisions of counties are called hundreds. For the proof of the first, the reader is referred to Judg 6:15, where, instead of my FAMILY is poor in Manasseh, the Hebrew is, my THOUSAND ... is the meanest in Manasseh." The emphasis is, obviously, on the humble origin of the ruler. The birth of Christ was even more humble than Micah's prophecy could foresee. When Jesus was born, Luke tells us, His mother Mary: "wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."¹⁰¹ Even humble Bethlehem had no place for the King of kings at His birth.

The intent of the second verse is, obviously, to comfort Bethlehem in its humble condition. The birthplaces of famous people in this world are only marked in retrospect. Micah's prophecy designates Bethlehem as the future birthplace of the Messiah, which from a human perspective, is an impossibility. But this prophecy is a reference point in a line of prophecies concerning the Messiah that runs through the whole Old Testament. God Himself spoke the first one when He told Satan that Eve's offspring would crush his head.¹⁰² Jacob pinpointed that the royal line of Judah would produce "Shiloh,"¹⁰³ and Isaiah detailed His suffering and death.¹⁰⁴ David saw Him as the King of kings and the eternal High Priest.¹⁰⁵

The Pulpit Commentary sees in the mention of Bethlehem a shift from the capital, Jerusalem, to a place of no significance. We read: "This presupposes that the house of David will have lost the throne and have been reduced to low condition."

The pre-existence of the Messiah is described with the words: "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." The Hebrew reads literally: "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

⁹⁹ Matt. 2:6

¹⁰⁰ Gen. 35:19

¹⁰¹ Luke 2:7

¹⁰² Gen. 3:15

¹⁰³ See Gen. 49:10

¹⁰⁴ Isa. 53:2-12

¹⁰⁵ Ps. 110

The Hebrew word, translated “everlasting,” or “ancient times” is *owlam*, which is derived from a word that means, “to conceal.” The same word is found in “And the LORD God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”¹⁰⁶ It is also found in: “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the *Eternal* God.”

The NIV obscures, in a sense, the contrast of what comes forth from Bethlehem and what comes from eternity. The KJV shows more clearly the difference between coming forth and going in, “out of thee shall he come forth” and “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Messiah’s generation as man, coming forth unto God, to do His will on earth, is from Bethlehem; but as Son of God His goings forth are from everlasting.”

This is the only place in the Old Testament where the eternal character of the Messiah is revealed. John would later say: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”¹⁰⁷ In their emphasis on Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah, the Pharisees and scribes in Jesus’ day do not seem to have paid any attention to this part of Micah’s prophecy. They never saw that Jesus’ claim “Before Abraham was, I am”¹⁰⁸ could have any root in this verse of Scripture.

In order to comprehend what it means that our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal God, we have to understand what eternity is, and that is an insurmountable obstacle to the human mind. *Barnes’ Notes* comments correctly: “We have neither thought nor words to conceive eternity; we can only conceive of time lengthened out without end. ... True, that in eternity there are no divisions, no succession, but one everlasting ‘now;’ one, as God, in whom it is, is One. But man can only conceive of Infinity of space as space without bounds, although God contains space, and is not contained by it; nor can we conceive of Eternity, save as filled out by time.” Even in eternity, we may never fully understand what it means that the Word became flesh.

Micah’s prophecy in this chapter is full of contrasts. Comings and goings are distinguished; eternity is set over against time. After announcing the coming of the Eternal One, the prophet says that Israel will be abandoned “until the time when she who is in labor gives birth.” The apostle Paul states: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.”¹⁰⁹

Extended periods of times are condensed into small sections that fit in one sentence. Israel’s abandonment, obviously, refers to the captivity and the labor and giving birth must be seen primarily as a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. But Israel returned from captivity almost five centuries before Christ was born. It is difficult for us to understand that the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets could jump over blocks of time that are larger than the history of the United States of America. Our human impatience is no match for God’s eternity of which Peter says: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.”¹¹⁰

And, obviously, not only the return from captivity is envisioned but also the coming of the Gentiles into the fold of Israel to obtain salvation. “The rest of his brothers” can hardly refer to the return from captivity of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, since, in that case the name Judah would have been used instead of Israel. Paul speaks about Israel’s abandonment and the return of the rest of the brothers. In *Romans*, he writes: “Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”¹¹¹

Verse 4 takes us beyond the horizon to the time when Jesus will reign in all His glory and peace will cover this earth. It is the time when sheep from outside the fold of Israel will be brought in. Jesus speaks

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 3:22

¹⁰⁷ John 1:1

¹⁰⁸ John 8:58 (KJV)

¹⁰⁹ Gal. 4:4

¹¹⁰ II Peter 3:8

¹¹¹ Rom. 11:11,12

about this in John's Gospel: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."¹¹²

The first line of vs. 5 belongs, obviously, to the previous section. The apostle Paul may have borrowed Micah's language when he wrote to the Ephesians: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."¹¹³

The reference to the Assyrians may be seen as an allusion to a contemporary event. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* believes this to be the case. We read: "This man, as king and ruler, shall be the peace when the Assyrians shall come into our land. This refers to the deliverance of Hezekiah and his kingdom from the power of Sennacherib, who invaded them, in the type; but, under the shadow of that, it is a promise of the safety of the gospel-church and of all believers from the designs and attempts of the powers of darkness, Satan and all his instruments, the dragon and his angels, that seek to devour the church of the first-born and all that belong to it." *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "The prophet, in this and the following verses, shows what is that peace which Messiah shall bring. Asshur is named as the type of Israel's deadliest foe, and as that which even then was threatening the kingdom: witness Sennacherib's invasion in Hezekiah's time, when the angel of the Lord smote the alien army with sudden destruction (2 Kings xix.). The prophecy looks forward to a far-distant future, when the world-power is arrayed against God's people; the details (as often in such prophecies) do not exactly suit the actual facts in contemporary history."

The language must be considered poetic and symbolic. Although Assyria was a definite threat to Judah at that time, Micah's reference to the Messiah and the mention of "seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men" to counter the contemporary danger suggests that more is envisioned than an immediate remedy of political tensions. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* believes that the seven shepherds and eight leaders is "supposed to mean the seven Maccabees, Mattathias, and his five sons, and Hyrcanus, the son of Simon" and "eight princes, the Asmonean race; beginning with Aristobulus, and ending with Herod, who was married to Mariamne... Perhaps seven and eight are a definite number for an indefinite number, as Eccl 11:2; Job 5:19. The prophet means the chiefs of the Medes and Babylonians, the prefects of different provinces who took Nineveh, whose number may have been what is here specified." *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* takes the words to have a symbolic meaning. We read: "Seven is mentioned as the number of the works proceeding from God, so that seven shepherds, i.e., princes, would be quite sufficient; and this number is surpassed by the eight, to express the thought that there might be even more than were required."

Assyria is called "the land of Nimrod" because Nimrod was the founder of Nineveh, and also because Assyria stands for all that rebels against the authority of God. We read about Nimrod in Genesis: "He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, 'Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD.' The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city."

Initially, this prophecy must have meant a great encouragement for King Hezekiah when the army of Sennacherib laid siege around Jerusalem and the Assyrians were driven away by God's intervention. This event was the first but not the final fulfillment of Micah's prediction. Behind this prophecy looms the final victory over the "Prince of Assyria," the Prince of Darkness whose head is crushed by the Prince of Peace.

Verses 7-10 shed an interesting light on the purpose of Israel's Diaspora. In its dispersion among the nations of the world, Israel is meant to be a salt that keeps corruption at bay. Micah calls the Jewish influence in this world "dew from the LORD," and "showers on the grass." In a remarkable twist that is typical of God's dealing with men, that the punishment for Israel's sin is converted into a blessing for the world. This planet is as an arid desert through which mankind wanders as pilgrims to the Promised Land. The presence of those who are the guardians of divine revelation are the dew and rain showers that keep this world alive spiritually. There is a parallel with the persecution of the early church. We read in the Book of Acts after the death of Stephen: "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered

¹¹² John 10:16

¹¹³ Eph. 2:14-18

preached the word wherever they went.”¹¹⁴ God used persecution to spread the Gospel. The fact is, however, that most of Israel had not lived up to God’s purpose. They holed themselves up in ghettos and clung together, more concerned about preserving their Jewishness than about being the kingdom of priests God wanted them to be. The church of Jesus Christ, with some exceptions, has not fared much better.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the blessing that results from the apparent rejection of God’s people. We read in Romans: “Did [Israel] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”¹¹⁵

The second characteristic of the dispersion of the Jews is their strength. God compares them to a lion. “The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue.” It seems an overstatement to compare the dispersed Jews in this world with a lion among the beasts of the forest. They have been the victims of Russian pogroms and of Hitler’s holocaust. Yet, in spite of all outward appearance, the Jews have supernaturally succeeded while Stalin’s empire and Hitler’s Reich have long disappeared. We ought to redefine victory. “Not to the strong is the battle, not to the swift is the race, yet to the true and the faithful victory is promised through grace.”¹¹⁶ We tend to see death as the ultimate defeat of life but God has turned failure into victory. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the greatest triumph the world has ever seen. The apostle Paul calls the cross “the power of God.” He writes to the Corinthians: “For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”¹¹⁷ One drop of God’s weakness is stronger than an ocean of human strength.

Most commentators believe that verses 10-15 are also addressed to Israel and through Israel to the church of Jesus Christ. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* quotes Calvin on this section who says: “The Church will never be safe until she is stripped of all creature-trusts, and rests on Yahweh alone.”

It seems more logical to understand these words to be directed to the nations of the world. They are mentioned clearly in vs. 15. Micah announces that they will be subject to “the wrath of the Lamb.” John paints the picture in Revelation: “Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’”¹¹⁸ The subject of God’s wrath will be the nations’ military might, their witchcraft, and their idolatry. The tying together of these three points to their common origin. Behind all human disobedience stands the prince of this world.

It remains true, of course, that God’s children can be polluted by the world in which they live. They will only have the strength of a lion if they are cleansed from the elements Micah condemns in the nations in these verses. James defines our faith in God by saying: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”¹¹⁹

III. The Plea for Repentance 6:1--7:20

A. The First Plea of God 6:1-8

1. God Pleads 6:1-5

1 Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say.

¹¹⁴ Acts 8:1,4

¹¹⁵ Rom. 11:11,12

¹¹⁶ Victory through Grace by Fanny J. Crosby

¹¹⁷ I Cor. 1:25

¹¹⁸ Rev. 6:15-17

¹¹⁹ James 1:27

2 Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel.

3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me.

4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.

5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember [your journey] from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore The Book*, introduces this chapter with the words: "The last two chapters of Micah are in the form of a *colloquy*; and when read as such they light up with new interest. All we can do here is to point out where the different speakers come in. First, in chapter vi. 1, 2, the *mountains* are exhorted to listen, like stately referees, to Jehovah's 'controversy.' Then, in verses 3 to 5, *Jehovah* pleads. In verses 6 and 7 *Micah* speaks, representing those in the nation who would fitly respond. In verse 8 the overhearing mountains break in – "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Next, in verses 9 to 16, *Jehovah* speaks to 'the man of wisdom,' wheresoever he is, in the city, exposing the nation's sin, and showing why the nation suffered."

The word "Listen" or "Hear" which introduces this part of the prophecy is typical for Micah's style. In this chapter, God takes His people to court. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* calls this a dialogue between God and the people but that term may be too friendly a description for the content of this chapter. The language is a strange mixture of accusation and pleading. God humbles Himself before man by pleading His case. There is a suggestion of the Incarnation in this in which our Lord Jesus Christ "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"¹²⁰

The case is heard against the background of the mountains, which, on the one hand, had been the scene of Israel's idolatry and, on the other hand, symbols of God's eternity as the "everlasting foundations of the earth."

The opening words are a summons to the people to state their case before the mountains. The suggestion is that they looked to the mountains as the places where their idols were situated and where idolatry was perpetrated. Israel's idols were the audience in this case. But God brings His accusation before the mountains as the One who created those symbols of eternity. In the words of Moses: "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."¹²¹ The scene also reminds us of God's Word to the children of Hosea regarding the people of Israel: "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband!"¹²² Isaiah presents us with a similar situation but with a different content when God pleads with Israel: "Come now, let us reason together, ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."¹²³

Part of Israel's sinful condition is due to the fact that they do not know their own history. A nation that does not know its history does not know from where it came and, consequently, does not know where it is going. This is the reason God brings His plea in the form of a history lesson. God leads them back to the day of their birth. Israel was born as a nation when they left Egypt. It is interesting to see that both Aaron and Miriam are mentioned with Moses as leaders of the people. Reading the story of the exodus, we do not get the impression that Miriam occupied a leading position. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* mentions the Chaldee text of this verse, which reads: "I have sent three prophets before you; Moses, that he might teach you the tradition of judgments; Aaron, that he might make atonement for the people; and Miriam, that she

¹²⁰ Phil. 2:7,8

¹²¹ Ps. 90:2

¹²² Hos. 2:2 (NKJV)

¹²³ Isa. 1:18

might instruct the females.” Miriam is called a prophetess when she leads the women of Israel in *The Song of Moses*, after the people have crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army had drowned.¹²⁴

The next lesson is about Balak and Balaam. The story is recorded in Numbers.¹²⁵ Balak wanted Balaam to curse Israel but Balaam was unable to utter any curse; instead he pronounced a series of blessings upon the nation.

Between Sittim and Gilgal lies the River Jordan, which Israel had to cross in order to begin its conquest of Canaan. *Barnes’ Notes* comment on “From Shittim unto Gilgal: ‘The words are separated by the Hebrew accent from what went before. It is then probably said in concise energy for, ‘Remember too from Shittim to Gilgal,’ that is, all the great works of God ‘from Shittim’, the last encampment of Israel out of the promised land, where they so sinned in Baal-peor, ‘unto Gilgal,’ the first in the promised land, which they entered by miracle, where the Ark rested amid the victories given them, where the Covenant was renewed, and ‘the reproach of Egypt was rolled away’ (Josh 5:9). Remember all, from your own deep sin and rebellion to the deep mercy of God.” The mention of the journey from Sittim to Gilgal is more than a reference to the miracle of the crossing of Jordan River; it symbolizes the miracle of cleansing from sin and restoration of dignity.

Micah states that the purpose of the history lesson is “that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes on this: “The remembrance of what God had done to them might convince them of all this, and engage them forever to his service. Or they may refer to the controversy now pleaded between God and Israel; let them remember God’s many favors to them and their fathers, and compare with them their unworthy ungrateful conduct towards him, that they may know the righteousness of the Lord in contending with them, and it may appear that in this controversy he has right on his side; his ways are equal, for he will be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges.

2. Micah Replies 6:6-8

6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

What our outline calls “Micah Replies” is, probably, the reaction of the people to Micah’s prophecy. We could hardly suspect Micah of wanting to “offer [his] firstborn for [his] transgression, the fruit of [his] body for the sin of [his] soul.” This last paragraph places the whole thought of coming before God with a sacrifice for sin on a doubtful footing. It equates the practice of true religion with the corruption of pagan rites. The words are no expression of conviction of sin and true repentance but they are the thoughts of a confused mind. King David had prophetically written similar words pertaining to the coming of the Messiah who would bring the sacrifice of His own body. We read in the Psalms: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, ‘Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.’ ”¹²⁶ But the sacrifice of the body of Christ, which made atonement for the sins of the world is infinitely removed from the murder of a baby as a sacrifice to a pagan idol.

Not only the content of the act of contrition of the sinner is wrong but also the attitude that accompanies the act. The bringing of a calf or of a ram as a sacrificial animal was required by law to make atonement for sin. But the suggestion to bring ten thousand rams and ten thousand rivers of oil projects the image of an affluent person who can afford to pay for his sin and for whom, consequently, sin is not a serious issue. This is the confession of a Texas millionaire who can afford to sin and who can afford to pay. He is even broad minded enough to allow some heathen practice of killing infants if God would so desire. He is ready to meet his Maker but he doubts whether his Maker is ready to meet him. This man believes

¹²⁴ See Ex. 15:20

¹²⁵ See Num. 22:2-24:25

¹²⁶ Ps. 40:6-8

himself to be on equal footing with God with whom he can make arrangements for some unethical business practices to be covered up. For such a person, religion is making deals with God.

To this the prophet replies with words that, next to the prophecy about Bethlehem as the site of Messiah's birth, have become the landmark of this book. "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." God's demands have been well documented in the Ten Commandments and in the whole Pentateuch. God has revealed Himself as the ultimate standard of goodness. The purpose of the rituals of atonement was not that man would pay for his sins in order to keep on sinning but that he would "act justly and ... love mercy." Those words describe man's relationship to his fellowmen. "Walk humbly" refers to fellowship with God. The word "humble" is probably the most misunderstood word in the Bible. The Hebrew word *tsana`* is found only twice in the Old Testament. The literal meaning is "to humiliate." The other instance is in Proverbs: "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the *lowly* is wisdom."¹²⁷ The NIV renders this verse: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with *humility* comes wisdom." The word *tsana`* refers to the order of human relations in which some people have failed to reach the level that brings respect and influence in society. It has nothing to do with a person's inner worth but rather with the "pecking order" or the place "at the totem pole." God transfers this feeling of disdain in human relations to our relationship with Him, not because He does not value us but because when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, the Lord of glory Himself became the outcast of society. Isaiah describes the Messiah in terms of this kind of humiliation: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."¹²⁸ And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of: "Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."¹²⁹

In the context of Micah's prophecy, the word *tsana`* suggests sorrow over sin, the opposite of a proud attitude. In the New Testament, Jesus elevates the concept as a means of victory over sin, and death, and the power of the Evil One. He says: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."¹³⁰

B. The Second Plea of God

6:9--7:6

1. God Pleads 6:9-16

9 Listen! The LORD is calling to the city-and to fear your name is wisdom-"Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.

10 Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed?

11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?

12 Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.

13 Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins.

14 You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword.

15 You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine.

16 You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab's house, and you have followed their traditions. Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations."

¹²⁷ Prov. 11:2 (KJV)

¹²⁸ Isa. 53:3

¹²⁹ Heb. 12:2

¹³⁰ Luke 9:23,24

In the NIV, the following section opens with the word “Listen,” which is the call to attention with which every segment of this prophecy is introduced. Some versions have the word in the middle of the sentence, but that does not change the meaning.

“The LORD is calling to the city,” which is Jerusalem. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes: “When the sin of a city cries to God his voice cries against the city; and, when the judgments of God are coming upon a city, his voice first cries unto it. He warns before he wounds, because he is not willing that any should perish.” The crying of the voice of the Lord is identical to Micah’s prophecy. God speaks and cries to people through His prophets.

The second sentence of the verse, “and to fear your name is wisdom” has been rendered also: “Wisdom shall see Your name.”¹³¹ *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* explains: “Instead of *yir’aah*, will see, the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Vulgate, and the Arabic, with twelve of Kennicott’s MSS. and De Rossi’s MSS., have read *yir’aay* ... they that FEAR. The Vulgate reads...: ‘And thou shalt be salvation to them that fear thy name.’ The Septuagint reads...: ‘And he shall save those who fear His name.’ This the Arabic copies. The Targum states: ‘And the teachers shall fear the name.’ ” The variations are probably due to a misreading of one or two letters in a manuscript.

Fearing the Name of the Lord is a biblical concept, which definitely makes more sense than seeing the Name. The Name of the Lord stands for His character. In the context of this prophecy, it means taking God’s wrath seriously and adjusting one’s lifestyle accordingly by repenting of sin and beginning to practice righteousness.

The Rod appointed by God Himself refers to Assyria, which is also called the rod of God’s anger by Isaiah. We read: “Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath!”¹³²

Vs. 10 reads in the NIV: “Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed?” The KJV renders this: “Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The old versions compare this ill-gotten wealth to a fire which shall consume the homes of its possessors. Septuagint, ‘Is there fire and the house of the wicked treasuring up wicked treasures?’ ” The Law specifically forbade the use of unjust measures. We read: “Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”¹³³ The Book of Proverbs strongly condemns dishonest business practices. “The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.”¹³⁴ The words are put in the form of a question, suggesting that any reasonable person would answer “No.”

The shortsightedness of dishonesty has eternal consequences for man. Cheating in business, the making “a fast buck” are an indication of a denial of reality. A person who takes shortcuts to riches believes that life on earth is all there is and that material benefits provide happiness. Jesus warns us against the danger of focusing on the wrong issues. We read that He says in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Rust and fire are similar chemical reactions; they both are symptoms of the fact that certain atoms are breaking up while being mixed with oxygen. Fire is an accelerated form of the process; rust a slower form. We believe that precious metals are rust proof, but there is rust that ruins even gold, at least the gold we know, not the gold the streets of the New Jerusalem are made of.

Another misconception about riches is that it provides protection. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews assures us that the promise of God’s protection is more precious than any earthly possession. We read: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has

¹³¹ (NKJV)

¹³² Isa. 10:5

¹³³ Lev. 19:35,36

¹³⁴ Prov.11:1; see also Prov 20:10; 20:23

said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' „¹³⁵

Riches and violence are often partners in the same business. Man tends to equate material possessions with influence and power, as if an accumulation of wealth would give a person the right to abuse his fellowmen. We tend to forget that our possessions are entrusted to us and that, on the Day of Judgment, we will have to give account of every penny we spent or did not spend. We will not only be judged on our moral behavior but also on our bookkeeping. Better said: Our financial dealings are considered as part of our moral behavior. There are not many people God can trust with riches. This does not mean that there are not many rich people in this world. Many rich are rich to their own detriment. It is not without reason that Jesus calls the thorns in the Parable of the Sower, "the deceitfulness of wealth."¹³⁶ The Scottish writer George MacDonald believed that God punishes some people by making them rich.

The punishment for the rich who possess their riches irresponsibly is spelled out in verses 13-15. The destruction and ruin of man, which is described in these verses, is a moral ruin. The people who are addressed have accumulated possession for the purpose of providing them with happiness, but they are left empty and dissatisfied. King Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes: "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil-this is the gift of God."¹³⁷ In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells the parable of the man who planned to build bigger barns to accommodate his bumper crops without taking God into account. He died before he could enjoy his retirement. Jesus comments: "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."¹³⁸ To those who seek their happiness outside God, God withholds His gift of happiness. Some millionaires are the poorest people on earth. Jesus' advice to the rich young man who asked about eternal life was: "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." Mark tells us that, "Jesus looked at him and loved him. At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!' The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' „¹³⁹ If we don't look for happiness from the only source that provides it (fellowship with God), God will close all other avenues to us.

God reproaches the people of Judah that they "have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab's house." The Bible says of Omri: "Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD and sinned more than all those before him. He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat and in his sin, which he had caused Israel to commit, so that they provoked the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their worthless idols." Jeroboam's sin was that he broke with God's revelation and initiated a worship of YHWH that accommodated man instead of the divinely instituted worship. Omri took a step further away from the truth and substituted this worship of YHWH with a worship of Baal and other idols, although the Baal worship is actually credited to Omri's son Ahab and his daughter-in-law Jezebel. This transition is called "The statutes of Omri." Omri was one of the most powerful kings of the Northern Kingdom. Omri moved the capital of Israel Tirzah to Samaria, which he fortified to the point that it took the Assyrians two years of siege to take it. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states: "Beth Omri, 'the house of Omri,' is the regular designation for Samaria in Assyrian monuments, thus confirming 1 Kings 16:24. In the black obelisk even Jehu as king of Israel is called 'son of Omri' In the Dibon stone Mesha records that Omri subjected and oppressed Moab until Mesha delivered his country." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Omri, king of Israel, the father of Ahab, was one of the worst kings the Israelites ever had; and Ahab followed in his wicked father's steps. The statutes of those kings were the very grossest idolatry. Jezebel, wife of the latter, and daughter of Ithobaal, king of Tyre, had no fellow on earth. From her Shakespeare seems to have drawn the character of

¹³⁵ Heb. 13:5,6

¹³⁶ See Matt. 13:22

¹³⁷ Eccl. 3:12-13

¹³⁸ Luke 12:21

¹³⁹ See Mark 10:21-25

Lady Macbeth; a woman, like her prototype, mixed up of tigress and fiend, without addition. Omri, Ahab, and Jezebel, were the models followed by the Israelites in the days of this prophet.”

It is quite likely that, at the moment this prophecy was uttered, the Northern Kingdom had already been taken into captivity to Assyria. Thus the Kingdom of Judah knew exactly what Micah talked about when he announced that Judah would be given over to ruin, and the people to derision, and that they would bear the scorn of the nations.

2. Micah Replies 7:1-6

1 What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave.

2 The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net.

3 Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire--they all conspire together.

4 The best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of their confusion.

5 Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words.

6 For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies are the members of his own household.

There are in the Gospels several acts and utterances of our Lord Jesus Christ that acquire a deeper meaning in the light of Micah's prophecy. Matthew records the incident of the fig tree Jesus cursed because it had no fruit. We read: "Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered."¹⁴⁰ Jesus' act becomes a symbolic confirmation of Micah's sorrowful exclamation: "What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave." And Jesus' statement to His disciples: "I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'¹⁴¹ is a direct quotation of Micah's prophecy.

The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary outlines this last chapter of the book as follows: "The prophet responds to the threatening of the Lord (Mic 6:9-16) in the name of the believing church with a penitential prayer, in which it sorrowfully confesses the universality of the deep moral corruption, and painfully bemoans the necessity for the visitation of God (vv. 1-6); after which it rises, through belief in the fidelity of God, to the confidential hope that the Lord will cause the light of His grace to rise again upon the church, which is bearing the merited punishment, and will not let its enemies triumph over it, but will procure it justice, and deeply humble the foe (vv. 7-13); and to this it appends a prayer for the renewal of the former manifestations of grace (v. 14). The Lord answers this prayer with the promise that He will renew for His people the wonders of the olden time (vv. 15-17); whereupon the prophet closes by praising the mercy and grace of the Lord (vv. 18-20)."

The Pulpit Commentary also sees in Micah's opening words a representation of the sentiment of the whole nation. We read: "Micah threatens no more; he represents repentant Israel confessing its corruption and lamenting the necessity of punishment." The context, however, seems rather to warrant a personal and very emotional reaction of the prophet to the decadence of the people than the people's repentance.

In the exercise of his prophetic office, Micah becomes emotionally involved to the point where he cries out to the Lord. God always intends His servants to personally experience the message they proclaim. There is never a place for aloof professionalism in preaching. Many of the Old Testament prophets displayed deep emotions while speaking the Word of the Lord. Jeremiah expressed both the Lord's sentiment as well as

¹⁴⁰ Matt. 21:18,19

¹⁴¹ Matt. 10:35,36

his own when he exclaimed: “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.”¹⁴² Jesus displayed deep emotional involvement when He wept over Jerusalem. Luke records: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes.’”¹⁴³ And the apostle Paul writes to the Romans: “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.”¹⁴⁴ In all of this also, “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.”¹⁴⁵ In his shedding of tears, the servant expresses his Master’s sorrow. When the prophet weeps, he weeps God’s own tears.

God expects His people to bear fruit, even if it is only a little, but He is sorely disappointed. The lack of fruit is the reason for judgment. Jesus expresses God’s sentiment both in His weeping over Jerusalem as in His cursing of the fig tree.

The Hebrew word translated in the NIV “summer fruits” is *qayits*, which can mean the harvest, or the grain, or fruit, or even the dry season. *Barnes’ Notes* states in a footnote: “Literally, as the gatherings of the fig-harvest. It is one of those concise comparisons, which have to be filled up. In prose it would be. ‘I am as one who, at the gatherings of the fig-harvest, should still look for fruit on the trees.’ The meaning, ‘summer,’ the English margin is doubtless a secondary sense of the word, resulting from the fact, that the main fig harvest was about the summer solstice.” And *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* explains: “[Israel’s] condition resembles that of an orchard in the time of the fruit-gathering, when you may find fruit enough indeed, but not a single early fig, since the early figs ripen as early as June, whereas the fruit-gathering does not take place till August.”

The meaning of the image in vs. 1 becomes clear in vs. 2. The figs represent the godly in the land, which have been swept away. Jeremiah elaborates on the picture in one of his visions where he sees Israel as two baskets with figs, very good figs and very bad one. The good figs represent the good people who will be lead into Babylonian captivity; the bad figs stand for the evil members of the nation who will perish in the land.¹⁴⁶

There are instances in world history of good people who were swept from the land. During the Reformation in Western Europe, thousands of Protestants fled their homelands. France and Belgium were both creamed off their population, which enriched the Netherlands. The same happened in Nazi Germany when Jews, who could flee, fled, taking their culture and sophistication with them. Countries in South East Asia have become impoverished by communist takeovers, which drove the best of their people away. When that part of the population, which is the pride of a nation, has left, what remains is a group of hoodlums who do not hesitate to enrich themselves and commit murder. David described in the psalms the picture of a nation that leaves God out of the picture: “Help, LORD, for the godly are no more; the faithful have vanished from among men.”¹⁴⁷ And in another Psalm, he states: “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”¹⁴⁸ A few righteous people can save a whole nation. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been spared by ten righteous people or less. The Lord told Abraham, in answer to his prayer for Sodom: “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”¹⁴⁹

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary offers the following interesting explanation on the sentence: “Each hunts his brother with a net.” “This appears to be an allusion to the ancient mode of duel between the

¹⁴² Jer. 9:1

¹⁴³ Luke 19:41,42

¹⁴⁴ Rom. 9:2-4

¹⁴⁵ See Matt. 10:24,25

¹⁴⁶ See Jer. 24:1-10

¹⁴⁷ Ps. 12:1

¹⁴⁸ Ps. 11:3

¹⁴⁹ Gen. 18:32

retiarius and secutor. The former had a casting net, which he endeavored to throw over the head of his antagonist, that he might then dispatch him with his short sword. The other parried the cast; and when the retiarius missed, he was obliged to run about the field to get time to set his net in right order for another throw. While he ran, the other followed, that he might dispatch him before he should be able to recover the proper position of his net; and hence, the latter was called secutor, the pursuer, as the other was called retiarius, or the net man.”

World history abounds with examples of nations that have become totally corrupt. In both capitalistic and totalitarian societies there are elements that have abandoned all moral principles. But in some cases the whole of a nation has become rotten to the core. There are countries where one cannot enter or leave without paying a bribe and where nothing is achieved without paying money under the table. David said: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people he chose for his inheritance,”¹⁵⁰ but Satan is a cruel potentate in those countries that do not recognize the rule of God.

Vs. 4 takes the picture back to the vineyard where, instead of fruit bearing vines, one finds only briars and thorns.

Micah announces the Day of Judgment as if it had already arrived: “The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you.” The Transliterated Hebrew Bible reads literally: “the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh.” The watchmen can be either the prophets who foretold the coming of the judgment or the ones that are punished because they did nothing to divert disaster. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* quotes Grotius, who interpreted the words: “the day foretold by thy (true) prophets as the time of ‘thy visitation’ in wrath.” But Calvin believed that it meant: “the day of thy false prophets being punished; they are specially threatened, as being not only blind themselves, but leading others, blindfold.” It is also possible, and even more likely that “watchmen” stands for “God,” since the two are found in parallel sentences. The fact that the NIV put “watchmen” in the plural is no argument against that, since the NKJV put it in the singular. There we read the verse: “The day of your watchman and your punishment comes.” God is called a watchman in the Book of Psalms. We read: “He will not let your foot slip--he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”¹⁵¹

God’s visitation brings about confusion, which is elaborated on in verses 5 and 6. The Hebrew word rendered “confusion” is *mebuwkah*, meaning “perplexity.” It is derived from a word that means “to involve,” or to “be entangled.” Micah describes this entanglement as a series of relationships gone wrong. There is in vs. 5 a series of examples of bonds of deepening intimacy from neighbor to friend to lover. Vs. 6 takes this even further into blood bonds. These should all be natural and harmonious relationships but they have become corrupt. God’s visitation does not cause relationships to go sour; it reveals the effects of sin in the life of man. When fellowship is broken vertically, it breaks down horizontally also. God’s presence brings to light what was hidden under the surface.

Jesus’ reference to Micah’s prophecy throws new light on this passage. In His discourse with His disciples, Jesus says: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’”¹⁵² *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* quotes from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: “O shame to men! Devil with Devil damn’d firm concord holds, men only disagree of creatures rational; though under hope of heavenly grace; and, God proclaiming peace, yet live in hatred, enmity, and strife among themselves, and levy cruel wars, wasting the earth, each other to destroy!” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “When the soul has lost the love of God, all other is but scheming love, since ‘natural affection’ is from Him, and it too dies out, as God gives the soul over to itself (Rom 1:28). The words describe partly the inward corruption, partly the outward causes which shall call it forth.”

The purpose of Jesus’ coming into the world is not war but peace. The angels announced at His birth: “on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”¹⁵³ And to His disciples He said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do

¹⁵⁰ Ps. 33:12

¹⁵¹ Ps. 121:3,4

¹⁵² Matt. 10:34-36

¹⁵³ Luke 2:14

not be afraid.”¹⁵⁴ But the Word of God also works as a sword, not only severing corrupt human relations but also corrupt motives of the inner soul of man. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes this by saying: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” The abscess of man’s soul has to be lanced by the sword of God’s Word in order to bring about healing. The purpose of Jesus’ coming is not to bring about animosity in human relations but to expose the existing corruption for the purpose of healing. The same is true of Micah’s prophecy. God’s visitations are never for the purpose of judgment but always for salvation. Judgment is always the result of man’s rejection of God’s grace; it is never the intent of God’s coming. “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”¹⁵⁵ God’s light reveals an existing reality.

C. The Promise of Final Salvation 7:7-20

*7 But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.
8 Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light.
9 Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.
10 Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, "Where is the LORD your God?" My eyes will see her downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets.
11 The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries.
12 In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.
13 The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds.
14 Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, which lives by itself in a forest, in fertile pasturelands. Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in days long ago.
15 "As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders."
16 Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf.
17 They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you.
18 Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.
19 You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.
20 You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.*

The last part of this prophecy is a compound of addresses. Micah addresses his enemies in verses 7-10. In verses 11-13, he speaks to the nation of Israel. Vs. 14 addresses God and in vs. 15 God Himself speaks. In verses 16-20, God is addressed again.

Micah’s reaction to his own prophecy is similar to the one Habakkuk expressed. Predicting judgment to come is one of the most depressing parts of the ministry of a prophet. Jeremiah’s struggle gave him the sobriquet “the weeping prophet.” Habakkuk countered his feeling of depression by reaching beyond judgment to God’s grace. We read: “I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop

¹⁵⁴ John 14:27

¹⁵⁵ John 3:17,18

fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.”¹⁵⁶

Bible scholars disagree about whether Micah speaks for himself, or in the name of the faithful among the people, or for the nation as a whole. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* understands the text to be a reaching forward to the Captivity, at which time Israel will demonstrate understanding of the punishment for her sins and hope in God for the future. Other scholars believe that the prophet speaks for himself.

Whoever the enemy may be in these verses, we know that behind all human hostility stands the archenemy of the human soul, who seeks man's destruction. He is the author of sin and, although man bears full responsibility for his own fall, no one sins without demonic assistance. When Satan lures a human being into sin, he turns around and, with an appeal to God's righteousness, takes the role of an accuser. John calls him in Revelation: “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night.”¹⁵⁷ The reference to darkness also points in the direction of demonic presence. Jesus acknowledged the presence of Satan at the time of His arrest, when He said to the soldiers who seized Him: “This is your hour-when darkness reigns.”¹⁵⁸

Micah's prophecy applies to the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon whom the ultimate punishment for the sins of mankind was laid. We may object that Jesus had no sin and that the words, “Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD's wrath” do not apply to Him. but when Jesus died on the cross, He was considered worse than a sinner, a man who had committed sin, He became sin itself. The apostle Paul writes: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”¹⁵⁹ In a way, Micah's words have a universal application to all who have sinned and hope in God for salvation. Satan may accuse us before God, but the Holy Spirit, God Himself, is the Paraclete, the advocate who pleads our case. In Paul's words: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.”¹⁶⁰

The result of Israel's justification is the ultimate embarrassment of the enemy. Because the enemy is addressed as “she,” *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* believes that the city of Babylon is meant. Those who say: “Where is the LORD your God?” will always be ashamed. The words are borrowed from David's experience, who said in one of the psalms: “My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”¹⁶¹ The commander of King Sennacherib's army made the mistake of saying: “Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they rescued Samaria from my hand? Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from me? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand?”¹⁶² The Assyrian army went away defeated without Hezekiah shooting one single arrow at them.

We don't read that the Babylonians made the same verbal boast as the Assyrian army did, but in their attitude of arrogance they were not inferior to the Assyrians. Daniel records that, on the last night of his empire, King Belshazzar “gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.”¹⁶³ This was no less an act of defiance against YHWH than the boasting of the kings of the

¹⁵⁶ Hab. 3:16-19

¹⁵⁷ Rev. 12:10

¹⁵⁸ Luke 22:53

¹⁵⁹ II Cor. 5:21

¹⁶⁰ Rom. 8:33

¹⁶¹ Ps. 42:3,10

¹⁶² Isa. 36:18-20

¹⁶³ Dan. 5:2

earth, of whom David says: “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’”¹⁶⁴

Behind all this boasting, of course, we see the shadow of the Prince of Darkness, the ruler of this world, who once said: “I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”¹⁶⁵ When Micah predicts Babylon’s downfall, saying: “My eyes will see her downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets,” he says what later the prophet Jeremiah would predict at the conclusion of his prophecies to the people who had been led into captivity in Babylon: “When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, ‘So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.’”¹⁶⁶ And the apostle Paul promises the same truth to the church of Jesus Christ: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”¹⁶⁷

The next section, verses 11,12, obviously present problems to the translators. The NIV reads: “The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries. In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.” *Barnes’ Notes* suggests: “Up to and from Assyria and the cities of strong-land (Egypt); Up to and from strong-land and even to river (the Euphrates;); And sea from sea, and mountain to mountain.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* quotes other translations: “ ‘And in that day they shall come unto thee From Assyria and the fenced cities; and from Egypt even unto the river.’ Calmet translates: ‘They shall come to thee from Assyria even unto Egypt; And from Egypt even to the river; (Euphrates;); and from one sea to another, and from one mountain to another.’ ”

The restoration of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of its walls are symbolic for the renewal of God’s revelation in this world. This is obvious from the coming of Assyria and Egypt to Jerusalem, not to conquer but to be saved. The people did in fact return from captivity and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt under Nehemiah, but those events were merely an outward expression of a greater spiritual reality. The essence of God’s revelation on earth is expressed in John’s Gospel: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁶⁸ Israel will finally fulfill its ministry to the world as a kingdom of priests, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel of salvation.

Vs. 13 seems to swing back from proclamation of restoration to judgment. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, however, takes a different view of this text. We read: “[Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate] This should be translated in the preterit tense, ‘Though the land HAD been desolate;’ that is, the land of Israel had been desolate during the captivity, which captivity was the ‘fruit of the evil doings of them that had dwelt therein.’ ”

Vs. 14 is a prayer addressed to God: “Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance...” The question is, does Micah pray for himself or does he pray in behalf of the people? Some commentators believe that Micah sees himself here as the shepherd of Israel, who has gone astray. At the end of his prophecy, he lays down his office and commits his charge to God. Others see this as a prayer of the people facing captivity, asking for restoration.

The period of captivity was undoubtedly the time when Israel was, in Moses’ words, “like sheep without a shepherd.” When Moses was about to climb Mount Nebo, the mountain on which he would die, he said to the LORD: “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Ps. 2:2,3

¹⁶⁵ Isa. 14:13,14

¹⁶⁶ Jer. 51:63,64

¹⁶⁷ Rom. 16:20

¹⁶⁸ John 1:14

¹⁶⁹ Num. 27:15-17

Barne's Notes comments on this verse: "[Feed Thy people with Thy rod] The day of final deliverance was still a great way off. There was a weary interval before them of chastisement, suffering, captivity. So Micah lays down his pastoral office by committing his people to Him who was their true and abiding Shepherd. Who that has had the pastoral office, has not thought, as the night drew near in which no man can work, 'what will be after him?' Micah knew and foretold the outline. It was for his people a passing through the valley of the shadow of death. Micah then commits them to Him, who had Himself committed them to him, who alone could guide them through it. It is a touching parting with his people; a last guidance of those whom he had taught, reprov'd, rebuked, in vain, to Him the Good Shepherd who led Israel like a flock. The rod is at times the shepherd's staff (Lev 27:32; Ps 23:4), although more frequently the symbol of chastisement. God's chastisement of His people is an austere form of His love. So He says, 'If his children forsake My law, I will visit their offences with a rod and their sin with scourges: nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from them' (Ps 89:31,33)."

The title "Shepherd" for God originated with Jacob. In his blessing for Joseph we read: "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb."¹⁷⁰ David immortalized the thought of God being the shepherd of His people in Psalm 23: "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."¹⁷¹ Micah's prayer was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Him who said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."¹⁷²

In vs. 15, the voice of God is heard again, answering the prophet's prayer. The return of Israel from captivity is compared to the exodus from Egypt. The Biblical record does not report any supernatural occurrences when the Jews returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and the wall of the city in 535 and 444 BC. The implication is that God's promise reaches beyond the event of the return from captivity to a greater deliverance and restoration of Israel as a kingdom of priests in the future. There is undoubtedly a reference to the coming of the Messiah in those words but probably also to events that will occur in apocalyptic times.

Barnes' Notes observes here: "The reference to the Exodus must have led them to think of actual miracles; since, in regard to the Exodus, it is used of nothing else. But there were no miracles at the return from the captivity. 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion' (Ps 126:1,3), said a Psalmist of the returned people, 'we were like them that dream. The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad.' Great things, but not miraculous. The promise then kept the people looking onward, until He came, 'a prophet mighty in word and deed' (Luke 24:19), as to whom Peter appealed to the people, that He was 'approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know' (Acts 2:22); who gave also to them who believed on Him power to do 'greater works than He did' (John 14:12), through His own power, because He went to His Father; and when they believed, He shewed to him, namely, to the whole people gathered into the One Church, Jew and Gentile, yet more marvelous things, things, every way more marvelous and beyond nature than those of old, 'the unsearchable riches of Christ, the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God' (Eph 3:8-9)."

We have witnessed in the twentieth century the miracle of the return of the Jews to Palestine and the forming of the state of Israel. In terms of territory and military power, Israel should have been swept off the map by the numerically overwhelming forces of the Arab countries. Their survival borders on the supernatural.

The following verses depict Israel again as faithful stewards of God's revelation whose testimony is so clear that the nations of the world will flock to Jerusalem to find forgiveness and salvation. The superpowers will be healed of their pride and come in humility to the One who said: "Not by might nor by

¹⁷⁰ Gen. 49:22-25

¹⁷¹ Ps. 23:1-4

¹⁷² John 10:11

power, but by my Spirit.”¹⁷³ They will come to the embarrassing conclusion that “the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”¹⁷⁴

The reference to the snake in vs. 17 is not merely a figure of speech; it projects the picture of the first temptation on earth when Satan presented himself to Eve in the form of a snake and God condemned the reptile to crawl on his belly and eat dust all the days of his life.¹⁷⁵ In Revelation, John refers to the devil as “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”¹⁷⁶ The ultimate answer to Micah’s prayer will be when Satan, who is behind all human rebellion against God, is finally and totally defeated. That will be a victory with which no miracle from Exodus can compare.

The exodus of the human soul from the bondage of sin far surpasses anything Israel experienced when leaving Egypt. That is the theme of the concluding verses of this book. It is a song of praise to God for what He has done with the sins of His children. Micah did not know how God would forgive the sins of the remnant of His inheritance. He merely understood that God would forgive. The greatest miracle this universe has ever witnessed in which God dealt with human sin without compromising His love and His righteousness was still beyond the horizon of this prophecy. No one in the Old Testament could understand that “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”¹⁷⁷ would be God Himself. The treading under foot of the sins of the people refers back again to the image of the snake, the originator of human sin. God had told Satan in the first prophecy in the Bible: “he [the Messiah] will crush your head.”¹⁷⁸ And Paul predicts the victory of the believer over the powers of darkness by saying: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”¹⁷⁹

With the exclamation, “Who is a God like you! Micah reaches the pinnacle of his prophecy. This is the most moving part of this book. In a sermon entitled: *God’s Glorious and Everlasting Name*, C. H. Spurgeon says: “[God] gets to Himself a name in forgiving the guilty. When the great sinner comes, or the person who, though he has not openly offended, is yet conscious of great inward sin-when these come, and in a moment are washed whiter than snow, and realize that their sin is put away for ever, they cannot help crying, like a man in Scotland, of whom I heard, who, when he spoke the praises of Christ who had saved him from the wrath to come, said, in his joy, ‘Oh, he is a great Forgiver! Oh, he is a great Forgiver!’ You remember how the prophet Micah writes of this great Forgiver: ‘Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea’ Mic 7:18. Hallelujah! Every soul that gets the pardon of all its sin must magnify the Lord; and if you know to the full what that pardon is, it will make you give God a great name.”

God’s Name is Forgiveness. When Moses asked to see God’s glory, God answered him: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”¹⁸⁰

Yet, the prophet does not state that God writes a blank check to mankind as a whole. He speaks about “the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance.” The remnant consists of the ones who passed through judgment. Jesus speaks of the ones who believe in Him as people who do not come into judgment,

¹⁷³ Zech. 4:6

¹⁷⁴ I Cor. 1:25

¹⁷⁵ See Gen. 3:14

¹⁷⁶ Rev. 12:9

¹⁷⁷ John 1:29

¹⁷⁸ Gen. 3:15

¹⁷⁹ Rom. 16:20

¹⁸⁰ Ex. 33:19

but who have passed from death into life.¹⁸¹ We who believe in Him may consider ourselves to be part of “the remnant of his inheritance.”

Speaking of our sin, Micah uses again the words, “you will tread our sins underfoot.” The same words were used in vs. 10 in connection with the author of sin. Evidently, the reference in this verse also points to a source of sin outside the human heart.

Micah’s prediction that God will “hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” speaks of the completeness of God’s pardon. In the last decades, people have endeavored to reach the wrecks of sunken ships in the Atlantic Ocean. The discovery of the place where the Titanic sunk is an example. With the help of sophisticated modern equipment some interesting discoveries have been made, although not without great trouble and investment of large amounts of money. There are some ocean depths, however, that remain beyond human reach. It is into those “depths of the sea” that God hurls our iniquities. The Dutch lady, Corrie ten Boom observed that God added a sign to the place that reads “Fishing Forbidden!” The image conveys the thought that the sins God has forgiven are irretrievable. David uses another image that is even more absolute. We read in the Psalms: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”¹⁸² Unlike the distance between north and south, the distance between east and west is infinite. God said to Jeremiah: “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”¹⁸³ For the all-knowing God not to remember sin is tantamount to a complete removal of sin. The thought makes Micah exclaim: “Who is a God like you!” According to C. S. Lewis, the feature that distinguishes the Gospel of Jesus Christ from all other religions in the world is grace. Grace sets God apart from all other gods.

Micah’s appeal to God’s promises to Abraham and Jacob puts the grace of God on a legal basis. God has made a covenant with mankind through the ancestry of the people of Israel. It is on the basis of this legal contract that every human being can obtain pardon of sin and salvation by accepting God’s offer in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary quotes the Chaldee version of this last verse: “The Chaldee paraphrases this last verse with spirit and propriety: ‘Thou wilt give the truth to Jacob his son, as thou hast promised by oath to him in Beth-el. And the mercy to Abraham and to his seed after him, as thou didst swear to him amidst the divisions. Thou wilt be mindful of us on account of the binding of Isaac, who was bound upon the altar before thee. And thou wilt do us that good, which, from the most ancient days, thou hast promised to our fathers by an oath.’ ” *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes: “It is in pursuance of the covenant that our sins are pardoned and our lusts mortified; from that spring all these streams flow, and with these he shall freely give us all things. The promise is said to be mercy to Abraham, because, as made to him first, it was mere mercy, preventing mercy, considering what state it found him in. But it was truth to Jacob, because the faithfulness of God was engaged to make good to him and his seed, as heirs to Abraham, all that was graciously promised to Abraham. See here, [1.] With what solemnity the covenant of grace is ratified to us; it was not only spoken, written, and sealed, but which is the highest confirmation, it was sworn to our fathers; nor is it a modern project, but is confirmed by antiquity too; it was sworn from the days of old; it is an ancient charter. [2.] With what satisfaction it may be applied and relied upon by us; we may say with the highest assurance, Thou wilt perform the truth and mercy; not one iota or tittle of it shall fall to the ground. Faithful is he that has promised, who also will do it.”

The covenant with Abraham and his descendants is mentioned all through the Bible. In the Book of Psalms we read: “He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant.”¹⁸⁴

We find the mention of the same covenant at the birth of Christ mentioned by Mary in her Magnificat: “He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” And Zechariah makes mention of the same in his song of praise: “...to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father

¹⁸¹ See John 5:24 (NKJV)

¹⁸² Ps. 103:12

¹⁸³ Jer. 31:34

¹⁸⁴ Ps. 105:8-10

Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”

God’s promise to the patriarchs guarantees of our safe arrival. The words of the author of Hebrews are pertinent here: “Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”¹⁸⁵

The apostles never preached an easy Gospel. We read about Paul and Barnabas “strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith, saying: ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’”¹⁸⁶ It is because of the hardships that lie between us and the gates of heaven that we need the assurance of God’s oath that confirms the covenant.

Micah spoke those prophetic words at the onset of the long and dark night of the ruin of his country and the captivity of his people. Before darkness set in, God kindled a light to see His children through. He still does the same for us.

Indianapolis, IN, September 26, 2003

¹⁸⁵ Heb. 6:17-20

¹⁸⁶ Acts 14:22