

Micah

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Bad news for Israel and Judah—with a brief hint about the coming Messiah.

WHO WROTE IT? Micah, a prophet from a rural area in southern Judah.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Before and after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.

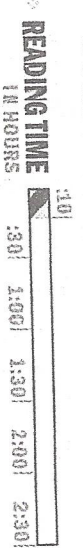
WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? During the period of the divided kingdom.

THE BREAKDOWN

- Chapters 1–2: Predicted destruction of Israel and Judah
- Chapter 3: Leaders are condemned
- Chapters 4–5: Future hope for Israel and Judah
- Chapter 6: God takes Israel to court
- Chapter 7: Gloom and hope

KEY CONCEPTS

• Accusation, case, charges (God uses the image of a courtroom to list the sins of his people)



WORTH MEMORIZING

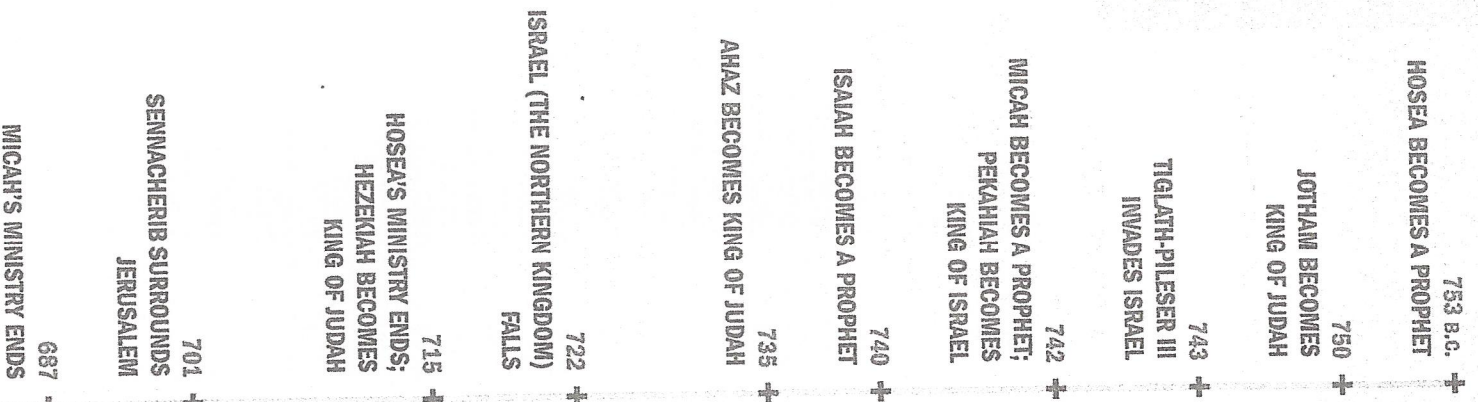
- 5:2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah, yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.
- 6:8 O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

• **LEADERS' RESPONSIBILITY.** For all who aspire to leadership, Micah warns that leaders will be held responsible for the way they treat the people under them.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF Micah?
+++
God is not a soft touch in the face of disobedience.

Timeline



FACTS



Old Testament Prophecies Fulfilled by Jesus

1. The OT contains over 300 prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah, all of which were fulfilled by Jesus Christ.
2. Micah 5:2 named Bethlehem as Messiah's birthplace some 700 years before Jesus was born.
3. The "suffering servant" passage of Isaiah 52-53 accurately depicts Jesus' substitutionary atonement for our sins.
4. Psalm 22, Psalm 34:20, and Zechariah 12:10 are amazing prophecies depicting the crucifixion of Jesus Christ many years before crucifixion was known in Israel.
5. Isaiah 53:9 foretold Jesus' burial in a rich man's grave while Psalm 16:10 prophetically declared His triumphal resurrection.

1:12-16 When there is no repentance, sin is contagious, and its effects are far-reaching. Notice that even the innocent children of the Israelites would be sold into slavery because of their parents' sins. We often fail to realize that our sins may cause great suffering for generations into the future. We need to act now, admitting our sins and failures and surrendering our lives into God's gracious hands. With God's help we will yet be able to set our children and grandchildren free from a painful future.

2:1-5 Many of Israel's influential people spent their time planning ways to ruin the lives of others. They sought personal wealth and influence, and the more they took for themselves, the more they hurt those around them. They were blind to much of the pain they were causing and unaware of the judgment they were piling up for themselves. Our sins often drive us to make the same mistake. As we reflect honestly on our lives, we should think clearly about those we have hurt and seek ways to make restitution.



According to a British survey, an average citizen of the United Kingdom knowingly violates five rules a week, which amounts to 260 rules a year, or 16,250 in a lifetime. These range from jaywalking to littering to piggybacking on someone else's wireless service. Of course, with millions of laws on the books, it's hard for any of us to make it through a week without some kind of infraction. Micah 6:8 suggests a far simpler code of conduct: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

It was a needed message in Micah's time. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. These were days of inequality and idolatry. Hezekiah was the best of these kings, but even his reforms had only a temporary effect.

Micah preached about both judgment and hope. Israel's sins could not be overlooked, but neither could the promises of God—including the prophecy involving the little town of Bethlehem, where a Messiah would be born, a Ruler whose goings forth were from old, even from everlasting.

Sometimes we make the Christian life into something it's not—placing ourselves under arbitrary, self-imposed rules, long lists of do's and don'ts, restrictive disciplines, and complicated objectives. The prophet Micah, however, boils it all down by asking, "What does the LORD require?" He requires us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him.



KEY THOUGHT:

Sin devastates; but we have the promise of a ruler to be born in Bethlehem, whose goings forth are from old, even from everlasting.



KEY VERSE:

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"
Micah 6:8



KEY ACTION:

We need to live justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.



KEY PRAYER:

Dear Lord, teach me Your ways that I may walk in Your paths.

INTRODUCTION TO
MICAH

BACKGROUND

The opening verse of the book of Micah identifies the prophet's hometown as Moresheth, likely Moresheth-gath (1:14) on the border of Judah and Philistia, twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. He speaks to conditions in both kingdoms, Israel and Judah.

Micah focuses his complaints on the injustices of the land and the sufferings of the poor at the hands of the rich, a message similar to that of the prophet Amos. Jeremiah 26:17–19 refers to Micah, as King Hezekiah repented, hearing Micah's message.

Micaia is a shortened form of the Hebrew name *Michayahu*, which means "who is like Yahweh?"

MESSAGE

God calls Micah to preach a message of God's hatred of sin and the love he has for his people. In the trial scene of chapter 6, God puts his people on trial for sin, declares them guilty, and assigns them a punishment of destruction and exile. However, God also promises to pardon their sin (7:18–20), using their punish-

ment as a way of purifying his people and drawing them back to himself.

The book of Micah also has a description of a coming time of peace and prosperity when the Messiah will shepherd his people and rule over the whole world (chapters 4–5).

God promises to rescue a remnant of his people from captivity (2:12, 13; 4:10) just as he had brought them out of Egypt (6:4).

TIME

Micah prophesied during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). Micah predicts the fall of Samaria (1:6), an additional indication that his ministry started before Assyria took Israel into captivity in 722 B.C.

A number of religious changes happened during the time of Hezekiah (715–686 B.C.), in part a response to Micah's condemnation of the rampant idolatry and immorality in the land (Jer 26:18). These factors indicate that Micah likely prophesied from 735 B.C. to 710 B.C., making his ministry contemporaneous with Isaiah's to Judah and Hosea's to Israel.

OUTLINE**I. Judgment**

1:1–3:12

II. Salvation

- A. God reigns in Zion
- B. A ruler comes from Bethlehem

4:1–13

5:1–15

6:1–16

III. God's Charges

- A. National depravity
- B. Mercy triumphs

7:1–6

7:7–20

BASIC SURVEY**MICAH**

AUTHOR: "The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Moreshthite" (1:1 KJV). Micah either wrote the prophecies or dictated them to another.

DATE: Approximately 700 BC.

TEN WORDS OR LESS

Israel and Judah will suffer for their idolatry and injustice.

DETAILS, PLEASE

Micah chastises both the northern and southern Jewish nations for pursuing false gods and cheating the poor. The two nations will be devastated by invaders (the Assyrians), but God will preserve "the remnant of Israel" (2:12 KJV).

QUOTABLE

> The LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8 NLT).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Centuries before Jesus' birth, Micah predicted the town where that would occur: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel" (5:2 NKJV).

SO WHAT?

Micah shows how God's judgment is tempered by mercy. "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy" (7:18 NIV).

READ MICAH 1–2.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 159. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 159. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 159. →

HIDDEN TREASURES

THE MILLENNIUM

Micah prophesied about a peaceful period that will follow a time of great end-time trouble. "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house... shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. . . . For out of Zion the law shall go forth. . . . They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and . . . nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Micah 4:1-3 NKJV). Then Christ will rule the world during the Millennium. This word comes from the Greek words *mille* (thousand) and *ennium* (years). God will transform the earth into a paradise, and we will help Jesus govern it. "And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4 NKJV).

READ MICAH 3-4.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE MESSIAH FROM BETHLEHEM

About 750 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah wrote, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2 NKJV). Or as the NASB states, "His goings forth are from NASB states, "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Jesus has always existed in eternity, one with God His Father, but He was born as a small baby in the town of Bethlehem. The Jewish chief priests and scribes knew this prophecy of Micah, so they were aware that this was the place the Messiah would be born (Matthew 2:1-6).

READ MICAH 5-6.



The prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. *The Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerard van Honthorst (1592-1656) depicts the birth of Jesus.

What about the Crusades?

I Steve Lee

In a speech at Georgetown University, former president Bill Clinton claimed that the current increase of Islamic terrorist activity, such as what occurred on 9/11, is a consequence of the Christian Crusades which occurred almost a thousand years ago. Ask about the Crusades and you will probably be told something like, "They were wars of unprovoked aggression by Christian nations against a peaceful Muslim world. The Christians were interested in gaining riches and land." In worst-case scenarios, people reject Christianity because they've been told that Christian Crusaders murdered Muslims for profit and gain. They conclude that Christianity is a violent religion.

First, and foremost, it must be remembered that Christianity did not originate in the Crusades; it began on the cross of Jesus Christ. Even if the Crusaders performed horrific acts of violence and murder, these acts do not undercut the truth of Christianity nor change its essence. At most these actions illustrate that sinful people are capable of wrongfully using the name of Christ for personal gain.

But the Crusades were not just about gaining wealth and land. One must consider the historical context to more fully understand the motivations of the Crusaders. The Crusades were *not* acts of unprovoked aggression by Christians against the Islamic world, but were a delayed response to centuries of Muslim aggression. From the very beginning of the Islamic religion, Muslims sought to conquer the Christian world. In fact, the first 300 years of Islam can be described as a period of military conquest. Muslim armies conquered all of North Africa, the Middle East, Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and most of Spain. Christian Europe had to defend itself or be overcome by Islamic invasion. As Muslim forces pressed into Europe, Pope Urban II in 1095 called for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in response to pleas of help from the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople (now called Istanbul).

In other words, the Crusades were a *defensive* war, not an aggressive grab for land and loot. In fact, crusading was an expensive and costly endeavor. After the success of the First Crusade, nearly all the Crusaders went home. Virtually none of them recovered the cost of crusading. If one wanted to get rich, crusading was definitely not the best route to make it happen.

Many atrocities occurred in the Crusades. Understandably, war can bring out the worst in people. Even during World War II, some American soldiers committed atrocities, but this does not mean the war was conducted so soldiers could commit crimes. As for the Crusades, Christians have rightly condemned the wrongs that many of the Crusaders committed.

In summary, the Crusades were *not* about wars of unprovoked Christian aggression against a peaceful Muslim world; neither were they motivated by a quest for riches and land. The Crusades were defensive wars that aimed to stop Muslim military advancement. The West today enjoys religious freedom and democracy because, centuries ago, the Christian nations prevailed.

God wants His people to care about justice. As the prophet Micah reminds us, "Mankind, He has told you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Micah

Martin Luther, the great reformer, said this about the Bible prophets: "They have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make a head or tail of them or see what they are getting at."

It can be difficult to follow and understand the prophets, and Micah is no exception. It helps to keep in mind the special role the prophets played in the life of the nation of Israel. Whereas the priests spoke to God for the people; the prophets spoke to the people for God. Sometimes that included speaking to the king, and often by way of strong rebuke. Thus Samuel spoke to Saul (1Sm 13; 15); Nathan to David (2Sm 12); Elijah to Ahab and Jezebel (1Kg 17; 21). God's prophets were not yes-men. They spoke the words God told them to speak, regardless of the consequences.

Micah spoke out against the moral degeneration and spiritual bankruptcy all around him. He cried out against Israel's priests and the other "prophets" who prostituted themselves to the wealthy and powerful. They talked about grace and forgiveness but left out any mention of God's righteousness and justice. He rallied against the ruling class for taking advantage of the middle and lower classes, driving them into poverty and economic dependency.

Sometimes God's servants are called to stand apart from the crowd and say unpopular things (for example, speaking out against sin) and risking ridicule and rejection. We live in a time and culture where every form of sexual practice and lifestyle is considered a right, and every manner of profanity and vulgarity protected by the Constitution. To say otherwise is to be called self-righteous, judgmental, fundamentalist and—worst of all—*intolerant*. Micah would say to you, "Believe me, I understand."

Sound bleak? There is good news: Jeremiah later reported that the people listened to Micah and repented of their sin (Jr 26:18-19).

If you are serious about following Christ, you will frequently find yourself at odds with the culture and having to make the choice as to where your allegiance lies. Take a page out of Micah's playbook: Stand strong on the Word of the Lord and speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) to a culture and a world that is dying to hear it. As this book makes clear, some may hear and respond positively. As it also makes clear, it is their only hope for doing so.

Author: Micah

Date: During the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (around 750–686 B.C.)

What in the world is going on?

- ca 750 B.C. Homer writes the epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*
- ca 750 B.C. Hosea becomes a prophet to Israel
- 750 B.C. Micah is called to be a prophet to Judah
- ca 750–550 B.C. The third phase of the Iron Age of the Medes
- 750–500 B.C. Archaic Age of Greece
- 750–735 B.C. Jotham reigns over Judah (co-regency with Uzziah for 10 years)
- 745–727 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III rules Assyria and invades Israel and Judah
- 742–740 B.C. Pekahiah reigns in Israel
- 740 B.C. King Uzziah of Judah dies; Isaiiah is called to be a prophet to Judah
- 739 B.C. Hiram II becomes king of Tyre
- ca 735–715 B.C. First Messenian War between Sparta and Messenia
- ca 735 B.C. Aram and Israel invade Judah sparking the Syro-Ephraimite War
- 735–715 B.C. Ahaz reigns in Judah (co-regency with Jotham for three years)
- 734 B.C. Syracuse (east coast of Sicily) is founded by the Corinthians and later becomes the top Greek city in Italy
- 732–723 B.C. Hoshia reigns in Israel
- 730 B.C. Piy, the king of Cush, invades Lower Egypt
- 726–721 B.C. Shalmaneser V is king of Assyria
- 725 B.C. Shalmaneser V begins a three-year siege of Israel
- 722 B.C. Fall of Samaria to the Assyrians
- 715–686 B.C. King Hezekiah reigns in Judah
- ca 706 B.C. The city of Tarento (Tarentum) in southeastern Italy is founded by Greeks from Sparta and Laconia
- 705–682 B.C. Sennacherib reigns in Assyria; Nineveh becomes official capital of the Assyrian Empire (although the city has served as a part-time royal residence)
- 701 B.C. Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians, lays siege to Jerusalem
- ca 700 B.C. Period of the Greek city-state (*polis*) begins; these include Sparta, Corinth, Athens, Megara, and Argo
- 700 B.C. The graves of Celtic chieftains, found in Hallstatt, Austria, date from this period
- ca 700–600 B.C. Work begins on the Great Wall in the state of Chu in China
- 697–642 B.C. Marassah reigns in Judah (co-regency with Hezekiah for 11 years)
- ca 680 B.C. The Etruscan form of pottery, bucchero, dates about this era

Self-Assessment on Faithfulness

Read: Micah 4:5 Habit: Faithfulness

Before beginning this exercise, review "A Model for Self-Assessment" on page 903.

Note for reflection—"Our need is not to prove God's faithfulness but to demonstrate our own, by trusting Him both to determine and to supply our needs according to His will." —John MacArthur¹

Definition—Faithfulness is the external outworking of our internal trust in God. (See 5 Things to Know About Faithfulness" on page 16.)

Meditate on the following passage: "All the actions may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever" (Mic 4:5).

Reflection—As we grow in our knowledge about God, we trust him even more, thereby increasing our faith. How much do you trust God? Is that trust shown in your actions? What steps do you need to take to increase your faithfulness?

Wit-down questions:

1. What is my primary motivation to increase my faithfulness to God?
2. Do I need to become more aware of any area of my life where God is trying to lead me?
3. How am I responding to the ways God is testing me? How have I tended to respond in the past?
4. How can I increase my abilities (e.g., increasing my knowledge and skill necessary to study Scripture) to increase my faithfulness?
5. Am I living faithfully by truly repenting of my sins?
6. Do I know how to preach the gospel to myself? Do I do it often?
7. In what areas do I need to increase my spiritual perseverance?
8. How is sin in my life affecting my faithfulness to the Lord?
9. Do I seek to be reconciled with all fellow believers?
10. Do I need to forgive or seek forgiveness from any people in my life?
1. What vows have I made to God to which I need to recommitt?
2. Am I seeking God's will for my life? What would change if I truly put God first?

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Faith describes our internal state of trust in God; faithfulness, external actions that result from that trust.

Faithfulness is the external outworking of our internal trust in God.

Developing the Habit of Goodness

Read: Micah 6:6-8 Habit: Habit Formation

Before reading this article, read or review "4 Steps to Creating Virtuous Habits" on page 759 and "Developing Mini-Habits" on page 781.

The goodness of God is most often reflected in the way he deals with his people (cf. Ps 23:6; 68:10). We know God is good because he has been good to us. Similarly, our goodness is in response to and modeled on God's goodness. But what does this goodness look like?

The most common form of goodness displayed by God is kindness and mercy. He is merciful in overlooking our transgressions and kindly provides for our needs. Similarly, God expects us to exhibit the same goodness he shows us. And what type of goodness does God require of us? Micah provides the answer: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

Here are three mini-habits for developing goodness:

1. Memorize and meditate on Psalm 107:1: "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever."
2. Reflect on what it means for you on a personal level to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Make a list of three actions you can take every week to apply that verse to your own life.
3. Make a list of people you think have wronged you over the past few years. Think of ways you can show them mercy that will help strengthen, restore or mend those relationships.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Developing habits that teach us to be just, merciful and humble is one of the most important ways to develop goodness.

The most common form of goodness displayed by God is kindness and mercy.

1:2 witness

(Heb. *ʿed*) (Gen. 31:44; Deut. 5:20; Ruth 4:9) H5707: This word refers to one who testifies or gives evidence or testimony, and yet it is derived from a verb that means to repeat or return. Likely, this is because a witness repeats his/her statement and is expected keep returning to the truth of what has been seen or heard (Lev. 5:1). In legal proceedings, two witnesses were required to convict (Num. 35:30; Deut. 19:15). To bear witness falsely was forbidden by the ninth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:16). God, who sees and hears all, is the ultimate witness (1 Sam. 12:5; Job 16:19).

1:7 *Idol* - see Ps. 115:4.

How to Wait on the Lord

Read: Micah 7:7 | Habit: Trusting God

The prophets didn't always know what God would do, but they knew the Lord is always faithful. So Micah knew what to do: "I watch in hope for the Lord. I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me" (Mic 7:7).

Waiting for the Lord means consulting or seeking his will before any human action is taken.² Here are three things to know about waiting for God:

Waiting for the Lord means consulting or seeking his will before any human action is taken.

1. *Waiting is action*—While waiting might feel like inaction, waiting on the Lord can

be the most productive form of action. As Charles Spurgeon said, "If the Lord Jehovah makes us wait, let us do so with our whole hearts; for blessed are all they that wait for him. He is worth waiting for. The waiting itself is beneficial to us; it tries faith, exercises patience, trains submission, and endears the blessing when it comes."³

2. *Waiting develops patience*—Ambrose Pierce cheekily defined "patience" as "a minor form of despair disguised as a virtue."⁴ We recognize patience as a virtue and the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal 5:22), but having to be patient can indeed feel like a form of despair. When God requires you to wait on him, use it as a time to develop patience. When you grow anxious or frustrated in waiting, ask yourself, "Do I trust God? Do I trust He knows what is best for me?" The more you are able to answer "Yes, I do," the more you'll be able to develop the necessary patience.

3. *Waiting uncovers motives*—Sometimes we wait on the Lord to give us an answer. But sometimes God waits for us to be able to hear the answer he has for us. "Biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want," says John Ortberg. "Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be."⁵ Search your heart to find the true motive behind your waiting. Are you merely waiting for God to provide the answer you want or are you willing to listen for whatever answer he gives?

FACTICAL TAKEAWAY: Waiting on the Lord is a skill we develop by deepening our trust & reliance on him.

1.2-7 God announced the coming of a sudden and intense judgment on his people, who had refused to trust and obey him. They had rebelled and sought help from powerless idols. God showed them how useless their idol worship was by allowing them to suffer the consequences of seeking help from a source that could not deliver. Anything we turn to in the place of God may become an idol. If we pursue help from idols, however, we will only be disappointed. Only God has the power to help us and satisfy our hearts' true desires.

Micah

Timeline	793 BC	760 BC	750 BC	740 BC	732 BC
World Events	Period of prosperity during the reign of Israel's Jeroboam II	Calling of Amos the prophet	Calling of Micah the prophet	Calling of Isaiah the prophet	Fall of Damascus to the Assyrians
Biblical Events					

"Who is a God like You, removing iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not hold on to His anger forever, because He delights in faithful love" (7:18).

Who wrote Micah?

The prophet Micah, the Moreshite (1:1,14)

Who were the recipients?

Micah, while delivering his message primarily to Judah, addressed both Samaria and Jerusalem. Micah was not a court prophet like Isaiah but spoke to leaders and common people alike.

When was Micah written?

750–686 B.C.

Where did it happen?

Micah, from a small town in Judah, lived in a time of great political upheaval. The Assyrian Empire had begun to dominate the ancient Near East around 740 B.C. Israel and Judah became vassals of this new political power and were engaging in idolatry. God declared through Micah that he would send Assyria to judge both the northern and southern kingdoms for their sin. Micah witnessed the fall of Samaria in the north and the revival under Hezekiah in the south. However, many cities of Judah were destroyed, and Jerusalem was besieged but did not fall at that time (2Kg 18–19).

What is Micah about?

The spiritual, moral, and ethical corruption of Judah and Israel.

The people had mixed idolatrous practices with worship of the Lord and its effects were far reaching.

The sovereignty of God. The Lord is not some local deity concerned only with the destiny of His own people. He is, rather, the sovereign Lord of the universe who works through all nations to bring about His purposes. God's people will ultimately triumph, and then all nations will be subject to the Lord.

The Lord's faithfulness to His covenantal obligations. There is the well-known promise of divine blessing under the Ruler from Bethlehem, which is an inextricable part of His sovereignty. This promise, together with His emphasis on God's sovereignty, shows the urgency of Micah's message. The Lord, though the punisher His people, will not give up on them. Thus, Micah gives His readers a true theology of hope.

Why should women read Micah?

The book of Micah speaks especially to women who enjoy checklists and have organized their lives to such a point that they live to check off a list rather than living for the highest purpose. For the Israelites, the obligation to worship and complete the task of temple sacrifice had become more important than living their daily lives as a sacrifice to the Lord. Women who read Micah will be reminded that their confession and conduct are intertwined. To do outward acts of devotion but have no inner heart of submission to the Lord results in religiosity rather than true worship.

How do you read Micah?

Micah's unity is affirmed in its outline. It is comprised of three sections (Mic 1:1–2:13; 3:1–5:15; 6:1–7:20). Each main section begins with an exhortation to listen, followed by a prophecy of judgment, and ending with a message of encouragement and hope. There is no good reason to doubt the book's unity and the power of its message. Micah is written entirely in poetry. It is marked by alliteration and vivid and powerful imagery. Although best known for its prophecy concerning the birthplace of the Messiah (5:2), the book of Micah is primarily concerned with the spiritual apostasy of both Israel and Judah and includes many of the same themes found in Amos.

Though the often stands in the shadow of Isaiah, his more famous contemporary, Micah's message is no less important than Isaiah's. He preached against the social and ethical injustices of his day and warned the people of the coming exile. But he also foretold a time of restored blessing under the divine Ruler of Bethlehem.

Micah states at the beginning of his book that what he saw concerns both Samaria and Jerusalem. Therefore, while delivered primarily to Judah, his message concerned both kingdoms. Micah was not a court prophet like Isaiah, but his message is for both leaders and common people alike. In relation to the whole of Scripture, Micah's treatment of the remnant of God's people is noteworthy. He prophesies that this remnant will become a powerful force in the world under their divine Ruler, the Messiah, and thus he continually points readers to the Messiah.

MICAH

THE BIG PICTURE

The people of Micah's day were not much different from people today. Many of them lived self-centered lives driven by greed and false pride. They spent their nights plotting against the helpless and their days taking advantage of the weak. Religion was a tool for personal gain, and hypocrisy marked their spiritual lives. They lied to make themselves look good and deceived others to cover their corruption. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had wandered far from God's plan. The people would soon suffer the painful consequences.

Centuries before, God had agreed to bless the people of Israel in a unique way in return for their faithfulness (see Deuteronomy 28:1–15). The people had agreed to follow God's will, but they had never kept their promise. Through his prophet Micah, God took his wayward people to court. God was the prosecutor and plaintiff; Micah was the plaintiff's spokesman; Israel was the defendant; the witnesses were heaven and earth. God could do nothing but judge his people guilty as charged. Their punishment would be exile. The northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria soon after this prophecy; the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon a few centuries later.

Micah made it clear that no satisfaction in this life can be found apart from God. Only when we acknowledge our weaknesses, accept responsibility for our actions, and submit to God's will can we hope to escape judgment. Through our repentance God will offer us his forgiveness, compassion and unfailing love.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE DANGERS OF PRETENSE

The people in Micah's day were extremely hypocritical. All their religious activities were designed only to make them look good to others. Honestly assessing our actions and doing away with pretense are necessary if we want to progress spiritually. To mix selfish motives with an empty display of religious activity will pervert the meaning of faith. But to turn to God in our need and to honestly repent of our sins will signify a genuine change of heart that will lead to healing. Anything less will only set us up for failure.

A. THE DOWNFALL OF THE PROUD

- (1:1 — 2:13)
1. Judgment Comes to the Sinful (1:1 — 2:11)
 2. Hope Comes to the Faithful (2:12–13)

B. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE HELPLESS

- (3:1 — 5:15)
1. Judgment Comes to Those Who Serve Themselves (3:1–12)
 2. Hope Comes From the One Who Serves Others (4:1 — 5:15)

C. THE DEFEAT OF THE OPPRESSORS

- (6:1 — 7:20)
1. Judgment Comes to Those Who Give Misery to Others (6:1 — 7:13)
 2. Hope Ultimately Comes for God's People (7:14–20)

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To warn God's people of the destructive consequences of disobedience and to offer a life of peace to those willing to obey God's revealed will.

AUTHOR:

The prophet Micah.

AUDIENCE:

The people of God in Israel's northern and southern kingdoms.

DATE WRITTEN:

Sometime between 742 and 687 BC.

SETTING:

Micah spoke to God's people in the northern and southern kingdoms during the period described in 2 Kings 15–20 and 2 Chronicles 26–30.

KEY VERSE:

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Micah and the people of Samaria and Jerusalem.

KEY PLACES:

Samaria, Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

GOD DELIVERS THE POWERLESS

Though God's judgment against his rebellious people was sure, he promised that a remnant would trust him and survive the trials ahead. God can bring hope into our hopeless situations. God's ways are different from the ways of the world. He brings deliverance in unexpected ways. Micah made it clear that when we acknowledge our sins, God will step in and deliver us.

GOD CARES FOR THE HURTING

God cares for those who are hurting and helpless. He shows tenderness to those who suffer and have been rejected. He reaches out in love and mercy to bring healing and hope. And he calls on us to do the same. As we progress spiritually, we can become God's instruments to bring healing to others. An important part of our spiritual growth is sharing God's promise of freedom with those who are still in bondage. As we do this, we give hope to others and also experience renewed encouragement to persevere in our own spiritual growth.

THE BOOK OF MICAH

MICAH, CALLED FROM HIS RUSTIC home to be a prophet, leaves his familiar surroundings to deliver a stern message of judgment to the princes and people of Jerusalem. Burdened by the abusive treatment of the poor by the rich and influential, the prophet turns his verbal rebukes upon any who would use their social or political power for personal gain. One-third of Micah's book exposes the sins of his countrymen; another third pictures the punishment God is about to send; and the final third holds out the hope of restoration once that discipline has ended. Through it all, God's righteous demands upon His people are clear: "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

The name *Michayahu* ("Who Is Like Yahweh?") is shortened to *Michaia*. In 7:18, Micah hints at his own name with the phrase "Who is a God like You?" The Greek and Latin titles of this book are *Michaias* and *Micha*.

WATCH WORDS

- witness (one who testifies or gives evidence)—1:2
- dark (without light or surrounded by evil)—3:6
- compassion (tender love, mercy)—7:19