

MICAH

Micah, the champion of the poor, wrote this book around 735-700 B.C., and it is contemporary with the book of Isaiah. This was a period of turmoil, strife, change and growth. Morally and socially, Judah presented a dark picture.

Micah is from the village of Moresheth-gath, a village on the border between Judah and Philistia.

Micah is the champion of the poor. He was a prophet of the poor and downtrodden. He is courageous and fearless and is indignant over the corruption and heartlessness of inhuman rulers and time-serving religionists.

Micah saw clearly the conditions and needs of the hour and he met them by fearlessly attacking and condemning the sin of the people and by pointing them back to God.

In Jerusalem altars had been erected to heathen gods. These had been destroyed and true worship to God was restored. Also destroyed was the brass serpent set up by Moses because it had become an object of worship as an idol.

Micah saw the leadership of Judah swing from holiness, peace, and prosperity, to crass idolatry and immorality, then, almost desperately, back again toward righteousness and national respectability.

Concerning Micah himself little is known, but that little is enough to give a picture of a God-fearing man from the country, shocked and enraged at the luxurious degeneracy which he had found in the capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah is concerned with the plights of the poor in a land of affluence and plenty. The advantage taken of the poor by the rich, of the powerless by the powerful was, in the eyes of this country-bred preacher, an affront to God.

Micah makes no hesitation in insisting that the demands of God are binding upon the rich and powerful as well as the poor and powerless. He does not preach a "middle class morality" but eternal ethical right determined by Jehovah.

Verse 1

Micah not only claims that what came to him was the “word of Jehovah,” he also claims to have seen in a vision those things which he foretold concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Micah makes a double claim indicating not only that what he is about to write is the “word of Jehovah” but indicating also the method by which it came to him that is, in a vision.

He claims to have seen vividly that which he writes. His record is an eyewitness account of history in advance!

The time of Micah’s call is set by his reference to three kings of the southern kingdom: Jotham who reigned from 750 to 735 B.C., Ahaz, who reigned from 735 to 715 B.C., and Hezekiah, who reigned from 715 to 687 B.C.

A CALL TO HEAR AND HARKEN

CHAPTER 1:2-4

Evidence of universal concern — Verse 2a

At the outset of Micah’s prophecy there is evidence of God’s universal concern for all men. The term “people” is frequently used in Scripture to designate the covenant people of God. Micah calls the whole world to listen to God’s indictment of His covenant people. The use of “earth and all that it contains” describes the non-covenant nations, that is, the Gentiles, was one of longstanding precedent.

Two reasons are apparent for God’s concern that the “earth and all that it contains” hear His charges against both Samaria and Jerusalem, that is, against both branches of covenant people.

1. All men have a vital interest in the fulfillment of the covenant through the people.

The more nationalistic the people become, and the more their religious practices become polluted with Baalism, the less aware they became of God’s promise to bless, through them, all the nations of the earth.

2. The time was fast approaching when God would cast off His rebellious people.

When this happened, neither the world nor the people themselves would have any reason to say that God was unfaithful. None could say that He had not warned the people of the dire consequences of their failure to keep His covenant and obey His law.

A vital lesson is to be learned from this verse by today's "people," the church, namely that he who will not learn from God's past dealings with His people can blame only himself and not God for his own suffering.

Verse 2b

The condemnation of God is never arbitrary. The people are to have a "fair trial." The "star witness" for the prosecution is to be the Lord Jehovah Himself. Moses had issued a similar warning of impending judgment in Deuteronomy 29:22-28.

Anyone who has visited present day Palestine has been amazed that this land was once called "a land flowing with milk and honey." Today, it is a barren rocky wasteland.

What is true of the land is equally true of the people who once inhabited it. Micah presents the Lord himself as the chief witness to the justice of God's wrath against His rebellious people.

THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE

Verse 2c-3a

The temple here is not necessarily nor even probably the temple at Jerusalem. The temple, or holy dwelling place out of which the Lord comes to testify against His people is his real dwelling place.

God is not an absent God. He does not "dwell in temples made by hand." (Acts 17:24) God has always come out of His holy place to chastise His people.

TREAD UPON THE HIGH PLACES

Verse 3b

The “high places” refer to Baal worship. They were generally any natural or man-made projection which stood above their surroundings. High places were forbidden by the law (Deuteronomy 12:11-14) and when Israel entered the promised land they were instructed to destroy them as monuments to Canaanite idolatry.

Rehoboam instituted definite worship in the high places. (2 Chronicles 11:15) Hezekiah’s reforms included the systematic elimination of these shrines to paganism. (2 Kings 18:4, 22)

After this systematic destruction, there is no further mention of the worship of Jehovah in high places in the Old Testament. However, the “worship in these hills” mentioned by the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well was probably a vestige of this despicable practice mixing Jehovah worship with Baal worship.

The working of God in history has long since trodden down the “high places” of Baal worship and of polluted Jehovah worship, but the influence of Baal among God’s people is apparent yet today. Christians continue the observance of the same holy days by the use of many of the same devices and customs.

The history of virtually every major “Christian holiday” is traceable directly to the worship of the sun god in one form or another.

MOUNTAINS TO MELT, VALLEYS TO MELT LIKE WAX

Verse 4

Fire is the traditional symbol of God’s purifying judgment. (Deuteronomy 4:23-24) It is fitting that Micah, and other prophets in their attempts to call the people back to the covenant through obedience to the law, should remind them of this symbol. The heat of God’s wrath is depicted as melting the mountains and turning the valleys to wax. The symbolism is obvious, the high and the low, the great and the small will be devoured by God’s fiery wrath. God is no respecter of persons.

One of the primary warnings of the prophets is that human greatness does not bring preferential treatment from God.

THE OCCASION OF THE WRATH

Verse 5a

The purifying wrath of God against “the people” is, in this case, occasioned by “the sins of Jacob...and for the transgression of the house of Israel.” Here in the “indictment” Micah uses the covenant names which treat both the kingdoms as one people.

Many times the covenant name for God is “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The shorter form of reference to the covenant people is simply “Jacob,” as used here by Micah. Jacob, as the last of the patriarchs and the father of the twelve tribes, is the best representative of the covenant people as a whole.

Indeed, it is his new name, Israel, given to him upon his realization that Jehovah is the universal God rather than a local deity, which came to represent the people as well as the man.

Before singling out first the northern and then the southern kingdoms to warn them each of its particular punishment, Micah calls to them both in terms calculated to remind them wherein they have failed. They will be punished for more than specific sins. The punishment for these sins will be brought about by their failure to keep the covenant.

In both Israel and Judah, Micah equates the sins of the nation with the nature of its capital. The transgression of Jacob (Israel) is Samaria. The sin of Judah is Jerusalem.

JUDAH

Verse 5b

Following the rebellion of the ten northern tribes and the divisions of the kingdoms, the northern kingdom became known as Israel and the southern kingdom as Judah.

The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was Samaria.

Micah singles out this capital in the north as the personification of the “transgression of Jacob.”

The city from which the territory of Samaria took its name was situated on a hill some forty miles north of Jerusalem. Under Ahab, due in a large part to the influence of Jezebel, Baal worship came to dominate both the religion and the general culture of Samaria. Idolatry, sensuality and oppression become the order of the day.

The sin with which Samaria is particularly identified, when Micah calls her the transgression of Jacob, is idolatry, particularly the worship of Baal.

JERUSALEM . . . SIN OF JUDAH

Verse 5c

The sin of Judah is but a variation of the idolatry of Samaria. However, the “high place” of Jerusalem would be the temple and its immediate surroundings as the center of worship.

The worship conducted there, rather than being out and out Baal worship, was, during this period, Jehovah worship polluted with Baalism. It is interesting to note that both Je (in Jehovah) and Baal literally mean Lord. It is often difficult to tell, in some passages, whether the prophets are denouncing Baal worship per se or a corruption of Jehovah worship.

The “high place” of Judah was Jerusalem. Jerusalem was one of two cities called in Scripture, “the city of David.” The other is Bethlehem. After making Jerusalem his political capital, David determined to make it the religious capital also. He brought the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to Jerusalem and placed it there with careful preparation. (2 Samuel 6:12-14)

He also purchased the threshing floor of Araunah as the site upon which a permanent housing for the Ark would be built and later erected an altar of burnt offerings upon the site. (2 Samuel 24:25)

Evidence of early pagan influence in Jerusalem, capital of Jehovah worship, later became the place of Baal worship. (1 Kings 1:9)

A part of the sun worship during the festivities of the winter solstice (December 24-25) centered around the burning of a log. The log represented the sun god cut down in the midst of his strength. Around the stump of the tree was pictured a serpent, symbol of his reviving life. After the burning of the log on the evening of December 24, the evergreen fir appeared next morning in its place symbolizing the reviving of the slain god. The serpent which entwined around the stump was also worshiped as a minor deity. It was at an altar to this pagan god that Adonijah offered sacrifices.

Since Adonijah offered his sacrifices on the eve of an abortive attempt to seize the throne of his father, David, he could scarcely do so in the proper place.

It is highly probable that he was attempting to sacrifice to Jehovah. If so, his worship of God at a pagan altar is a good example of the pollution of the Jehovah worship by Baalism in Jerusalem.

It is quite obvious that the sinfulness of both Samaria and Jerusalem and their subsequent destruction are directly related to the insidious influence of Baal. Babylon “the mother of harlots” had succeeded, through her daughter, the religion of Baal, in seducing Israel the “prince of God.”

It was this spiritual immorality between the people of God and the religion of men that was the object of God’s warning to them through the prophets and the target of His wrath when they refused to repent.

POLLUTED AND FALSE RELIGION OF SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM RESULT IN MORAL AND SOCIAL EVILS

The peculiar sins of Israel were personified in Samaria. The moral and social abuses against which Micah prophesied are the same as those listed by Amos, who preached and wrote during the same period. Amos speaks of God’s faithful being sold into slavery. The poor were oppressed. Graft in high places was the order of the day as was dishonesty in business dealings. (Amos 2:6-12)

False confidence in a false god produced a false sense of security from divine judgment. (Amos 5:14) As might be expected, the moral fiber of the people was totally rotten. Amos speaks of father and son committing fornication with the same girl. (Amos 2:7)

The peculiar sins of Judah were personified in Jerusalem. Micah lists the peculiar sins of the southern kingdom. They vary slightly from those of the north, and the variation may be due in part to the degree of Baal influence.

Nevertheless, Judah's sins are heinous and the prophet's warning is sharp just as against Israel. In denouncing this unrighteousness, Micah focuses on four principal kinds of evil-doers.

1. There were the land grabbers whom, the prophet pictures as lying awake at night and scheming how they may do the small farmer out of his holdings. (2:1)
2. There were lovers of evil in high office. (3:1-4) In their activities, bribery rather than justice decided civil cases (7:3) so that the "little man" had no effective recourse against the grabbing by the rich and powerful.
3. False preachers, who were more concerned with their income than with the truth or with the right and wrong, preached what their wealthy listeners wanted to hear.
4. Hireling priests added to the practice of the false prophets. Idolatry was allowed to pollute the worship of the people.

As a result of such unholy "clergy," the people believed that their national identity as "God's People" insured them against destruction and that God's favor could be bought with sacrifice. They could have profited greatly by reading their own Bible.

No thinking American Christian can read the Minor Prophets and fail to sense the parallels between Israel and Judah just prior to their downfall and America in the twenty-first century. The sins are the same...their causes are the same...the public apathy is the same...the false sense of security is the same...and, because God deals with men in every age on the basis of the same eternal ethic, the danger of destruction is the same. If our nation should fall due to this moral dry rot resulting from polluted and false religion, it would be no strange thing when viewed in the light of history.

And if God should use a godless power to bring about this destruction, this also would be in keeping with the lessons of history. God is still on His throne exercising authority over nations.

SAMARIA TO BE DESTROYED

CHAPTER 1:6-7

Samaria had been first to succumb to Baal worship. Before Jerusalem, Samaria had first become shot through with sin as a result of false gods. Samaria had chosen to break with the government in God's chosen city, Jerusalem. Samaria would be first to feel the wrath of God against a rebellious people.

Micah had actually seen this destruction in the vision by which the word of God came to him. It is as though his eyes smarted from the dust of falling buildings and the stench of death after battle burned his nostrils. He would live to experience the same terrible desolation again in reality.

The land would be overrun in 734 B.C. and the city itself wiped out in 721 B.C. by the armies of Shalmaneser and Sargon II.

Micah's God will not brook flagrant disobedience and turning to strange gods. Nor is He simply a petulant overlord who is in a rage because He has not had His own way. His wrath springs from much deeper wells. His wrath is His love reacting to that which threatens to thwart His blessing all the nations of the world. If He is to bring this redemption about, what He is about to do to Israel, must be done to preserve the covenant by which the blessing is to come to all.

Samaria, capital of the northern nation and center of her religion has become also the capital of her sin and the center of guilt. So Samaria will become "as a heap of the field...as places for planting vineyards." A heap is a common sight, as the farmer gathers the stones into a heap in preparation for planting.

Verse 7

All her graven images are to be beaten to pieces. It is Israel's unfaithfulness to her covenant now with Jehovah in worshiping these images which was to bring about the ruination of Samaria.

The word “hires” refers to all that the worshipers of Baal sought to gain from worshiping him, along with the gifts offered to him as acts of worship. The motive in false worship is always personal gain of one type or another, just as true worship is always the abandonment of self to the purpose and service of God.

In laying waste the idols of Israel, God will be destroying the hires of a harlot. In her overthrow her wealth, gained from spiritual fornication with idols, would go to another harlot...the Assyrian capital of Ninevah.

Micah is not the first to call false religion harlotry, especially when indulged in by the covenant people. (False worship is called harlotry throughout the Bible from its inception in old Babylon.) The covenant with Israel is treated as a marriage vow; Israel’s incessant affairs with Baal as adultery.

The law required that an unfaithful wife and her lover be put to death. (Deuteronomy 22:22) Israel’s unfaithfulness is worse than that of a common prostitute who is paid for her services.

THE HUSBAND’S LAMENT

Verse 8

God does not enjoy punishing His people. Even though He has no choice but to cast off His faithless bride for a time in order to preserve the marriage, He now says, in effect, “This is going to hurt Me worse than it does you!”

The deep anguish of God over the state of Israel and the necessity to punish her so violently is spelled out in terms of the public mourning customary at the time. In time of deep distress, the bereaved stripped off his sandals (the Septuagint so translates “stripped” here) and his upper garments (the meaning of “naked” in these verses.) Such barefoot, naked condition was a common sign of mourning. (2 Samuel 15:30)

To lament was to beat the breast in despair to the accompaniment of a loud mournful howl. The sound is here compared to that of a jackal, (rather wild dogs) which howl when deserted, like a cub when left alone and unloved. It is also compared here with the sound of the ostrich which in distress utters a long shrill sighting cry as though in deep hurt. So has Israel deserted Jehovah!

Micah pictures Jehovah as utterly tormented by the plight of His people and with grief for having to punish them so severely. Although He has been deeply wounded by the unfaithfulness of His bride, He still loves her very much. Yet the purpose for which the marriage had been contracted demands her faithfulness to Him and to bring this about she must be punished. He does not glory in her impending suffering. He is more torn by it than she!

It would be difficult to find a more vivid example of what it means to hate sin and love sinners. How much more we would appreciate our relationship to God if we could but understand how very much He loves us! How much more we would be like Him and worthy to be called His children, if we could learn to so love in spite of sin.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PUNISHMENT

Verse 9

Leaving the allegory of the faithless wife and the injured husband, the Lord, through Micah, now reveals His ultimate concern. The infection of Samaria is spreading like a deadly contagion to Judah, to the Chosen City itself. If the Covenant of Promise is to be redeemed, the infection must be stopped. Since it is already incurable, it must be destroyed.

Moral decay resulting from false religion bears the seed of its own destruction. In the case of Samaria, it was time for surgery. The northern kingdom was wiped out, its people scattered, and there was never to be a return.

There is the hope that, seeing the destruction of Samaria, Judah would repent. As the infection, so the therapeutic destruction reached as far as the capital gates when the armies of Sennacherib camped outside the walls.

God's punishment came step by step, leaving time for repentance. The defeat of Samaria and the scattering of her people, the halting of Sennacherib short of a conquest of Jerusalem were designed to call Jerusalem to her knees in contrition, to turn her away from the idolatry and abandonment of morality which had become incurable in the north.

But Jerusalem would not repent. She was taken captive to Babylon so that God, through suffering, might force the remnant back to Himself that the covenant might be fulfilled through them.

PUNISHMENT EXTENDED TO THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

Verses 10-12a

The punishment of God against the northern kingdom is not to stop at Samaria. It will rather roll like a relentless tide until it dashes against the very walls of Jerusalem. Micah lists one village after another, each one slightly nearer Jerusalem.

Micah begins with Gath, one of the five cities of the Philistines and proceeds through *Bethle-aphrah*, *Shaphir*, *Zaanan*, *Bethezel* and *Maroth*.

The invasion of Sennacherib is presented in all its terror as one village after another falls before him, the refugees from one finding no assistance in the next.

He begins with Gath, the city of the Philistines. How the Philistines delighted to hear of the destruction of the Hebrews.

From Gath the invaders would sweep south to Bethle-aphrah, the “city of dust.” Rolling in the dust was one of many customary forms of mourning similar to that of sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

From there the disaster continues to Shaphir, a village of Judah. Shaphir means “fair.” “Pass away, O inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame.” Nakedness again is to be understood as the removal of the upper garment as a sign of mourning.

Zaanan is probably the same as Zenan, located east of Ashkelon. Its people cannot come forth to console the refugees from the north because they are themselves in the path of Sennacherib.

Bethezel may be the same as Azal. (Jeremiah 14:5) *Bethezel*, itself smitten, cannot sustain those who flee from the destruction on the plains. There is no more security near Jerusalem.

WARNINGS TO JUDAH

Verse 12b-16

The warning of Micah to Judah, concerning the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom, is that the punishment from the north is to extend through the Philistine plain to the gates of Jerusalem.

The cities mentioned are in the Philistine plain of Shephelah in northwestern Judah, and are the home territory of the prophet Micah. Moresheth-gath was Micah's home town.

The first of the cities of the Philistine plain mentioned is Maroth. The name means bitterness. The people of Morath (bitterness) are anxiously waiting for the good.

There is no bitterness like that felt by those who wait in the path of an invading army, hoping against hope for the intervention of a delivering force.

Since this is apparently the first city below the border and on Judean territory to be invaded, the citizenry would no doubt hope for the army of the southern kingdom to intervene on their behalf. In bitterness they waited eagerly for help, but none came. The anxiety of the citizens of Moriah over their own plight would be eclipsed by their awareness that Jerusalem itself was threatened.

The next mentioned city in the line of march, is Lachish. The literal meaning of Lachish is swift beast. The inhabitants of Lachish (swift beast) are warned to hitch their swift steed to the chariot. There would be need for speed if any were to successfully flee before the invading host.

Lachish is located about sixteen miles east of Gaza and slightly north. Micah says that Lachish is located about sixteen miles east of Gaza and slightly north. Her punishment is just, in that she was the "beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion."

Micah makes Lachish responsible as the beginning of corruption and idolatry in Judah. The implication is that Judah has been infected with Israel's sin and Lachish is the "carrier."

Micah's home town, *Moresbeth-gath*, is next on the list of cities receiving the prophetic warning.

Achzib is mentioned, along with *Mareshah*. It is probably to be identified with modern Aen-Kezgeh, situated eight miles north and east of Beit Jibrin in the Philistine plain.

The name *Achzib* is a play on words, meaning "a deceitful thing." So Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the king of Israel. The members of the royal family, fleeing to the town or towns of *Beth Ach-achzib* will not find a way of escape or refreshment.

Sargon claims to have carried off only some 27,000 people from the northern kingdom. If so, it was the members of the royal family along with the social, political and cultural leaders. In this way the conquered people would be leaderless and unlikely to rebel.

Moresah is located near *Achzib*. Archeologists identify it with a ruin called *Merash* near *Beit-Jibrin*, about one mile to the south. The Israelites had taken the city from the Canaanites. It will once more be possessed by a new possessor.

Adullam, as its location indicates, is in the lowlands of Judah and is characterized by an abundance of caves. It was here that David fled from Saul.

Now, centuries later, the same caves are to provide refuge for the northern nobility as they flee before the Assyrians. If there is to be a safe hiding place it will be here. So, the "glory of Israel" that is valuables which are to be hidden from foreign plunder are to come to the caves of *Adullam*.

Self-inflicted baldness was a symbol of mourning among the worshipers of Baal. It is forbidden in the Law of Moses probably because it was associated with the surrounding paganism. The demand that those receiving the punishment of Jehovah shear their beards and the heads of their children is repeated three times for emphasis. The punishment is essentially for worshipping pagan gods.

The word "eagle" in the English translation is misleading. The bird referred to here is probably the Carrion Vulture which populates Egypt (where it is

worshiped) and Palestine. Its head is completely bald in front, and has only a very thin covering in back. Micah's rebuke is valid and scathing.

WOE TO THE ARROGANT MISLEADERS

CHAPTER 2

Micah now turns from the generalities of judgment impending against the northern and southern kingdoms, their capitals and their cities, to the personal denouncement of those who sit in high places in them. The punishment for Jerusalem and Samaria are the result of sin. Sin is an individual thing. If a society or a city is sinful, it is because it is inhabited by sinful people. If the individual is subject to undue pressure and temptation in such surroundings, it is because he must associate with sinful people.

In the case of the kingdoms denounced by Micah, the people were pressed toward sin and idolatry by sinful social leaders. It was these leaders who were disbursed from Israel by the Assyrians. It was these leaders of Judah who were led captive to Babylon.

Verse 1

The evil of those in power was well thought out. They lay awake at night scheming, and the next day they eagerly put their plans into action. Micah accuses them of doing these evil things simply because the power to do so was in their hands.

An old adage says, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It was true in Israel and Judah.

Verse 2

"Power without justice is tyranny." Those in power in Israel and Judah were tyrants in the worse sense of the word. In the words of Wendell Phillips, "Power is ever stealing from the many to the few." The iniquity devised upon the beds of the powerful in Jerusalem and Samaria was designed to rob more and more of the possessions of the poor.

The prophet accuses them of coveting fields and seizing houses, of oppressing men and their families or heritage.

Verse 3

Therefore, because the powerful spend their time devising evil schemes against this people, I will devise an evil from which you shall not remove your necks, neither walk haughtily. It has been said often that sin carries in its nature the seeds of its own punishment.

Jehovah devised an “evil time” as the just punishment of these oppressors. Those against whom this particular “evil time was devised as punishment,” would find no escape from it. They would not be able to “remove their necks, or to walk proudly.” As they had taken lands and houses and possessions from the poor to add to their own pleasures, so, in the day of their captivity, were their houses and lands to be taken from them.

At the destruction of Israel and the later captivity of Judah, it was the rulers, the social elite and the influential rich who were actually lead away, first by the Assyrians and then by Babylon.

The full weight of God’s punishment thus fell upon exactly those people who were directly responsible for the evil which brought it about.

A TAUNT AGAINST THE WICKED

Verse 4

Having compromised God’s truth with the falsehood of Baalism, the character of these rulers and social leaders was not forged of any real metal. Having first given way to the temptation to flirt with a false god, they found no real standard of ethics by which to govern their own lives.

The inevitable result was the extreme cruelty against their fellows to which their greed had driven them. When the wrath of God is released against them, they will feel the sting of their own sins, as their enemies taunt them.

This insulting derision will be leveled against them repeatedly as their enemies make jest of their hardship, just as they now make sport of those whom they oppress.

Their friends, on the other hand, will cry in their behalf, “We are utterly ruined.” Those who now sit “high and mighty” at the expense of the down-

trodden will find themselves in total despair. They will exclaim, “He changed the portion of my people, how doth he remove it from me! To the rebellious he divides our fields.”

The powerful have changed the inheritance of the common people by cunning theft. They have removed the lands from them without recourse. In their downfall they will complain against God for doing exactly the same to them.

In their straying from Jehovah to Baalism they have rebelled against God, and their rebellion has resulted in their misuse of power and wealth and their trodding down of His people. In that day they will wonder why God has taken the same possessions from them and given them to the “rebellious” Gentiles who will over-run their lands.

Verse 5

Micah warns them that, just as they have left no legal recourse to those from whom they have stolen property so in that day they will have “none that shall cast the line by lot.” There will be no legal division of land, because there will be no land left to divide. It will be occupied by the enemies.

There will be no courts to establish titles, because the government will be in the hands of the invader. Their misery over the loss of their unjust claims and titles will bring them a measure of the misery they are now heaping upon others.

They have forgotten that the land, this land especially, belongs to God. He led their fathers to it for His purposes. Now that they have deserted Him for Baal and are grabbing the land for their own greed, He will remove it completely from them.

THE PROPHET ACCUSED AS AN ENEMY

Verse 6

These are the words of the false prophets and their followers in response to the warning pronounced by the prophets of Jehovah. The warnings of God’s spokesmen grate on the ears of those who will not hear. They specifically charge

Micah to desist from saying, “Reproaches shall not depart from Israel.” (“Do not talk like that, preacher—it’s not nice and it’s not tolerant, and we won’t listen!”)

Verse 7

Those whom the prophet has warned now turn on him as though he, and not they, were the enemies of God. In effect their challenge is, “We are God’s chosen people. We wear His name. Are we not the chosen Israel? Are we not the sons of the patriarchs? How can you say that God will act so toward His favorite people?”

Here is a glimpse of the national pride and racial arrogance that was ultimately to prevent the Jews from accepting Christ and which caused them to persecute Stephen and Paul for preaching a gospel of universal concern. Somehow the idea that God’s Israel is composed of those who are related to Him by obedient faith and not merely racial ancestry or national origin seems beyond their comprehension as a people.

There are some “evangelical” Christians today whose understanding of the prophets is warped by the same erroneous idea. Most of the “far out” schemes and devices dealing with eschatology have at their heart the notion that God is somehow bound to the physical Hebrew race and the citizens of a national Jewish commonwealth.

The insistence of Micah in this particular context is that the race (the nation) will suffer non-deferrable calamity because they have failed to really be Israel. They have failed, by going off after strange gods and by breaking the Law of God, to keep the covenant upon which their peculiar relationship to God depended. (Exodus 19:5-6)

The logic of Micah’s accusers is reflected in their retort, “Is Jehovah’s Spirit so constricted and narrow that He would allow the destruction of His chosen people?”

The error of such thinking lies in this: it is precisely because the Spirit of God is not straitened that He will take such drastic measures to preserve the covenant faith.

If God were only the tribal or national God of the Hebrews, He would be bound, or straitened, to defend them as “My people, right or wrong.”

But such is not the case. Israel was called into being in the beginning because it was God’s purpose through them to bless all nations. In the captivity there will be no nation, no holy city, no sacred temple. The people will have only their faith to cling to. Micah will shortly say that out of this experience will a faithful remnant through whom God’s redemption will come.

The tendency manifest here to blame God of His spokesman for the social calamities of a nation are not confined to the dusty ancient archives of biblical history, it is a tendency very much alive and with us today.

The person who says, “If there is a God why does He allow poverty and suffering and war and inequality to go without a remedy.” “If there is a God how can He allow such things to exist in a Christian civilization?” That is voicing the same false concept of God as that held by Israel and Judah, in the days of the minor prophets.

The failure of such logic assumes that a nation which gives lip service to God and prints “in God we trust” on its coins is a Christian nation. Or it assumes that all men are children of God by some inalienable right. Such simply is not, and never has been the case.

God’s people are those who are faithful to His covenant, and who obey His commandments. Ultimately a child of God is one who receives His redemption through the promised Seed of Abraham. (John 1:11-12)

The time had come in Micah’s day to place the blame for what was about to happen squarely where it belonged, to “tell it like it is.” The suffering and destruction and famine that lay ahead for both Israel and Judah would come as a result of their unfaithfulness, their disobedience and their failure to hear and heed God’s call to repentance.

We have arrived at a similar time in the history of western civilization and especially in “Christian” America.

THE PROPHET ANSWERS HIS CRITICS Verses 7b-11

Verse 7b

The word of God, no matter how stern, is never a threat to those who walk uprightly. Even the warning of inevitable national calamity would issue in the strengthened faith of the faithful, and the return from captivity of a generation dedicated to the establishment of true Jehovah worship. Psalm 18:26-27

Verse 8

The Hebrew here translated “of late” literally means “from of old.” “From of old” my people have risen up as an enemy. There is no more vivid description of the history of Israel.

The cycle of rebellion is seen throughout the Old Testament record. God blesses. Enjoying the blessings, the people forget their source. Forgetting, they turn from God to idolatry and disobedience; as a result they are brought low. In their low estate they cry out for deliverance. In answer to their cry, God sends a deliverer. In their blindness they reject the deliverer; and in the rejection their sufferings are multiplied the more.

The “*eber*” or robe is the garment worn next to the body. The “*salmab*,” or garment, is the large flowing coverlet worn as an outer garment in the day time and used as a blanket at night.

The haughty followers of the false prophets treat the humble passers-by as enemies stripping them of all their garments. This stripping of the garments of a defenseless enemy was not an uncommon practice in Bible times. Jesus was careful to instruct His followers as to the proper response when their Roman overlords did this to them. (Matthew 5:40)

The idea that must not be overlooked here is that of the proof of enmity with God is the mistreatment of His people. He has accused them of forever rising up like enemies against Him, and now offers as proof that they are treating His people not only as enemies, but as conquered enemies.

Verse 9

Not only are the passers-by stripped of their garments by these enemies of God, the women are driven from their sheltering homes and the glory of God is kept from their children.

Perhaps the prophet has in mind here the widows and orphans of these men mentioned in verse two of this chapter as having been driven out of their fields and houses and having their families oppressed.

From the point of view of God's purpose in Israel, the denial of His glory to their children is absolutely intolerable. The idea of taking away Jehovah's glory from the children obviously refers to the plight of the children in a household denied of shelter, proper clothing, and in many cases the presence of a father.

The denial of these physical necessities is deplorable, but worse is the denial of the proper upbringing of the children to assure their faithfulness to the covenant and obedience to the law.

It has been said that the church is always but one generation from extinction. The generation of parents which allows a whole generation of children to grow up unaware of their duty to God will be the last generation of the church. If it takes national calamity to drive such parents to their knees for the sake of their children, so be it.

One thing was characteristic above all else of the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity; they taught their children the way of the Lord.

Verse 10

Here is the direct command of God casting from His land those despicable people who had cast others from their homes. As those who "erred" in their hearts, and did not know God's ways in the wilderness, were not allowed to enter this land so those who have turned from His ways will not be allowed to remain in it. Because of their sins the sentence will not be revoked.

The land had become a resting place after the wilderness wanderings, but it was not to be so now because of their abuses. The reason the land is not to be

their resting place is, in the words of the A.S.V., “because of uncleanness that destroyeth.”

The sense of the statement seems to be that, because they have defiled the land which the Lord gave their fathers for the accomplishment of His covenant purpose, the land is now spewing them out. The law demanded that the land be not defiled, and stated the punishment for such defilement. (Leviticus 18:25)

Verse 11

Micah now describes the kind of prophet who is always in demand among a deprived people. “He walks in a spirit of falsehood.” His whole life is a lie. He presents himself as a prophet of God, knowing that the prophet’s primary business is to tell the truth of God to God’s people, while he has no such intention. Further he says to the people, “I will prophecy unto thee of wine and strong drink.”

Why wine and strong drink? It is possible that these refer to the intoxicants and narcotic potions given to the candidate for initiation into Baal worship. Since the Jews, at this juncture, had so polluted Jehovah worship with Baalism, they would have given heed to a prophet who preached the validity of this practice.

JUDGMENTS TEMPERED BY PROMISES VERSES 12-13

Verse 12

The idea of a restored remnant presupposes the capture and destruction of the political commonwealth and the rejection of the race per se. It was ever in the purpose of God to redeem a total political commonwealth of a race as an ethnic unit, that concept is abandoned with the introduction of the remnant idea.

In Romans 11:5, Paul refers to Isaiah 10:22 in his exposition of the final grafting together of the faithful Gentiles and the faithful remnant of Israel into a single people of God.

In identifying the remnant, as distinct from the whole of the race and nation descended from Abraham, Paul refers to Elijah’s “seven thousand men, who

have not bowed the knee to Baal” that is, those Israelites indeed who had refused to compromise their covenant relationship to Jehovah.

So, says Paul, the present remnant (the faithful of the first century) is the people chosen by the grace of God. This choice, or “election,” of grace is everywhere in the Bible related to the covenant.

Paul’s argument is that God has not repudiated His true people, in allowing the Gentiles access to the ranks of the election. He has rather identified them! His true people, the real Israel of God prior to the beginning of the gospel age as well as now, are not marked off from other men by their Semitic ancestry or their national citizenship.

As Barclay has said, “The prophet began to see that there never was a time, and there never would be a time, when the whole nation was true to God, but at the same time, always within the nation there was a remnant left who had not forsaken their loyalty or compromised their faith.”

The threats against the northern and southern kingdoms, coupled with the promises of salvation to the faithful remnant should serve a real purpose today. We need to know, for our own sakes, and to shout from the rooftops for the sake of others. No nation or race is saved per se. God commands all men everywhere to repent.

The remnant . . . the real Israel of God is the fellowship of individuals related to one another on the basis of a common covenant with God.

God has not, and never will reject His people, regardless of outward appearances to the contrary. No nation or religious institution is His people. The remnant of the human race, as well as of the Commonwealth of Israel is saved by grace through faith.

The sin of denominationalism is essentially the sin of counting oneself part of God’s people on the basis of identity with a religious institution just as the Jew’s of Micah’s day, and Jesus’ day, and Paul’s day, and one suspects even of our day, counted themselves as God’s people because they were citizens of a kingdom whose identity was based on a religious law.

The sin of racism is the twin brother to the sin of denominationalism. The Jews could trace their ancestry back to a common origin in Abraham. God had worked with them, through the influence of faithful men, in special ways. To prevent the entrance of paganism into their thinking as a deterrent to faith, He had forbidden them to marry non-Hebrew mates. All this and many other similar factors combined to bring them to the conclusion that as a race God considered the Hebrews superior to all others.

The conclusion of the Christian Gospel is that, among God's people there is no East or West, North or South, Jew or Greek, black or white. God's covenant people are one in the promised Seed of Abraham.

Micah's first mention of the remnant has as its primary concern the promise that God's people would not be brought to extinction in the judgments just pronounced. Rather, a remnant would return from the captivity. It is doubtful if even all of these who returned were true Israelites in the covenant sense of the word.

At the beginning of the nation, all the people had been given the opportunity to be true Israel. From the captivity on, Israel's national identity was (and is) important only as it bears directly on the fulfillment of the everlasting covenant.

In connection with the remnant, Micah pictures Jehovah by the use of three figures, the shepherd, the breaker (or lead ram) and the king. He is pictured as the shepherd of the "sheep of Bozrah."

"The sheep of Bozrah," was a popular saying, like the "kine (cattle) of Bashan" and alludes to the fine flocks which were the wealth of Bozrah, a key city of Moab.

Jehovah is pictured as shepherd of the finest of flocks, and the remnant is that flock.

Verse 13

The "breaker," or lead ram, was the ram which went before the flock to butt or break down any and all barriers.

So, the Lord, leader of the remnant flock, will break through all barriers to the ultimate accomplishment of God's purpose in the covenant people.

And so, for at least a thousand years before the birth of the Jesus, God's concern is seen to be not with the race or the national political entity but with the unconditional promise to set the Seed of David upon the throne of His people.

More than ever, the people existed for the sake of the Seed. When the time came that the Jews as a nation, and the religious institutions of that nation rejected the Christ, God would cast them off. But the promise which was at the heart of the covenant would be fulfilled through a covenant remnant ruled by the promised Seed of David.

OUTRAGES OF CIVIL OFFICIALS

CHAPTER 3:1-4

As in the case of the arrogant misleaders (Micah 2:1-3) so with the unjust magistrates (Micah 3:1-4), the prophet relates their sin to false preachers.

Verse 1

Micah's concern for the return of the people to the covenant reaches its highest pitch in chapter three, as he pleads with the official leaders of the people. He has dealt in chapters one and two with the economic and social leaders of the northern and southern kingdoms. Now he turns his attention to the official leaders. No nation can rise any higher than the moral standards of its officials, especially of its courts.

Repeatedly Micah couches his appeal to people in high places in terms calculated to remind them that they are the temporal rulers of God's people. To those he addresses a warning of imminent doom, but with the underlying hope that they will repent.

They must not mistake themselves for inclusion in the real Israel of God just because they sit in the seats of temporal judgment over the people.

In Micah chapter 2, we saw Micah's denunciation of the wealthy and influential for the merciless mistreatment of the poor. The prophet now

challenges the judges that they have the responsibility of preventing and dealing with such injustice. The wealthy could not do what they do were it not for corrupt courts.

Magistrates and judges above all others should be aware of the penalties of wrong doing and injustice. Micah's warning is that the laws apply equally well to the lawyers.

Verses 2-4

“YOU WHO HATE GOOD AND LOVE EVIL.” These corrupt judges not only hate good men and love evil men, worse than that, they hate good as a principle and love evil as a principle.

“PLUCK OFF THEIR SKIN AND FLESH FROM THEIR BONES.” Such allusions as this to describe the cheating advantage taken by one man over another are to be found in every culture.

A proverb attributed to the American Indian says, “The Indian scalps his enemies, the white man skins his friends.” It seems the white man cannot claim to be original in this maltreatment of his fellowman. The judges of Israel are warned here of the consequences of it.

This particular passage in Micah, denouncing the loving of evil and the hating of good brings to mind a very significant change in civilized man's evaluation of right and wrong. In 1867, Robert Milligan wrote, “It will, I presume, be generally conceded that the will of God is the natural and only proper standard of all that is right. If God is our Sovereign King and Lawgiver, it is our duty to obey.”

To this the Christian will readily say Amen!

To this also the ancient pagans would agree, although their confusion of deities could furnish no uniformly acceptable standard of right and wrong. To this even the evil doers addressed by Micah gave lip service else the prophet could not have appealed to them on the ground of a clear cut distinction between good and evil.

Twenty-first century man has reached the rationale which says there not only is not but there cannot be any absolute good or evil. Everything is relative.

Absolutism is dead and man must decide in the context of a given set of circumstances the situation ethics of the moment.

To try to cut through such layers of ignorance by quoting the dictums of God from the Bible is to try to sweep back the tide with a broom. To give up in despair of being able to reach those who think like this is to abandon an entire generation and possibly an entire civilization to spiritual darkness forever.

Somehow modern Christians must learn, as it is said the early Christians did, to “out-think, out-love, and out-die” those whose spiritual eyes have been blinded by the self-acclaimed wisdom of men.

MERCENARY PROPHETS Verses 5-8

Verse 5

Here the accusation is direct. It is the false prophets who “make my people err.” By not denouncing sin, the false prophet encourages his hearers to sin. By flattering sinners in their sin and telling them that God is not really all that demanding, the false preacher leaves the impression desired by his hearers. Namely, that sin will not really be punished.

When these false prophets do denounce some action or inaction in their hearers it is not because of the righteous demands of God but because they do not feel their salaries are big enough. This reveals them to be part of the total picture of a decadent social order.

They are as mercenary as those who lay awake nights, figuring how to cheat someone of his possessions.

The agreeableness of the message of a false prophet was determined by the size of the “bite” placed in his mouth by his hearers. When it was not, they sanctified war as a judgment against those who failed to feed them. In such pronouncements they sounded like the true prophet, but they would change their “tune” when the offerings were good. Such preaching is not calculated to bring about repentance on the part of the hearer.

Verse 6

Micah's warning concerning such despicable practices on the part of those who claim to speak for God is that the light of God will be withheld from them. There will be no vision. The implication is clear, for where there is no vision, the people perish. (Proverbs 29:18)

The calamities which Micah has predicted for Israel and Judah will be shared by the false preachers as well as the social and official misleaders. When calamity strikes they will no longer be able to claim to speak for God.

When the judgments of God come, as they have promised His judgments will come . . . when it is learned that God is not, after all, the tolerant benevolent benefactor the false teachers have made Him out to be, but rather the God of the covenant demanding faithful obedience to His law, no one will listen any longer to those who made Him out to be what their hearers hoped He was.

Verse 7

In the day of Judgment, the false seers will be put to shame and confounded. Everything of which they have been warned will come to pass . . . the laxity of judgment on the part of God which they have predicted will be shown for what it is . . . wishful thinking.

They will be put to shame. The covering of the lips may be explained in one of several figures. In the custom of the day, the moustache and beard were matters of great pride. The covering of them was an act of expressing shame.

Another reference to the covering of the lips is found in Leviticus 13:45. There the command is that the leper is to "cover his upper lip and cry unclean, unclean."

In this verse the implication seems to be that spiritual and moral infection being spread by the false prophet will finally be stopped when the calamity predicted by Micah finally stops their mouths.

Verse 8

Micah contrasts himself as a true prophet to the false prophets he has just denounced. Three things characterize him.

1. He has within himself the POWER of God's Spirit, without which no one can speak accurately and effectively concerning the will of God.
2. He possesses JUDGMENT, that is, a sense of justice which moves him to speak the truth no matter how unpopular as opposed to the false prophet whose motivation was money.
3. He possesses MIGHT or courage to say what needs saying in the face of ridicule and even persecution.

He possesses these three graces "to declare unto Jacob his transgression and unto his transgression, and unto Israel his sin."

Jacob and Israel originally referred to the same individual. Jacob was his name before God confirmed to him the everlasting covenant.

Israel was his covenant name. Micah apparently intends to distinguish here between the physical descendants of Jacob and the faithful covenant people among them to whom he refers by the covenant name—Israel.

Transgression is a specific term for the deliberate infraction of God's law. For these deliberate transgressions Micah has the power and the judgment and the right to speak out against those unfaithful to the covenant.

Sin is a more general term. Even those who were faithful to the covenant were not free from sin completely.

One can scarcely read this denunciation of false and mercenary preachers without being aware of the present religious climate of our day.

One does not have to be a prophet of doom to foresee the possible collapse of our culture which is following the lead of such men.

Just as those who misled the eighth century Jews into believing that God would not exact judgment against the followers of false teachers, so these twenty-first century clergymen have denied the judgments of God. If our culture should collapse it will owe much of its failure to the action of these men. And, in that day as in the day of Judah's fall, the false prophet will be shown for what he is.

CONCLUSION OF THE DENUNCIATIONS

Verses 9-12

To this point, Micah has denounced specifically the wealthy whose wealth is gained by cheating the poor, the false prophet was preaching what his listeners wanted to hear while he ignores their sins, the judges who are unconcerned with justice and the political officials who, like their constituents, hate good and love evil.

In this passage he summarizes and concludes the list of those whose greed for power and wealth, along with their unconcern for human misery have brought God's covenant nation to her downfall.

The list of their sins has an ominously familiar ring to anyone aware of the present spiritual condition of our own nation. They abhor justice and pervert all equity. They judge for reward, teach for hire and divine for money.

Through it all they have the audacity to "lean upon Jehovah." Rather than repent and obey His laws, they presume to believe that they are yet His people, so that no evil can befall them.

Verse 9

"Hear" is here resumed from verse one, indicating that Micah is about to sum up his denunciation of the evils of those who claim to be God's people.

The term "heads of Jacob" as in verse one calls attention to the civil rulers of the commonwealth, while "rulers of the house of Israel" here as there refers to the religious leaders. The sum of all of which he has accused them is that they "abhor justice and pervert all equity."

From this verse it seems they abhorred judgment as a thing loathsome and abominable, such as men cannot bear to look upon; they not only deal wrongly, but they perverted, distorted, all equity . . . whatever was right by conscience or by God's laws, they distorted, like the a person making the worse appear the better cause.

Verse 10

Maintaining his distinction between the civil and religious authorities, Micah accuses the latter of building up Zion with blood and the former of building up Jerusalem with iniquity.

Religion consisted of meticulously observing the formal sacrifices daily in the temple while ignoring the moral implications of the Law, particularly the matter of human relations. The charge is reminiscent of that level against the religious leaders of the first century Zion by Jesus. (Matthew 23:23)

Both Micah and Jesus would have agreed with Proverbs 15:8, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to Jehovah.”

The covenant purposes of God, symbolized here in the term Zion, cannot be built upon the blood of religious sacrifices offered by evil men.

We cannot but note in passing that one of the chief reasons for the disenchantment of modern man with the institutionalized church is that the religious people who are members of the churches have too often failed to relate their duty to God as their duty to man and particularly to the social injustices exacted from the poor and ignorant.

Just as the religion of Zion was built upon the blood of mockingly meaningless sacrifices, so the political structure of Jerusalem’s civil government was built upon social iniquity.

We will be something less than wise if we fail to understand that the moral dry rot which destroyed Israel and Judah in the eighth and seventh century B.C. will also destroy ours in the 21st and 22nd centuries A.D.

Verse 11

Following still further his denunciation of both the civil and religious leaders of the nation, Micah again accused the judges of being corrupt, deciding cases on the basis of bribes rather than justice.

Now he turns to the priest—the priest he alleges teaches for hire. The duty of the priest was to teach the law and decide controversy with justice. (Leviticus 10:11, Deuteronomy 17:11)

Instead, these spiritual representatives of God among His people were embodied in the same materialism that polluted the rest of the upper class of society.

Nor does Micah forget the false prophet in making this summary of his charges. He again asserts that the prophets preach only to fill their purses. They divine, that is proclaim) what they know the people want to hear as the will of God in order to receive pay.

And while they do this, they tell the people that God is among them, that the doom predicted by Micah and Isaiah and others cannot come to pass because they are, after all, the chosen people of God.

It should be apparent from the subsequent doom pronounced against Zion and Jerusalem, as well as from the testimony of more recent history, that God's relationship to the Jews as a race or as a nation is not unconditional.

They have rejected Jehovah for Baal; they have abandoned spiritual justice for materialistic gain and fleshly pleasure. As their ancient uncle Esau, they have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage and so no longer have any claim to the promises of Jehovah.

Verse 12

In consequence of the sin of those in high places, the sacred mountain, Zion, is to be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem their capital is to be any other high place in the forest. Note: On the 6th of September A.D. 70, Jerusalem fell and the Romans destroyed it so completely that they drove a plough across the ruins. As a nation the Jews had come to an end; and their own mad folly had brought their end upon them." (Barclay)

The kingdom is finished. The north will go first, the south will soon follow.

And God will recall a remnant through whom to accomplish His promise ". . . in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:3b)

One hundred years later another prophet, Jeremiah, would quote these verses from Micah in defense of his own denunciations of an equally sinful generation. (Jeremiah 26:18)

FUTURE EXALTATION AND MESSIANIC HOPE

ZION, CENTER OF WORSHIP CHAPTER 4 Verses 1-5

Verse 1

“It will come to pass” gives us transport to the future (from Micah’s day). We leap the centuries far beyond the captivity to Messiah’s day.

In Hebrews 1:2 we are told that God, having spoken to the fathers in the prophets has spoken to us in His Son.

The age was to be final and eternal. Nothing lies beyond it so far as earthly history is concerned. It is itself the final goal of history.

John indicates that we are in this end time. (1 John 2:18f) In this end time, says Micah, the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on top of (or at the head of) the mountains.

The coming of the Messianic age has not eliminated false religion. The very site of Jehovah’s temple is now the second most holy spot in Islam. But true Jehovah worship, that is, Christian worship, has been exalted above them all.

Verse 2

“Many nations” here is not to be understood in terms of political empires. The people of the Old Testament are generally all those in a covenant relationship to God while the nations are all those not in a covenant relationship.

Many who in Micah’s day were “separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise,” are now made “nigh in the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:12-13)

Isaiah looked forward to this same glorious day when the universal concern of God for all men would be realized.

Significantly, both Micah and Isaiah see the movement of the Gentiles toward the exalted “mountain of Jehovah’s house” as voluntary. The religion of the prophets is of such quality as makes it independent of nationality or election. As the Jews understood election, any interpretation of prophecy which overlooks this basic truth cannot be correct.

The statement, “Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem” is not to be understood as limited to or even indicative of the law of Moses.

Rather it the “law of the Spirit of life.” (Romans 8:1-2) It is in keeping with Jesus’ statement “thus it is written...that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 23:45-47)

Verses 3-4

Men are at war with men because men are at war with God. In the Messianic age (our own time included) the ideal is peace based on His judgment. He will judge between people. He will decide concerning strong nations. When and if the leaders of nations seek His will together...when His judgment is taken seriously, there can be peace.

History has demonstrated in blood that this peace will not prevail so long as each nation believes God has only its own national interests at heart. When asked if he did not believe that God was on the side of the north, Abraham Lincoln answered that it was more important that we be on God’s side than He on ours. This is the Messianic ideal.

Both in the matter of war as described in verse 3 and the relation of races described in verse 2, the church, as Messiah’s kingdom does not have the answer. The church is the answer. In the true church there is no Jew nor Greek, east or west, male nor female. We are all one, and until we are all one, we are not truly the church!

The implements of war will be beaten into implements of peace, not by voting funds for welfare rather than warfare, but by seeking the will of God’s Messiah in intentional relations.

The ideal described in verse 4 of every man in the security and plenty of his own vine and fig tree will come not by civil rights agitation and legislation, but by seeking the will of God's Christ in human relations. God must become the ruler of our economy as well as our church doctrine!

Verse 5

We noted above that all false religion would not be obliterated in the age of the Messiah. This is obvious to anyone with definite conviction concerning the "faith once for all delivered." We would simply add here that this verse is evidence Micah is not describing the final "summing up of the ages" when all false religion will be forever wiped out. When Micah says, "all the peoples walk everyone in the name of his god, and we walk in the name of Jehovah our God," "He is not condoning false religion." He is describing an era of tolerance or religious freedom unknown in the ancient world.

It is after all better to discuss religious differences than to kill over them, as in the great religious wars of western European history.

THE RESTORATION OF THE SCATTERED Verses 6-8

Verse 6

"In that day" refers us back to verse 1. What Micah is about to say is to take place during the same "last of days" which, as we have seen, is the Messianic Age.

"I will assemble the lame," as used here is the image of the covenant people as God's flock. His sheep are pictured as limping or halting as the result of much wandering. These will be assembled.

Part of the worship of Baal, the chief cause of their impending captivity, was a limping, halting dance about the altars of Baal in the high places. When God finishes punishing them they will have real cause to limp!

Verse 7

The covenant people are no longer identified with the race of Abraham descendants. From this point forward, true Israel is the faithful remnant.

There is a distinction here between two groups. The one Micah calls “that which was lame” or “bruised.” The other he styles “that which is driven away . . . afflicted...cast off.”

The lame or bruised are the faithful obedient few. Although they will be bruised in the captivity and dispersion of the nation, God will make of them a remnant. Through them He will yet fulfill His covenant promise.

That which is cast off He will make a strong nation. Paul informs us emphatically that God has not cast off His people. (Romans 11:1) His people are the remnant. Those whom He cast off are the rebellious majority.

Of both, the remnant and the strong nation composed of those cast off, Micah says, “Jehovah will reign over them.”

Verse 8

The flock is the remnant, God’s faithful covenant people, Zion, out of whom shall proceed the law of God to all people.

The tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion (not Zion herself) is the cast-off ones who shall become a strong nation. As the tower of the flock was a lookout post to guard the shepherd’s flock, so the nation would shield within her the covenant remnant until the time of Messiah’s coming.

The term “tower of the flock” is literally the “tower of *Ophel*.” *Ophel* is not Mount Zion, but a slope on the south of the temple mount.

Verses 9-10

The term “tower of the flock” (verse 8) appears also in Genesis 35:16ff. There is the record of Rachel, beloved of Jacob, dying in childbirth as they journeyed from Bethel to Bethlehem.

Just as Rachel died in childbirth, so the nation of Israel would die at the hands of Titus (70 A.D.) and Hadrian (135 A.D.) in the height of her Messianic expectancy. First century Israel looked for a king, but could not find one. Micah’s question is pertinent, “Is there no king among thee?” The king would indeed be in her, but she would die in travail without seeing (recognizing) Him just as Rachel died.

The nation, even in Micah's time, in pain would go away into Babylon, there to be rescued. To all outward appearances the Hebrew nation was dead when they were led away into Babylon. In truth, however, it was there that they were molded into a people who never again forgot God.

True their national ambition blinded them to The Christ. He was recognized only by the remnant, not the nation.

Verse 11

It is the prophet's purpose in these verses to return to the warnings of chapter 3:12. Before there can be a national restoration and a deliverance of the remnant there must be the captivity.

Having projected hope which lay nearly two centuries in the future in its first instance, that is, the deliverance from Babylon, and some eight centuries in the future in its Messianic fulfillment, Micah returns in verse 11 to the situation immediately before him. Between the present and the blessed future was an array of enemies bent on Israel's destruction.

In Micah's own time the Assyrians dominated the international scene. They would wipe out the northern kingdom and in their turn be replaced by Babylon. Babylon would enslave the southern kingdom, only to be destroyed by the Persians.

The Medo-Persians would themselves yield to Alexander and the Greeks.

Against the oppression of the Greeks would rise a blood bath known to history as "the Maccabean Period," including a Jewish civil war, to be ended only by Roman occupation.

Verse 12

This array of foreign powers who, from the beginning of recorded history, have used the land of Israel as a military pawn and buffer state have reckoned without God's thought and counsel. He has gathered them, that is, the nations arrayed against Israel, as sheaves to the threshing floor. Jerusalem "daughter of Zion," is called to arise and thresh. Jehovah will make her horn iron and her hoofs brass.

Nothing in history to date, fully accords with the prediction.

The only period of history since Micah in which Israel has had any military power was the Maccabean period of victory of Antiochus Epiphanes and that victory was on nothing like the scale indicated here in the threshing of many nations.

To find the fulfillment of this prophecy, we must look to more recent history. We have previously referred to Romans 11 in reference to the first group here presented by Micah, that is, the true Israel, the covenant people called the remnant. But what of the cast-off ones who are to become a strong nation to whom the former dominion shall come?

It is concerning them that Paul writes in Romans 11:24ff.

The Jews are precious to Jehovah because of His past relations with them. There is little doubt that the Bible predicts another period of national life and prosperity.

To recognize this ought not, however, to engender in us such earthly, material and sordid hopes as proved their undoing in the rejection of Christ two thousand years ago.

Whatever is in store for the Jewish nation in terms of earthly identity, it can in no way preclude the longing of God and His church to win them to Christ.

It is my opinion that in our day, which is called the latter days, the time of the Messiah, we are seeing the fulfillment of Micah 4:9-5:1 in the present history of the Israeli nation.

No time in the interval between Micah and the present has met the fullness of this passage. From Assyria to now many nations have been assembled against the Jews. (verse 11) In all this historic desire to see these people defiled, the nations have not considered God's will nor known His counsel. (verse 12)

The present Arab-Russian-Chinese coalition against modern Israel certainly takes none of this into account.

Yet, in a strength unbelievable, reported by every news media of our time, this little postage stamp country has not once but four times in turn defied the

strength of Britain and all the Arab world could hurl against her and has each time “threshed” them soundly. (verse 12)

Micah promised this would come to pass during the Christian era. It ought to be no great source of amazement that we are seeing it happen!

FOCUS ON THE MESSIAH

Chapter 5:1-6

Verse 1

But before the remnant shall be gathered by Messiah, before those cast off can become a strong nation, the inevitable must happen. The kingdoms will gather their armies together and attempt in vain to hold off the armies of Assyria and of Babylon. But it will be to no avail. The price of their apostasy must be paid.

Verse 2

When the bloodied-handed Herod sent to the rabbis to ask the place of the Messiah’s birth, he was pointed to Bethlehem. It was on the strength of this passage of Micah’s prophecy. No prophecy concerning His coming is more clear. No predictive Scripture is more universally agreed upon as to its meaning.

Having described the nature of the Messianic age and having inserted a reminder of the punishment which must come first, Micah now focuses our attention on the birth and work of the Messiah Himself.

Bethlehem! Birthplace of David. Ancient *Ephrath* of the Gentiles. The entire race of men, have an acute interest in what will happen here. To the Jew first but also to the Greek, there will be born in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

As villages go, Bethlehem is no more or nor less than average. Nestling on the eastern slopes of ridge some five miles southwest of Jerusalem, this was, among other things, the traditional home of many whose trade was carpentry.

We might have expected the Son of God to be born in Jerusalem, or the King of Kings to be born in Rome, or some other center of power and influence. Instead, He came to a peaceful little Judean town, so insignificant in worldly eyes that Josephus doesn't bother to mention it. Nor for that matter, is it included in the catalogue of Joshua in late Hebrew manuscripts.

It is not without significance that the sheep tended on the slopes of Bethlehem's hills were traditionally those intended for temple sacrifice.

He who was born there was the Lamb of God. The shadow of a cross fell across the manger bed. It was a king who was to be born in Bethlehem, not merely a Galilean carpenter or a pale religious philosopher.

The child born in Bethlehem was to be the "ruler in Israel." (Micah 5:2) He was to rule over the house of Jacob forever. (Luke 1:33)

The Jews object that Jesus could not be the Messiah because He was so far from being the ruler in Israel that Israel ruled over Him . . . put Him to death. But He Himself answered this objection, and in doing so put the lie to all who would claim for Him a materialistic kingdom. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world."

It is spiritual Israel He reigns over, the children of the promise . . . all the followers of believing Abraham. (Galatians 3:7)

Verse 3

God will not fully vindicate His people and exalt them until, through suffering, Israel brings forth His Son.

"Then the remnant shall return unto the children of Israel." The covenant people, with the race and nation and without . . . the genuine children of Israel in covenant with God . . . all believers will be incorporated into the Israel over which the Messiah shall rule. And He shall not be ashamed to call them brethren. (Hebrews 2:11)

Verse 4

He shall be a glorious prince, but His relationship to His people is that of shepherd. It is no coincidence that the 23rd Psalm is the most dearly beloved Old Testament passage among Christians.

He shall do this, not as other men, but in the strength and majesty of Jehovah. It would be said concerning Him that He taught “as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

The nation of Israel was perishing. Soon the northern tribes would be disbursed so completely as to make them, in subsequent history, unidentifiable. The southern kingdom would endure longer—even be in a measure re-established following the captivity, but any hope of national honor related to God’s covenant promise had gone up with the smoke of their sacrifices to Baal. But Messiah’s flock would abide.

Jesus’ own words re-affirm this, “And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that all that which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”

And His greatness shall be to the ends of the earth. Here is another of the myriad evidences in the Old Testament of God’s universal concern for all men. The Messianic intent of God has ever been that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

Verses 5-6

In the original here there is no word for man. It is simply and emphatically “this one” . . . He alone . . . who is our peace. It is only the Messiah who can bring peace . . . who can bring an end to the warfare between God’s people and those who, before He came were “separate from Christ.” (Ephesians 2:11-15)

Assyria, being Israel’s most powerful enemy at the time of Micah’s ministry is made to represent all the enemies of God’s people. When the Messiah appears, He will destroy them.

“Seven shepherds...eight principal men,” a strange array, it would seem, to send against the Assyrians. “Seven” expresses perfection. We shall raise against (or depend upon) the Messiah . . . the perfect shepherd.

“Eight” is seven plus one. The Messiah plus those “principal men” or “anointed men,” such as the twelve “shall lay waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrance thereof.” The Lord’s strength is more than enough.

The terms “palace,” “seven,” and “eight” connect themselves with the threatening formula employed by Amos (Amos chapter 1-2) to announce the approach of the destruction which was about to break. God’s grace will be greater than the sin; hence, instead of three and four sins which make the judgment necessary (Amos 2:4) seven and eight heroes are named who shall drive away the enemies when the Messiah has come.

Just as the Roman Empire in which period Jesus was born, enforced peace with the Roman sword. So, the Messiah and those who stand with Him will enforce His peace by subduing His enemies with the sword of the Spirit.

Those who stand against the Gospel of Christ, and continue in league with idolatries and witchcrafts, as did Assyria and Babylon of old, shall be consumed by it.

In our day, when tolerance of any and all false teaching has become a sacred cow and when unbelief is regarded as a normal reaction to God, it is difficult to think in these terms. There is, however, a “hard” side to the Gospel. The sword has a cutting edge. There is destruction for those who resist it. (1 Peter 2:8)

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE OF THE REMNANT Verse 7-15

Verse 7

Micah writes glorious things in this passage concerning the remnant.

Israel according to the flesh dwelt alone until her destruction. The nearer destruction finally came, the more she dwelt alone, turned in upon herself the

less certain it was God's Messiah would save her and make the Gentiles her slaves. Not so the remnant, the true Israel; she will be in the midst of many people . . . as the salt of the earth; or as seed sown upon the ground.

The remnant shall be as dew from the Lord, covering all as dew in a summer morning. They shall be pure and clear as dew drops, as the water of life.

Dependent upon the Spirit, they shall "tarry not for man, nor wait upon the sons of man." They shall be a great blessing to those people among whom they live, just as the refreshing dew from heaven is a blessing to thirsty earth.

Verses 8-9

But the remnant shall not be tread upon as is the dew. They shall be "as a lion among the flocks of sheep" . . . as a lion "treads down and tears in pieces and there is none to deliver."

Messiah's people shall be silent and bringers of blessings, as the dew, but they shall be as bold as lions. The forces which today threaten to destroy Christian civilization cannot stand against the power of the Gospel in the lives of committed people any more than a hyena can stand against a lion.

The strength of God's covenant people is that which derives from the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Israel of old has been instructed to not go to Egypt for horses lest they depend upon chariots and cavalry rather than upon God.

From Solomon on they would disregard this command. The new Israel has no such arms. She stands or fails upon her trust in Christ. So long as she is faithful nothing can stand against her. (Romans 8:31ff)

Verses 10-11

Note those things against which His people are to prevail . . . horses and chariots are cut off and destroyed. Cities and strongholds will be thrown down. The temptation to trust worldly power is to be eliminated.

The church has been slow to relinquish these things, but the circumstances of our day now leave us no choice. Only the gospel can stand against the armed atheism which threatens our existence.

Verse 12

Witchcrafts and soothsayers are also to be cut off. There is a revival of such evil in our day, but not in the hands of the church.

Verses 13-14

Graven images and pillars and the graven images which are the works of our hand are to be eliminated. Even the Roman church recently “decommissioned” two hundred saints before whose idols thousands have prayed. In the New Testament church such things were an abomination.

Verse 15

This verse must be almost unbelievable to the one today who thinks the God of the Old Testament was only a primitive fore-shadowing of the God of Love revealed in the New Testament. Nevertheless, the prophet sees, IN THE AGE OF THE MESSIAH, God executing “vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations which harken not.” The concept of a God Who does not bring vengeance against anyone is of very recent origin and completely foreign to the Christian God of the New Testament as well as the Old.

JEHOVAH’S CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE

Chapters 6-7

These two chapters are composed of a series of lamentations, threatenings, and denunciations.

FORGOTTEN ACTS OF SALVATION

Chapters 6:1-8

Verse 1-2

The first controversy of Jehovah against His people is occasioned by their having forgotten His saving activities in their behalf in times past. The judgments pronounced against both the northern and southern kingdoms in chapters 1-3 are harsh.

The denunciation of the nation, the casting off of the race per se which is evidenced in the promised blessings to the remnant (chapters 4-5) are sure to be decried as unfair by those who are to be cast off. To prove His fairness in these things, God calls the prophet to set the sins of the people before them.

The justice of God's judgments against the leaders of the nation was established before all the people and nations, so the fairness of His complaints against the people will now be openly seen by all. The equity of God's cause will be pleaded and sinners themselves forced to confess that God's ways and judgments are fair.

O MY WHAT HAVE I DONE Verse 3-5

In these verses the complaint of God is made. In 6:9—7:6, the case will be judged.

Verse 3

Here we have the plea of a broken heart. "What have I done unto thee?" "Wherein have I wearied thee?" They have sinned against His love as well as His law.

Verse 4

"I brought you up . . . "The nation of Israel did not exist until the mercies of God brought an enslaved race out of a foreign land because of the covenant of blessing made with their father! (Exodus 2:24-25)

It was the law, given them through Moses and the priesthood instituted in Aaron that turned the race into a nation . . . the very law whose flaunting now occasioned the heart-break of their God as the necessity of judging His people.

Verse 5

Micah's allusion here is to (Numbers, chapters 22-24.) The prophet places himself in the position of Balaam and asks those to whom he speaks to see the parallel.

Israel, drawing near the Promised Land had encamped on the plains of Moab opposite Jericho on the east bank of the Jordan River. Balak, king of Moab, seeing what Israel had done to the Amorites, was terrified and sent to Pethor near the Euphrates to the prophet Balaam with the request that he come and curse Israel.

When Balaam went before God for direction, he was directed not to return with Balak's messengers, the elders of Moab.

Balak, assuming that Balaam could be bribed, sent ambassadors of higher rank with greater gifts. Again, Balaam went to God in prayer and this time was instructed to go with the princes of Moab but to say only what God gave him to say.

Next morning Balaam went with the princes toward Moab. And God was angry, apparently because Balaam had been tempted enough by the bribe to question God's first instruction. As Balaam rode toward Moab, an angel appeared to his donkey, but not to him. The animal seeing the angel block her way, turned aside into a field, whereupon Balaam beat her.

Again, the donkey saw the angel and, instead of obeying Balaam, crushed his foot against a wall, and Balaam beat her a second time. A third time the animal saw God's angel blocking the way, and this time she balked, for which Balaam struck her with his rod.

Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth and she asked her master what she had done to be beaten. When Balaam answered it was because she had provoked and ridiculed him and wished for a sword to kill her, the animal reminded him that she had served him well all her life and asked if this had ever happened before.

Then Balaam's eyes were allowed to see the angel standing in the way with drawn sword. He fell on his face before the angel and was asked why he had beaten his donkey when the angel had come to stand against him.

The prophet then confessed he had sinned in attempting to force his way past the angel of the Lord. Understanding that he had done wrong in asking again and again for permission to curse Israel, Balaam asked for instructions and was told to go on to Moab but to say only what the Lord would instruct him to say.

Seeing Balaam coming, Balak rushed to meet the prophet assuming he was going to curse Israel. Balaam ignored the king's rebuke for not having come at once and warned him he would say only what the Lord gave him to say.

Balak took Balaam to *Kireath-huzoth*, overlooking the outskirts of Israel's encampment. There the Moabite offered sacrifices and sent portions of the sacrifice to Balaam.

Next day Balak took Balaam to the high places of *Bamoth-Baal* from which he could see the Israelites. The prophet required the king to again build altars and sacrifice. When this was done, he instructed Balak to wait by the sacrifices while he inquired of God.

God met Balaam, and gave him a message, "How can I curse those God has not cursed?" How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?"

Hearing this, Balak took Balaam to yet another high place, to the top of Mount Pisgah, hoping he would be permitted to curse Israel from this vantage point. Again, Balaam waited on the message of God.

This time the message was, "God is not a man that He should tell or act a lie, nor feel compunction, for what He has promised, I have received His command to bless Israel."

Balaam's discourse to Balak, concerned God's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. (Numbers 23:22-26)

Seeing Balaam would not curse Israel, Balak requests that he neither curse nor bless her, to which Balaam answered, “All the Lord speaks I must do.”

Again, Balak took Balaam to another high place in a last effort to have his way against Israel. But Balaam no longer looked for signs of God’s permission to curse His people. Instead he looked the other way.

Then God’s Spirit came upon Balaam and the prophet blessed Israel in Balak’s presence. Upon this, the king of Moab became angry. In answering Balak’s anger, Balaam said, “I cannot go beyond the command of the Lord to do either good or bad of my own will, but what the Lord says, that I will speak.” (Numbers 24:13)

It is Balaam’s progressive willingness and final determination to speak only what the Lord gave him to say that Micah here appropriates to himself. He too has said what his listeners do not want to hear. His reply is, “O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him . . . “

Micah is also determined to say, good or bad, only what the Lord gives him to say.

After God had steadfastly forbidden Balaam from cursing Israel and had actually brought this alien prophet to bless Jehovah’s people, the people themselves turned to idols! (Numbers 21:1ff)

Having settled down in Shittim the people “began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab and so Israel joined himself to Baal of Peor.” Numbers 25:1-3

As a result, God’s anger had been kindled against Israel so that He had instructed Moses to hang their leaders and 24,000 Israelites were smitten.

Micah again asks that those to whom he speaks remember God’s past dealing with Israel. He had formerly punished her for unfaithfulness. If they will recall this truth, they will see the validity of Micah’s warning of the same wrath. Again, Micah’s message is timely in our day.

Verses 6-7

Micah's question is simply whether he, as Balak, shall continually, with animal sacrifices, attempt to alter the will of God. Having placed himself in the way of Balaam's determination to do God's will, whether good or bad, he now implies that his hearers are in the same position as Balak, king of Moab!

Micah pursues the issue farther, insinuating they would have him turn to Baal in their behalf. It was one of the abominable practices of Baal worship that the first-born son of the worshiper be tossed into the fiery bowels of the idol to atone for the parent's sin . . . would they have him resort to this despicable practice to atone for having pronounced the judgment of God against them? The sarcasm is scathing!

Verse 8

Here is one of the classic questions of Scripture. It ranks with that of Lord, "What is a man profited, if he gains the whole world and loses his own life?" The Hebrew writer says, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?" For such questions there is no answer.

God's insistence upon faithfulness is not unreasonable, particularly when His past blessings and present promises are remembered.

Nor is His punishment for unfaithfulness unreasonable when one remembers that it is His purpose through such faithfulness to benefit not only the faithful but all man-kind.

"What does God require of you?" God's worshipers shall, "Do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." Failure to keep the commandments and precepts expressed in outward forms inevitably leads to failure to do these simple yet profound elements; do justly, love kindness, walk humbly.

1. "Doing the justice."

What is described here is the life style: required by God. To be doing justice is to have just actions as the habit or style of one's life.

But what is justice? It has to do with the keeping of God's law, His commandments and ordinances.

Far from removing the necessity for keeping God's commandments, this passage states in simple, yet forceful, terms the necessity to do so. But to obey commandments formally—to go through the motions of conformity to God's law without any corresponding effect on one's life makes such obedience a hollow mockery and an affront to God.

2. "Love mercy."

The phrase, "rendered mercy," means—literally, to have pity, to have compassion.

To have compassion is to place ones' self in the sufferer's situation, to suffer with him.

Micah is not claiming this is required of God's people. Obviously, it is an ideal to be sought, but what is required is pity, a feeling sorry for, objectively. We are to love such mercy! Here is one of those rare pre-Christian uses of the word love—the love of the will, not emotions. The love that is deliberate and self-giving.

God requires deliberate giving of self to pity, the obvious, concern for others. Without this all formal religious obedience is hollow. (Matthew 23:23)

The church member today who is meticulously correct in "doctrinal matters" and unconcerned for mercy where there is human suffering has missed the mark as far as those to whom Micah promised God's wrath missed it.

3. "Walk humbly."

The phrase "to walk humbly" means literally, proceed or go one's way in an attitude of readiness to go with God as Lord.

God requires His people to be alert to His Authority. As we go our way, we are to do so in the awareness that God is our Lord.

God does not require by simply issuing commands and edicts. The heart of God's ordinances is His intimate knowledge of the hearts and minds of men.

GOD’S JUSTICE DEMANDS THE WICKED BE PUNISHED VERSE 9-16

The prophet, speaking with the voice of the Lord, calls upon the city, Jerusalem, to see the reason why God must punish her wickedness.

Verse 9

“The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom.” The course of wisdom is to seriously heed God’s warnings. He is God and is therefore perfectly capable of doing what He says he will do.

The warning has been given. Micah entreats the people to heed the rod before it falls—before they feel it. They are also entreated to hear Him Who has appointed this punishment for His children.

God’s messengers are ever required to explain God’s providences and to quicken and direct men to learn the lessons taught by them.

Verses 10-12

Those who had wealth and power abused it. Those who did not have such advantages found other means of defrauding those with whom they dealt.

If they could not use force and violence they used fraud and deceit. False weights and measures and deliberate lies were common devices for making a “good bargain.”

How can God remain pure and yet withhold righteous judgment from such people? Can He be pure and “go along” with such ethics? This is ever the dilemma of God’s justice and mercy.

It is very popular today to believe a God of mercy is not capable of stern judgment. There have been other times, like the Puritan era, when it seems to have been believed that a just God could not possibly be merciful.

To the informed Christian, or for that matter the informed Jew, the answer has always been God’s Messiah. This is the message of Romans 3:21-26. It is also the message of Micah as he alternately warns of judgments and promises the Messiah’s coming.

Verse 13

The persistent fact of sin is a prime factor in Micah's message. He did not see it as mere maladjustment or even failure to attain to some objective religious standard. Sin is against the person of God.

It is unfaithfulness to His covenant, it is disloyalty to His purpose, and it is disobedience to His authority. Exploitation of the poor, bribery, drunkenness, harlotry, idolatry, is evil, because they are an affront to a moral ethical God!

The God Who cannot give countenance to sin will not save from destruction those who persist in it. He will not abandon His mercy. The remnant will be redeemed and received by the Messiah.

But aside from the Messiah, and until He comes, God's rebellious people can expect to reap the consequences of their own evil ways.

Verse 14

As they have swallowed down the riches of ill-gotten gain, so they shall vomit them up again. Their unethical affluence will not bring them satisfaction. Such affluence never does. We are experiencing unparalleled social dissatisfaction in the midst of plenty in our time, largely because those who have been unconcerned for those who have not, and because much of our affluence has been gotten at the expense of the poor.

Their country will not harbor and protect them. God can cast a nation down by what is in the midst of them. They shall not be able to preserve what they have by force nor recover what they will lose. Their tainted wealth shall be removed by a foreign sword.

Verse 15

Either their crops will be blasted and withered until there is nothing to reap, or an enemy shall come and reap what they have sown. When they are carried away captive, they will not return to harvest what they have sown.

Verse 16

Here Micah alludes to the idolatrous reign of Omri as symbolic of the current unfaithfulness of the people. Omri had become king in the north, in the dynastic line of Jeroboam. He consolidated his power by defeating Tibni. Omri reigned six years in Tirzah, after which he bought and fortified the hill of Samaria as his capital city.

It is said he did more evil than all his predecessors, beginning with Baal worship, “that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah.”

After a six-year reign in Samaria, Omri died and was succeeded by his son, Ahab. Micah here refers to the “works of the house of Ahab.” It was he who married an infamous Jezebel whose missionary zeal for her god, Baal, puts the Israelites to shame in their apathetic neglect of Jehovah.

Micah here accuses Jerusalem of following the same idolatrous course as Omri and Ahab. In so doing, he presents us with evidence that the chief concern of the prophet is to call the people away from idolatry and back to the covenant.

There were all sorts of evil rampant in both kingdoms but the root of it all—the fundamental reason for God’s wrath against them—was their going off after Baal and in so doing breaking their covenant with Jehovah.

The desolation mentioned here is that the proud city of Jerusalem will lie in ruins for the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, and never again regain the splendor of her former glory.

The term “hissing” depicts the sad wonder of those who pass by Jerusalem in her desolation. They clap their hands and suck their breath through closed teeth in expression of their amazement of the sad state of the city once called “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth.”

Because of their haughty claim to be God’s only people, while failing in their covenant relationship to Him, the Jews will bear the reproach which comes from such a claim.

Because of their disgraceful use of the Law of Jehovah, that which should have been a real honor, that is, their “chosen people” status, shall become the occasion of their being despised by the people of the earth.

MICAH LONGS FOR GODLINESS

CHAPTER 7:1-6

Verse 1

A cry of despair comes from the lips of the prophet. His soul is hungry for the fellowship of godly men. In this he is disappointed as a man physically hungry who comes first to the vineyard and then the orchard and finds nothing to relieve his hunger.

Micah sees beyond the confines of the little kingdoms of Israel and Judah. If there are no godly men among the covenant people, then godliness has perished from the earth. Turning to idolatry, as the world worshiped idolatry, the chosen people had brought about a moral situation to that which would prevail if there were no God at all!

Verse 2

The statement, “there is none upright” reminds us of David’s affirmation concerning those fools who say there is no God in Psalm 14:1. “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works.”

In Romans 3:9-18, Paul establishes this ungodliness as the universal state of man outside of Christ. There the apostle uses a chain of references to prove that the Jews are in no better fix than Gentiles, for all are under sin.

There are, says Micah, not only none who do good, but multitudes that do positive hurt. “They all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother.” They have a thousand cursed arts of ensnaring men to their ruin.

Verse 3

The magistrates, office patrons, and protectors of right are those who practice and promote wrong. The prince and judge may be hired for bribes to exert all their power to carry out wicked purposes.

The great man who has wealth and the power to do good but who desires to do evil does not utter the evil desires of his soul lest his conspiring with the prince and judge become evident.

Verse 4

“The best of them is a briar; the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge.” They prick and injure all with whom they come in contact.

This is the day of the watchman. Just as a policeman comes upon a criminal to arrest him, so the true prophet, God’s watchman, comes upon the false prophet and his corrupt followers. The party is over, the piper must be paid. God’s wrath is at hand.

Verses 5-6

Here follows a list of those whom honest men (if indeed there were any) could not trust. The list includes: “a neighbor,” “a friend,” “she that lays in thy bosom.” that is, one’s own wife, “the son,” “the daughter,” “the daughters-in-law.” Such a society is indeed corrupt, ready for the wrath of God.

Note: Jesus quotes verse 6(b) in connection with those He expected to persecute the new covenant people in Matthew 10:35-36.

THE PROPHET LOOKS TO GOD VERSES 7-13

Verse 7

From the stench of social injustice and personal immorality brought on by false worship, Micah lifts his eyes to God. Not only will he look to the Lord, he will wait “for the God of my salvation.”

Here is a timely lesson for anyone who would serve God. Whether it be Elijah, despairing in loneliness because of the unfaithfulness of God’s people, or Joshua standing like an oak, alone if necessary but steadfast, or Micah declaring his trust to a faithless generation, he who would serve God faithfully must be able to differentiate between God Who is faithful, and His people who too often are not. Micah is unshaken in his conviction that, “My God will hear me!”

Verses 8-10

Truth is ever in the minority. Error is ever on the throne and with this unnatural imbalance the wicked always boast and scoff and rejoice in the discomfort of God's people. But their joy is as hollow as it is destined to be short-loved. Though enemies triumph and insult, they shall be silenced and put to shame.

Here is another eternal truth, spoken in the Old Testament and re-affirmed in the New Testament.

Romans 8:31-39 asks and answers the same question. "If God is for us, who can be against us? ...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!"

The enemies of God's faithful may rejoice for a season in God's chastening of His people, but their joy is to be brief. Micah sees his own plight, as does every true worshiper see such circumstances as a result of sin.

Micah confesses that he is a sinner (verse 9) and stands ready to bear the indignation of Jehovah. This is a common attitude among spiritual giants. David, in his great guilt, felt abandoned by God, yet he knew God had heard and would deliver him.

Paul cried out in recognition of his own sin, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death" and immediately rejoiced in the answer, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 7:24-8:1)

Verse 11

Having stated his trust in God, accepted his discomfiture as the just result of his own sin, and rejoiced in the sure hope of deliverance, Micah now transfers this entire process to the people. Beyond the anticipated exile the prophet sees the decree for deliverance and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Verse 12

In the day of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, following the fall of Babylon, the Jews now scattered, shall return from throughout the surrounding nations.

Verse 13

The returning exiles will not find, as did their forefathers, “A land flowing with milk and honey.” Rather the land will be desolate, the temple and the walls of the cities will be in ruins. They must recognize this as “the fruit of their doings.”

The history of the rebuilding of their lands by the returned remnant is one of the most thrilling chapters in the history of this stiff-necked people.

Verses 14-15

When Joshua and Caleb returned to Moses after having spied out the Promised Land, they reported it was a land flowing with milk and honey. Micah’s prayer is it shall be that way again when the people return.

One can stand today among the lush forests in the plain of Megiddo at the foot of Mount Carmel and marvel at the beauty of the land as it has recently been reclaimed by today’s returnees from exile. They found the region a miserable swamp and turned it into a garden. So does the prophet pray that God’s people after Babylon shall reclaim their land.

Bashan was famous for its cattle, Gilead for its healing balm. Micah asks God on behalf of the remnant that it may be so again.

Verses 16-17

This prediction concerning the neighbors of Israel is easily seen demonstrated both in ancient and modern times. Just as those who returned from Babylon set about to rebuild, so the modern Israeli loves his land.

Hillsides once eroded through neglect and poor husbandry are covered with verdant vegetation. What was formerly barren wilderness now is home for the unique farming communes of Israel.

The nations who mistreated this land, both in ancient and modern times have ample reason to be ashamed.

Verses 18-20

Micah is overwhelmed by the knowledge that, though He must now punish His people for their utter faithlessness, He will not only deliver a remnant, but will bless their lands and humiliate their enemies.

Jehovah is praised for His great glory, His readiness to forgive and His faithfulness to the ancient promises of the covenant.

Although He is just and does punish, He “delights in loving kindness.” No one who knows Micah’s God can possibly see any contrast between Him and the God of Love revealed in the New Testament.