

MICAH

MICAH

Proclaiming the Incomparable God

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“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets,
he expounded unto them in all the scriptures
the things concerning himself.”

Luke 24:27

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PREFACE

For many years the minor prophets have fascinated me. If you have read multiple times through the Bible as I have, you might have been bewildered at these twelve short, but difficult books at the end of the Old Testament. Perhaps as a child you memorized the list of the books of the Bible—including Hosea through Malachi—but even now you feel embarrassed when the minister announces Habakkuk, Haggai, Obadiah, or Micah from the pulpit because you cannot find them without checking the contents page of your Bible.

And even if you do find Micah or one of the other short prophetic books, you do not know what any of it (with the possible exception of Jonah) means. Yes, you are familiar with a few passages from the prophets, but these books remain largely a mystery. With a sigh, resigned that you will never grasp the meaning, you dutifully read through the prophets until finally you reach the easier New Testament.

But the minor prophets are part of scripture. They are inspired writings addressed to the people of God, and addressed to us also in the New Testament church. As inspired scripture they speak of Christ: Micah speaks of Christ and not only in the obvious reference to Bethlehem in chapter 5:2. Christians want to know Christ also from the Old Testament, from Micah, and the other minor prophets. And yet for many of us the minor prophets are like a sealed book.

MICAH

This book is based on a series of sermons that I preached in Limerick, Ireland, between November 2013 and March 2014, to the saints of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship. I present it with the prayer that the reader might find in the prophecy of Micah the incomparable God of glory in our Lord Jesus Christ.



INTRODUCTION

One of the most neglected portions of scripture is the minor prophets. We neglect them because they are difficult to understand and seemingly distant from us. Micah the prophet is distant from us historically, geographically, and culturally, but Micah's prophecy is part of holy scripture, and he speaks to us today. Micah is one of the twelve minor prophets (Hosea to Malachi); minor not because he is unimportant, but because of his relative brevity.

Micah is best known for three passages:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. (5:2)

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (6:8)

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. (7:18)

Micah's name means "Who is like Jehovah?" and his message is to proclaim the incomparable God. No god is like Jehovah in

judgment, righteousness, and holiness. No god is like Jehovah in mercy and faithfulness.

We need to place Micah in the broad sweep of biblical history. Micah prophesied some two hundred years after the division of the kingdom of Israel and some one hundred and fifty years before the Babylonian captivity. Micah was a prophet during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). This makes Micah a contemporary of Isaiah (who began prophesying before Micah) and Hosea (who prophesied around the same time as Micah).

Furthermore, Micah prophesied near the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, shortly before Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Micah prophesied to Judah while she had one of the worst and then one of the best kings of her history. Jotham was good, Ahaz was very wicked, and Hezekiah was the great reformatory king. Yet even during Hezekiah's reign, the people as a whole were living in hypocrisy. The people of Judah imagined that God could never judge them because they were God's people, for God dwelt in their midst. Therefore, they lived in presumption. The great world power of that day was Assyria, which would destroy the northern kingdom near the beginning of Hezekiah's reign and even attempt to overthrow Judah. God gave Judah a reprieve of some one hundred and fifty years before judgment fell on Jerusalem. Interestingly, Micah's message brought Hezekiah's generation to repentance:

17. Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying,
18. Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Zion shall be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become

heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.

19. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls. (Jer. 26:17–19)

About Micah himself we possess very few details: he is simply called the Morasthite (Mic. 1:1), which means that he was a native of the Judean town of Moresheth-gath (v. 14). His prophecy can be neatly divided into three sections beginning with the command to hear: chapters 1–2 (“Hear, all ye people”), chapters 3–5 (“And I said, Hear, I pray you”), and chapters 6–7 (“Hear ye now what the Lord saith”).

Before we begin, we need to see some general truths about prophecy. First, prophets do not merely or even mainly predict the future. A prophet was a messenger of God to whom the word of God came. The word *prophet* in Hebrew comes from a verb that means “to bubble forth.”

Second, prophets receive direct revelation from God. God speaks to them, they see visions, and they dream dreams. Therefore, what they proclaim is the authoritative word of God (“The word of the LORD that came to Micah...which he saw” [1:1]).

Third, the prophets couch their prophecy in figurative language, using language familiar to their audience, the language of the Old Testament. Thus they speak of cities known to the people, religious ordinances practiced by the people, and other aspects of Old Testament life unfamiliar to us.

Fourth, the prophets use a device called “foreshortening,” which means that they see multiple events as one single event. The first and second comings of Christ are one event from their vantage point. Rarely, if ever, do they provide specific times or

dates: “the last times,” “the latter days,” or “the last days” are as precise as they get.

Fifth, prophets prophesy to God’s people and for the sake of the elect. The prophets do not offer answers to social issues. They address moral issues in the church, that is, the Old Testament church.

Sixth, the prophets address the nation as one organic whole. They bring a message of judgment to the whole nation in order to bring the elect to repentance. They proclaim salvation to the whole nation so that the elect will be comforted. When judgment falls, it falls on the whole nation: it destroys the reprobate and purifies the elect. The principle of Romans 9:6 must always be applied: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”

Seventh, the prophets speak of Christ. They speak of him in Old Testament picture language suitable to their times, but they do speak of him. We must see Christ in the prophets:

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27)

10. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:
11. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.
12. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down

from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. (1 Pet. 1:10–12)

With these principles guiding the reader, we begin our study of the prophecy of Micah as he reveals to us the word of the incomparable God.



Chapter 1

Mountain-Melting Judgment

1. The word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.
2. Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple.
3. For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.
4. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.
5. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?
6. Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof.

7. And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot. (Micah 1:1–7)

THE MEANING

Micah begins with judgment: a terrifying, awe-inspiring description of God as judge. In this first vision, Micah presents Jehovah as both judge and witness. From this we are immediately struck by two truths.

First, Jehovah is not a local deity, a national god, but the God of all the earth. Sometimes Israel was tempted to think that Jehovah lived in the temple in Jerusalem as if he were confined there, but such a thought domesticated God, manipulated him, and dishonored him. Micah begins (literally) in verse 2: “Hear ye *peoples*, all of them; hearken, earth and its fullness” (emphasis added). In chapter 6, Micah includes the mountains and hills (vv. 1–2). God claims sovereign jurisdiction over all peoples, not only over Israel and Judah. This is because Jehovah is the creator and lord of all: “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1).

Second, Jehovah summons all men to witness and participate in court proceedings or in a trial. This is a summons that no man can put off or ignore. The language of our text is that of the courtroom. Hear and hearken! Pay attention while the judge presides! Be silent before him, for he has something to say! Jehovah is not only the judge, but also the witness, the witness for the prosecution. A witness gives testimony in a court of what he has seen, heard, and known. Jehovah has seen, heard, and known all things. That he is the prosecuting witness and not the defense

witness is seen in the word *against*: “Let the Lord GOD be witness *against* you” (Mic. 1:2, emphasis added).

On the basis of God’s own testimony, he will pronounce judgment and condemn. He will pronounce sentence and punish. Who else would dare make this claim? None of the heathen gods claimed such universal power and authority. None of the heathen gods claimed to judge all peoples.

The sting for Micah’s hearers, probably gathered around him in Jerusalem, is that God’s judgment includes and even begins with his own people, Israel and Judah. Micah did not go to all the nations of the earth (Assyria, Egypt, Philistia, and so on) and tell them this word of God. He proclaimed this to Israel and Judah. Probably as Micah begins to speak, the people are pleased with the message. “God is a witness against all peoples. Good. God will judge all peoples. Excellent. That is what we want.” But that is not where Micah ends. Micah very quickly turns from all peoples (v. 2) to God’s own people (v. 5). Micah changes from general judgment to specific judgment.

Micah’s message is judgment against the church—the church of his day, and the church of all ages, which is guilty of the same sins described in this book. There is a very important principle here. Judgment begins with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). Before God destroys the wicked, he will purge his church through judgment, purify her, bring her to repentance, and destroy the wicked within her. That is the offense of the prophet; that made him offensive to Israel some 2,700 years ago, and that makes him offensive to us today. When we study Micah, we must not say, “Oh, how wicked those Jews were!” We must rather confess, “How wicked I am!” We must not lose sight of our own sins.

That is not popular preaching. The church will tolerate sermons about sin as long as they are sermons about the sins of the world, sermons about the sins of the false church, or sermons

about the sins of the neighbor. But Israel and Judah did not want Micah to preach about her sins, and we do not welcome the preacher preaching about our sins today: “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8).

Very graphically and vividly, Micah describes the judgment of Jehovah upon Israel. He does so in terms of Jehovah descending, or coming down, and treading or trampling upon the mountains. The description of Jehovah’s descent is terrifying; it should be, especially to the wicked. As long as Jehovah remains in his holy temple, in his place, he appears distant, but in Micah’s vision, Jehovah “cometh forth out of his place” (1:3). Jehovah comes forth because he has been provoked to wrath. He comes on a mission of destruction.

What is striking is that Jehovah “will come down” (v. 3). For Jehovah, you see, the only way is down. Everything is beneath him because he is the exalted creator and ruler over all things:

4. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens.
5. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high,
6. Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth! (Ps. 113:4–6)

Jehovah, warns Micah, shall come down and tread upon the high places of the earth. The highest mountains are for this God, this incomparable God, low.

That is awesome, and we should ponder it. When we look at the mountains, we are awestruck at their height. Usually we cannot even see the top of them. Some very courageous human beings have attempted to climb such mountains, yet few have climbed

the world's tallest peaks. But the world's tallest peak is nothing to Jehovah. He treads it underfoot. Is that your God? The God whose footstool is the mountains? The God who comes down to stand upon the highest mountain ranges? If not, he is too small.

God's judgment would fall first upon Samaria. "I will make Samaria as an heap of the field" (Mic. 1:6). That is the purpose of Jehovah's descent upon the mountains. Jehovah comes to judge and to destroy.

Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel, which Omri, Ahab's father, had built.

23. In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah.
24. And he bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.
25. But Omri wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him. (1 Kings 16:23-25)

Samaria was a heavily fortified city that stood on a hill. It had excellent protection, and the Israelites imagined it could never fall. They also imagined that it would never fall because God would protect it. But Israel had apostatized from the worship of Jehovah many years before Micah preached. Despite constant warnings from God's prophets, she never repented, and she never expected judgment to come. But judgment did come in 722 BC, when after a lengthy siege the Assyrians captured Samaria and with it the northern kingdom.

Samaria's destruction was utter and final. Worse, her destruction was of God.

Samaria was demolished so that she was “an heap” (Mic. 1:6), a ruin, fit only for planting vineyards on her fertile slopes. Even her foundations were uprooted and the stones of her buildings were dumped into the valley below. The people of Samaria and of Israel were slaughtered, and the survivors were rounded up as prisoners and scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. They never returned.

But notice verse 6: “I will make.” God did this. He used Assyria as an instrument in his hand, but he did it. He came forth in power and wrath out of his place to do it. That is what was happening behind the scenes. Micah, with prophetic insight by divine revelation, saw that.

Do not miss that. And that is still true today: when a nation falls, whether by war, political intrigue, societal decadence, or some other factor, God brings that nation down. One day he will bring all nations down when he finally comes out of his holy place.

THE EFFECT

Jehovah’s coming down in judgment has an effect upon the mountains: they melt. There is nothing more solid, more permanent in all creation than mountains. Mountains have been here a lot longer than we have; they have seen countless generations, and they will be here long after we have died. In scripture, mountains are a symbol of ancient stability. Only God himself is older than mountains, because he is eternal. “Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth” (Prov. 8:25). “Before the mountains were brought forth...from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (Ps. 90:2).

The mountains round about Zion, which were by no means the highest mountains in the world, afforded protection to the

city of Jerusalem and were symbolic of God's care for his church. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever" (125:2). Can you imagine, then, that the mountains of Zion or the mountains of the Alps, Rockies, Andes, or Himalayas could ever be moved?

When Jehovah comes out of his place in judgment, the mountains not only move; they melt. That imagery is supposed to impress us. What kind of God causes the mountains to melt before him? Only the incomparable Jehovah! This melting of the mountains is not merely a volcanic eruption like the eruption of Mount Vesuvius or Mount Etna. This is the disintegration of the mountains themselves.

When Jehovah appears in judgment, the creation itself reacts.

The valleys are cleft, that is, they are split open or violently torn apart. Into the gaping abyss made by the cleft valleys flows the molten rock, which rushes down the slope like a torrent, an overwhelming flood. The mountains are like wax, which simply melts and is consumed when it comes into contact with fire. This kind of language appears in other passages as well.

5. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.
6. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him...
8. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. (Nah. 1:5-6, 8)
15. The kings...hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16. And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. (Rev. 6:15–16)

This is a powerful, terrifying vision of the power and wrath of God. When Israel saw the marauding Assyrian armies, Micah saw Jehovah behind the army. This kind of language is common when describing earth-shattering judgments. When Samaria falls, when Judah falls, when Nineveh falls, when Babylon falls, Jehovah is coming forth out of his place to tread upon the high places of the earth. Micah was sent to proclaim this to God's people to stir them up to repentance.

This will really happen when Jesus Christ returns. Micah, like all prophets, sees something that has a near and far fulfillment. The ultimate fulfillment of this is the final judgment on the last day.

THE REASON

The reason for Jehovah's descending out of his holy place, the reason for the mountains melting, and the reason for Samaria becoming a heap is Israel's sin.

That was not what Israel and Judah were expecting to hear from the prophet. Remember, Micah 1:2 summons all peoples (plural) to be judged. Israel and Judah may have been expecting Micah to say: this judgment is coming because of Assyria's cruelty (Assyria was notorious for her barbarism), or this judgment is coming because of Egypt's idolatry. Verse 5 gives a different reason: "For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel."

Israel's transgression was her rebellion against God. Israel, the northern kingdom, had rebelled against God for two centuries. That rebellion began at the start of the reign of Rehoboam

when ten tribes seceded from Judah. At that point, the ten tribes cut themselves off from Jerusalem, the worship of God, the kings of David, and the line of Christ. Jeroboam I had made golden calves in Dan and Bethel, and later Israelite kings had continued to lead the people into idolatry.

In our text Israel's sin is especially called "the hire of an harlot" (v. 7). It ought to strike us that the prophets did not mince Jehovah's words. They used highly offensive language. A harlot, a whore or a prostitute, is one who sells her body to give sexual favors for money. The hire of a harlot is the price a man pays for the services of a harlot; it is the harlot's profit, how she makes a living. Micah accuses Israel of being a harlot and of gathering to herself idols and images with the hire of her harlotry. Israel's idols, in which she trusted, will be destroyed, she will be stripped of her harlot's hire, and her profits will be used to finance harlotry in a foreign land. This is poetic justice from the righteous, avenging God.

Israel's harlotry is all the more serious because she is Jehovah's wife. The nation as a whole, both the northern and the southern kingdoms, is called Jehovah's spouse, just as the church today is called the bride of Christ. God will judge the church that goes a-whoring from him.

Israel imagined that being Jehovah's wife gave her privilege without responsibility. But Jehovah threatened severe judgment on his prostitute wife: that judgment came in 722 BC when Samaria fell and again in 586 BC when Jerusalem fell. Today, the church is called adulterers and adulteresses when she loves the world (James 4:4) and when she goes after false christs, false gospels, and false spirits (2 Cor. 11:1-4).

Samaria and the northern kingdom are judged first, but Micah's preaching is primarily to Judah. Judah will be judged also: "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and

Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest” (Mic. 3:12).

Micah teaches this in chapter 1:5: “What are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?” Jerusalem, the holy city where Jehovah dwells, is the high places of Judah. The high places were private shrines that the Jews set up to worship God or idols. These places were on every hill and under every green tree, the prophets complained. But the point is that these places were unauthorized and not in the temple. Even Jerusalem itself was given over to idolatry. Moreover, Jehovah would tread upon the high places, which includes Jerusalem. Jerusalem was spared only one hundred and fifty years longer than Israel.

But what of us, and what of the faithful remnant in Israel and Judah? Did Micah have no good news for them? In fact, he did, but not yet in his prophecy. The prophets do not bring the good news until they have thoroughly humbled the people. Micah will give a glorious vision of the future, but we must wait.

There is only one place where a more terrifying judgment has taken place than the one described here, only one mountain where Jehovah’s wrath has been poured out with fiercer intensity than here, and that is Calvary. The same wrath, which causes the mountains to melt like wax before the fire, fell upon Christ on the cross. That is why he had to be both God and a perfect, sinless man. For what mere man could withstand the mountain-melting wrath of God? Christ stood in that place of wrath for us, we who believe in him. So when judgment comes, as it will, we must find comfort in the cross. We must repent and flee to Calvary, the one mountain where we will be able to stand.