

# THE BOOK OF MICAH

## A. ORIENTING DATA FOR MICAH

- Content: alternating oracles of doom on Israel and Judah for their idolatry and social injustices and of future hope because of Yahweh's mercies
- Prophet: Micah, a Judean prophet from Moresheth, a town about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem
- Date of prophetic activity: some length of time between the accession of Jotham (740 B.C.) and the death of Hezekiah (686)
- Emphases: the threat of divine judgment for breaking covenant with Yahweh; Yahweh as a God of justice and mercy who pleads the cause of the poor and requires his people to do the same; after judgment Yahweh will restore Jerusalem through the promised Davidic king; Yahweh as God of all the nations

## B. OVERVIEW OF MICAH

The book of Micah, sixth in the Book of the Twelve, is a careful—and unique—collection and arrangement of oracles delivered by Micah over an apparently long period (1:6–7 was given well before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., while 1:10–16 traces the march of Sennacherib, which took place in 701; see 2 Kgs 18:13–19:37; Isa 36–37). Its uniqueness lies in its (not necessarily chronological) arrangement, which alternates between oracles of judgment and of future hope (basically Mic 1–2; 3–5; 6–7, which are marked off by the call to “hear/listen” 1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

The oracles in 1:2–2:11 are primarily pronouncements of divine judgment on Samaria and (especially) Jerusalem (the capitals representing the two kingdoms); they conclude with a brief promise of future restoration (2:12–13). The second set is introduced by a brief collection of three doom oracles (3:1–4, 5–8, 9–12); it concludes with a longer collection of oracles of hope (4:1–5:15) that focus on the promised (messianic) Davidic king. The third set is more evenly divided between threat (6:1–16) and hope (7:8–20), which are held together by Micah's lament over Israel's decadence (7:1–7).

## C. SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING MICAH

Four matters are crucial for a good reading of Micah. First, the arrangement itself not only offers you a handle for reading the text but at the same time says something about Micah's own theology, which mirrors Deuteronomy 28–30. At the heart of things, as in Hosea, is the dynamic tension between the necessity of divine judgment (curses) because of Israel's breaking covenant with Yahweh and Yahweh's own longing to bless his people because they are his and because of his own character (compassion, mercy, forgiveness; see Mic 7:18–20). Micah himself is, as it were, both torn apart and held together by this twofold reality; the final composition of his book presents this tension in bold relief but concludes on the bright note of future hope.

Second, as is true for most of the prophets of Israel, the political history of the period plays an especially important role in understanding the oracles themselves. Micah is the fourth of the

eighth-century prophets, a generation after Hosea and Amos, and a younger contemporary of Isaiah. Gone now are the halcyon days that characterized the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, and all of the seeds of decay and eventual destruction are settling in as the idolatry and social injustice condemned by Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah continued apace. At the same time Assyria is a constant threat on the international scene as she begins reasserting her power in the Near Eastern world (see “Specific Advice for Reading Isaiah,” p. 176). Thus Assyria looms large in Micah, but her role is ambivalent: Although she is God’s agent of judgment on Samaria (1:6–7, 10–16), she will fail against Judah (5:5–6) and will eventually experience God’s judgment (5:15; 7:10). At the same time, as with Isaiah, the anticipation of Babylonian power is also prophesied (4:10).

Third, note especially the reasons for judgment on Judah. As it is with Isaiah and Amos, the issues are two: idolatry (1:7; 5:12–14) and social injustice (2:1–2, 8–11; 3:1–3, 8–11; 6:10–12; 7:2–3). Especially important for Micah is the role of the promised land as inheritance, which here goes in two directions—(1) exile from the land as part of the curse for unfaithfulness to Yahweh (1:16; 2:10; 4:9–10; cf. Deut 28:25–42) and (2) the unfaithfulness itself as the leaders and land barons deprive the rural poor of their traditional inheritance (Mic 2:2, 9; 3:2–3, 9–11; 6:10–12, 16; 7:2).

Fourth, Micah takes Israel’s promised role in blessing the nations (Gen 12:3) with full seriousness (Mic 4:1–4; 7:11–13). This is the oath made to Abraham (7:20; the final word in the book), and this is the ultimate role of the messianic king, who will be God’s agent for the peace of the nations (5:5). Note, therefore, that chapters 4–5, which express future hope in messianic terms, lie at the very center of the present arrangement. Thus, both the first and second oracles of hope center specifically on the coming messianic king (2:13; 5:1–6), and Micah 5:2 is cited in Matthew 2:6, in a Gospel that is particularly concerned about the Messiah’s role in behalf of the nations (Matt 28:19–20).

Finally, you should also note that one hundred years later the oracle in Micah 3:12 is cited by some elders against King Jehoiakim, who wanted to take Jeremiah’s life (Jer 26:17–19), a passage which also implies that Micah’s preaching was in part responsible for Hezekiah’s reforms (2 Kgs 18:1–8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [\*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 235–237.