

# THE MESSAGE OF MICAH

*J.K. McKee*

When today's Messianic Believers think about the Book of Micah, what immediately comes into their mind? Aside from being familiar with a selection of verses like 4:1-3; 5:2; and 6:8, it is probably safe to say that the Book of Micah is something that exists in relative obscurity for a great number of contemporary Messianic people. Sitting at seven chapters, Micah is not long and overbearing like some of the other prophetic books of the Tanach. At the same time, making sure that we are all familiar with the overall themes and words of Micah, is definitely something that we each need to have been sure to do.

The message that the Prophet Micah delivered was to an Eighth Century B.C.E. situation in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel where there was prosperity, but also extreme corruption, and calamity to occur. Some of the material of the Book of Micah can be a little difficult to follow, as both the Divided Kingdom era, and later the Southern Kingdom being all that was left, are depicted. Yet while there might be a few challenging sections of Micah, not quite realizing which "Israel" is possibly being referred to—the fact that the whole of Israel is guilty committing sin against the Lord cannot be disputed by any reader.

The word that the Prophet Micah was given to speak for the Lord, was delivered "during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1:1a), and it concerned both "Samaria and Jerusalem" (1:1b), the respective capitals of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. It is clear that the whole of Israel is guilty of sin, although the message that is delivered is one which all the peoples of the world must heed. It is also evident that while God's judgment will be issued against the whole of Israel, that the Northern Kingdom and Samaria are the first ones to experience the brunt of it:

"Hear, O peoples, all of you, listen, O Earth and all who are in it, that the Sovereign LORD may witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place; he comes down and treads the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like water rushing down a slope. All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem? "Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations. All her idols will be broken to pieces; all her temple gifts will be burned with fire; I will destroy all her images. Since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes, as the wages of prostitutes they will again be used" (1:2-7).

Judgment will be issued too against the Southern Kingdom, Jerusalem, and its towns. Weeping and wailing will come, indicative of great shame before the Lord, and with it also many from Judah will be taken into exile.

"Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and moan like an owl. For her wound is incurable; it has come to Judah. It has reached the very gate of my people, even to Jerusalem itself. Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all. In Beth Ophrah roll in the dust. Pass on in nakedness and shame, you who live in Shaphir. Those who live in Zaanan will not come out. Beth Ezel is in mourning; its protection is taken from you. Those who live in Maroth writhe in pain, waiting for relief, because disaster has come from the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem. You who live in Lachish, harness the team to the chariot. You were the beginning of sin to the Daughter of Zion, for the transgressions of Israel were found in you. Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth Gath. The town of Aczib will prove deceptive to the kings of Israel. I will bring a conquerer against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam. Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile" (1:8-16).

While there are some parts of the Book of Micah that appear directed a little more to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and some that appear directed a little more to the Southern Kingdom of Judah—what no reader can deny is witnessing how severe the problems of the whole of Israel have been. A significant part of the problem has been trickery and thievery, as the Lord decrees, "**Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!** At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance" (2:1-2). Those who have plotted evil, those who have stolen others' property to enlarge their holdings, and those who have disregarded justice—will experience a time when their possessions are all taken from them, and they will find their pride reduced to nothing:

"Therefore, the LORD says: 'I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: "We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors." Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot" (2:3-5).

The Prophet Micah takes note of how his message is not one that has been well received, not only among the sinners of the people, but most especially the many false prophets in the community. There is a specific rebuke issued against such false prophets, including the mocking word that if they speak some sort of message of prosperity or revelry, then those who

would hear such false prophets absolutely deserve them:

“Do not prophesy,’ their prophets say. ‘Do not prophesy about these things; disgrace will not overtake us.’ Should it be said, O house of Jacob: ‘Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things?’ Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright? Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle. You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing from their children forever. Get up, go away! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy. **If a liar and deceiver comes and says, ‘I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,’ he would be just the prophet for this people!”** (2:6-11).

In spite of the judgment to come to the whole of Israel, and the incumbent sins that have been identified and denounced, there will be a future time when the Lord promises to gather all of the remnant of Israel, like sheep being brought to a pasture:

“I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head” (2:12-13).

A theme often witnessed throughout the Prophets of the Tanach is that while God’s people have committed sin, and that they will be judged for such sin—a future restoration is also promised. Micah still has words to deliver to Ancient Israel for offenses committed. While all of the people are surely guilty of something to one degree or another, the leaders of Israel receive a definite indictment against them for loving evil and harming the people who they were to presumably serve:

“Then I said, ‘Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. **Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones; who eat my people’s flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces; who chop them up like meat for the pan, like flesh for the pot?’** Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. At that time he will hide his face from them because of the evil they have done” (3:1-4).

False prophets too will receive a scathing word against them, particularly in terms of them crying that peace will be present, when it surely will not be. While the false prophets say that Israel will not be harmed, the reality is that even Jerusalem will fall. Not to be overlooked is how such false prophets invoke the authority of the Lord for their misguided utterances:

“This is what the LORD says: ‘As for the prophets who led my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim “peace”; if he does not, they prepare to wage war against him. Therefore night will come over you, without visions, and darkness without divination. The sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them. The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God.’ But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin. Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. **Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, ‘Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.’** Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets” (3:5-12).

Even with Jerusalem foretold to fall, because of the sin of the people, a great time of restoration—which will inaugurate an era of global peace and prosperity—is also foretold. **Micah 4:1-3** (cf. Isaiah 2:2-4) is a widely known prophetic oracle, that has not only become part of the traditional liturgy of the *Shabbat* service in the Jewish Synagogue, but has been widely promoted by Christians wanting to emphasize the need for peace in the world via the power of the gospel:

**“In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.’ The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.** Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken” (4:1-4).

The observation made is that “All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever” (4:5). While there will be a time in the Last Days when sinners of the Earth will be judged for their idolatry, serving other gods, the people of Israel and those from the nations who stream to Israel, will know the Lord and follow His Instruction. The restoration that will come to what Israel had lost will be most glorious, as the exile will be over, strength will come back, and the Lord will reign over His people forever. Whether it be calamity and catastrophe brought about by the Assyrian exile or the Babylonian exile, the Lord’s plan for His people will prevail:

“‘In that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.’ Why do you now cry aloud—have you no king? Has your

counselor perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor? Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies. But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, 'Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!' But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, he who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor. Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations.' You will devote their ill-gotten gains to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth" (4:6-13).

Probably one of the most well-known words in the entire Book of Micah, especially for Christian readers who tend to read the Old Testament for prophetic oracles about the coming of Jesus, is seen in the midst of prophecies about the restoration of Israel. **Micah 5:2**, in particular, is quoted in Matthew 2:6, and likely alluded to in John 7:42, speaking of one who will come forth from Bethlehem to rule over Israel:

"Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a road. **'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.'** Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join to the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace" (5:1-5a).

We should not doubt the fact that the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah on the scene in the First Century, was a major step forward in seeing the eventual fulfillment of a major prophetic word like this come to complete fruition. Yeshua was born in Bethlehem, a small town in Judah, and "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (5:2, NASU), representative of His pre-existence and Divinity. Yet the expectation that this Ruler will arrive to restore all of Israel, cannot leave out the fact that Micah's message is rooted within the events of the Eighth Century B.C.E. While there will be a scattering of Israel among the nations, as God's people are restored, imperial powers like Assyria will fall before Him. Various pre-millennial readers have viewed this from the perspective that those who were raised up by God to judge a sinful Israel, will themselves be judged by Israel subsequent to the Millennium and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom:

"When the Assyrian invades our land and marches through our fortresses, we will raise against him seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men. They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with a drawn sword. He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he invades our land and marches into our borders. The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for man or linger for mankind. The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mauls and mangles as it goes, and no one can rescue. Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed" (5:5b-9).

At the same time, as Israel is fully restored, the need for Israel to actually possess armaments will no longer be present. As the nations are judged, there will be a final purge of sin from Israel, and its weapons of war and war centers will turn to complete reliance upon God:

"In that day,' declares the LORD, 'I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. I will destroy your witchcraft and you will no longer cast spells. I will destroy your carved images and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles and demolish your cities. I will take vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations that you not obeyed me'" (5:10-15).

The remaining three out of four oracles classifiable in the remainder of the Book of Micah are not positive. One of the most frequently-quoted admonitions from this text, **Micah 6:8**, appears within a litany of accusations against Israel. While God delivered the people from Egyptian servitude, and they were led in the wilderness by Moses and Aaron, and they have experienced His righteousness—some thought was present from Micah's audience that God might be appeased only by presenting various offerings before Him. What is required by the Lord is not various material offerings, but a change of moral and ethical behavior:

"Listen to what the LORD says: 'Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember *your journey* from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.' With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? **He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God**" (6:1-8).

The sins that have truly offended the Lord are then detailed. They include acquiring ill-gotten gains, being dishonest and violent, and seeking to save up various possessions. Yet the prophetic observation is that those who have acquired these things will not be able to benefit from them. Of particular importance is how the sin of Israel is compared to that of the House of Omri, which produced Ahab and Jezebel. 6:9-16 can certainly be applied to those of both the Northern and

Southern Kingdoms, as both were affected by the Assyrian invasion. 6:9-16 draws attention to how the Southern Kingdom will eventually fall prey to sin to the same extent as the Northern Kingdom, which was worst epitomized by the House of Omri:

“Listen! The LORD is calling to the city—and to fear your name is wisdom—‘Heed the rod and the One who appointed it. Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed? Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights? Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins. You will eat but not be satisfied; your stomach will still be empty. You will store up but save nothing, because what you save I will give to the sword. You will plant but not harvest; you will press olives but not use the oil on yourselves, you will crush grapes but not drink the wine. **You have observed the statutes of Omri and all the practices of Ahab’s house, and you have followed their traditions.** Therefore I will give you over to ruin and your people to derision; you will bear the scorn of the nations.”

The words that have been issued in the Book of Micah, have not at all been something joyous for the Prophet to deliver. We see some personal lamentations expressed, as when judgment comes upon the sinners of all God’s people, righteous people are necessarily affected by it as well. When sin manifests among His chosen ones, it is something that infects just about everyone, and people cannot even trust their closest neighbors and relatives:

“What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains. All men lie in wait to shed blood; each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil; the ruler demands gifts, the judge accepts bribes, the powerful dictate what they desire—they all conspire together. The best of them is like a briar, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen has come, the day God visits you. Now is the time of your confusion. Do not trust a neighbor; put no confidence in a friend. Even with her who lies in your embrace be careful of your words. For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies are the members of his own household” (7:1-6).

Is it any wonder why the Prophet Micah can only say, **“But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me” (7:7)?**

The Book of Micah ends with a warning against those who would rejoice or take glory over the fall of Israel, something which in the text has been presented in terms of affecting both the Northern (1:6-7) and Southern (4:10) Kingdoms. The fact remains that in spite of Israel’s transgressions against the Lord, He will bring His people back into His light, and the world—especially the powers that would want Israel to fall—will be judged:

“Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the LORD’s wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. **He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness.** Then my enemy will see it and will be covered with shame, she who said to me, ‘Where is the LORD your God?’ My eyes will see her downfall; even now she will be trampled underfoot like mire in the streets. The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries. In that day people will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, even from Egypt to the Euphrates and from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain. **The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants, as the result of their deeds” (7:8-13).**

There are probably some very important lessons to be learned from the Book of Micah. We are definitely interjected into a complicated time of Ancient Israel’s history in the Eighth Century B.C.E., as the Northern Kingdom would fall and the Southern Kingdom would be all that was left. What might a more targeted analysis of various passages reveal, if we probe some of Micah’s verses in closer detail? *At the very least, we are likely to be even more repelled by the sins and offenses of Ancient Israel.* The excerpts that I have offered in this brief on the Book of Micah, should encourage each of us to appreciate this text of Scripture a little more than we probably have in the past. Hopefully, our spirituality will improve and we will not fall into the sins of those who have preceded us in the course of Bible history.

Most important, our attention as born again Believers examining the Book of Micah must be tuned to the future return of the Leader who would arise from Bethlehem (5:1-5a), as we anticipate the full restoration of Israel and judgment upon its enemies. The Book of Micah is one a tapestry of prophetic texts that speaks of this restoration of Israel, and today’s Messianic community certainly has some worthwhile studies ahead of it. Our understanding of the Father’s prophetic plan will surely be enhanced and amplified, as we get closer to the Second Coming.

How much of the Book of Micah have we not examined, not because of a lack of interest or importance afforded to Micah, but just because we have not been paying attention? Truly, Messianic people need to consider the questions and issues presented by Micah, and not let it escape our notice any longer.