

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

JOHN D CALVERT

Study 1. Micah 1: 1-9: A NATION IN CRISIS

In his Preface to the Letter to the Romans (1522) Martin Luther wrote: 'It can never be read or pondered too much, and the more it is dealt with the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes'. The Prophets are like that for although we might have our favourites, the Prophets speak to us today as they did to the people of God in the 8 th century BC. But the reader/listener must do their share of the work as they trust the Spirit to apply the truth. Luther continued: 'To begin with, we must have knowledge of its language and know what St. Paul means by the words law, sin, grace, righteousness, faith, flesh, spirit, etc. otherwise no reading of it has any value'.

Hebrews 1: 1&2 and John 1: 1-14. We are not 'in the dark' about God for the Light has come. The Jews were to be God's spokespeople to the nations but they rejected the prophets and the Word become flesh. The prophets have spoken and their message is written for us and is relevant for today. We listen and live and speak only the Word which has come to us, for the prophets were forth-tellers. They spoke for God never for themselves: *Thus saith Yahweh*. Micah came from Moresheth of Gath, although he may have inhabited Jerusalem, and faced a society where the wealthy excesses of the rich contrast with the poverty of the peasant. He has no hope for the rich and no hope for the city. This in spite of their heritage:

- 1) i: a common heritage, all sons of Jacob. ii: a common body of law, the ten commandments. iii: a common faith based on Covenant.
- 2) The menace of Canaanite religion, local agricultural gods, 'Baalim'. Ashtaroth, female goddess of fecundity (fertility) with imitative magic. The singular Baal means 'owner' or 'husband', so the local Baal god owned those who cultivated his land and 'married' to the soil. In contrast the Hebrew God was a warrior, a mountain God, his home out in the desert. Did the Hebrew God know the ways of agriculture and had He power over the fertility of soil in Canaan? The temptation to pay respect to the local Balaam was too strong: 2 Kings 17: 22-29. Popular religion included worship of both Yahweh and the Balaam, so Yahweh became one among many Balaam rather than the one and only God of the nation. This was syncretism, for Yahweh was worshipped with the rites, images and ceremonies along with the Baalim. He was worshipped in the form of a snake in the southern part of the country, and as a bull in the north. This broke the first two commandments and the Covenant.
- 3) The menace of Canaanite morality with a religion that had no moral demands, just ritual and sacrifice. The practice of animal and human sacrifice was as crude as their beliefs, involving gods believed to control human fertility as well as soil fertility. Their worship included sacred prostitution at the shrines and orgies of drunkenness. This was the culture of settled life in Canaan and the Jews soon accepted such practices. The threats were met in the providence of God by the prophets.
- 4) The chain of prophecy identifies Hosea of Samaria as the last prophet of the northern kingdom. Israel was conquered by Assyria and its people transported and intermarried. The first great prophet of the south with Jerusalem as the hub was Isaiah. Between these two men comes Micah who prophesied in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, which meant he prophesied before the fall of Israel and addressed both kingdoms. After

Israel fell, Micah gave attention to his own country and saw the same evils of Covenant breaking that brought destruction to Samaria: therefore Jerusalem must fall.

Micah is gripped by an awareness of the living God who is the God of all the nations. A century after his death, Micah's ministry was still remembered in the period of another prophet: Jeremiah 26: 18-19. Like Amos, he could see beneath the polished veneer of society to the underlying and obvious evil. The powerful exploited the poor, the courts were corrupt, rulers and religious leaders failed and feathered their own nests, for religious practices coupled with moral turpitude produced more evil and hypocrisy. A righteous God could not overlook rampant unrighteousness from His own people. The Assyrians were feared not as a powerful foreign enemy but as the instrument of God's judgment. But how could a true prophet declare the coming judgment of God's people and the holy city at the hands of another pagan power, Babylon? He perceived that the God of Covenant would exercise judgment on a covenant people who had neglected their covenant obligations.

Verse 1: *the word of YHWH the Lord (the essence of true prophecy) ...came...which he saw ... Samaria and Jerusalem.* The word as an event comes, happens, it is real, independent and self-contained and the power to actualise itself. 'It takes form through a particular individual at specific times and for a special purpose. The title claims that the entire book is the result of the event of the word of YHWH'.¹ The word is also said to have come to Hosea, Joel, Zephaniah, Malachi and others. *The word of the Lord came*, as a dynamic and powerful event.

Verses 2-9: God addresses His people through the prophet; **verse 2.** The advent of God is international in scope, and the whole earth is summonsed to listen for God is coming as Lord and Judge of all nations, to witness against them. Therefore the local scene is not confined geographically for YHWH comes to the nations. Micah is using the language of the law courts for as a judge comes to his court so God comes to the nations to exercise judgment, He presents the evidence and declares the accusation. This is more serious than any warning for the witness of YHWH against the peoples and nations comes from His *holy palace/holy temple*. **Psalm 11: 4-7.** His coming is not as some local deity for He is *the Lord God*, and contains the phenomena of theophany; **verse 4.** Micah's audience might have nodded their approval at first until he addressed his own people and that is too close to home.

Micah teaches us that behind the local and international crises of our times, the sovereign Lord is working. His audience would have been unsettled by his shift in focus from international to national. **Verse 5** reveals that sin and transgression, ie. breaking covenant (not contract) must culminate in judgment. The proclamation of the coming of YHWH in cataclysmic majesty is to deal with the sin of Samaria and Jerusalem and the nations.² **Verses 6-8** are first person, God in action. Samaria was an impressive city built on a hill, some 300 feet high and noted for its beauty and military strength, but note its destruction. What Micah saw and his audience did not was that Samaria's fall would be God's doing and the Assyrian armies would be God's instrument. That would be Jerusalem's judgment years later by the Chaldeans. We can detect the pattern more easily in other lives than in our own. Idols were the tangible symbols of Samaria's pagan world view; **Romans 1: 18-31.** **Verses 8 & 9** depict the divine agony with grief and lament. God derives no pleasure as the agent of judgment, His grief is rooted in His holy love; **Ezekiel 33: 11.**

¹ James Luther Mays, *Micah*, Westminster Press, 1976, 37.

² Mays, 38.

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STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

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Study 2. Micah 2: 1-5: WOE TO THE WICKED

Review Chapter 1: verses 2-9. YHWH judges His own people and will restore them in the process of judging the nations; **4: 1-5** show the blessings that come to peoples who hear and listen; cf. **5: 15**. The judgements of YHWH are redemptive not punitive.

1: 10-16: JUDGMENT IS COMING [typical Hebrew paronomasia]

The theme of judgment continues and while Micah points to towns in other areas he is still addressing Jerusalem. He seeks to make them aware of the critical times in which they live so that they return to the Lord. The threat is from the Assyrians under Emperor Sargon (Isaiah 20:1). Hebrew language is full of puns and word plays which often are lost to the English reader despite correct translation, and Micah's use of various towns illustrates this (Blackwood will be deadwood; Norwood = no wood, Hackham sliced in pieces, Black Forest ravaged by fire, Broken Hill smashed to oblivion).

Verse 10; *at Beth Ophrah roll yourself in the dust*, the name means 'House of Dust' and the word play refers to mourning coming as the result of judgment. **Verse 14**, *the houses of Aczib will become a deception*, means 'lying and deceitful'. Micah takes his listeners on an imaginary trip throughout the region which must have startled them for the approaching judgment would be extensive; **Galatians 6: 7**. **Verse 16** is the climax as he speaks to the citizens of Jerusalem and tells them to lament for their children, ie. the towns and villages that looked to the capital city. Also lament for themselves (yourselves) for without its children (villages) Jerusalem would not remain a capital. The outlying regions are gone and there is no centre, a significant lesson for we easily reverse the picture. I'm all right, what have I done to deserve this, Lord get me out of this difficulty, I'll promise ... If God is love He wouldn't do this: can't I bargain with God? The same general message continues but is supplemented by specific details. Linking the first two chapters we note two significant points:

- 1) Judgment is nearby: The prophet indicated in the first part of chapter one that Samaria's fate of total defeat and disaster would also come to Jerusalem. Samaria was the northern relative and the years passed, but the towns and villages listed from 1: 10 were in Judah, on Jerusalem's door, and judgment was inevitable. Significant to notice that the progress of judgment, over a few decades between the two periods, is the sign of God's mercy, long-suffering, patience and persistent love. Judgment is the inevitable response to sin and any delay is God's working not ours.
- 2) Telescope of time: We read the words in minutes but they cover years of ministry. We are not told the details of Micah's life for his focus is on the Lord and declaring His Word rather than his own situation. Augustine divided humankind into two cities 'formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self'.¹ Micah announces in this oracle of judgment that those who 'succeed' in the earthly city will lose out in the heavenly.

¹ Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, 14. 28.

Micah's interest in the political affairs of his nation and his acute awareness of the injustice and greed of the rich were because such behaviour contradicted the Covenant, not topics by themselves; **3: 8-12**. He addresses specific people, namely wealthy landowners whose main crime is the illegal appropriation of land. **2:1&2**, *Woe* is not 'alas' or 'bad luck' but a death sentence and he shows that crime begins with coveting and results in obtaining farm lands and estates, in a description that fits today's behaviour. Instead of sleeping peacefully at night these characters are lying in bed scheming ways to increase their land-holdings. *At morning's light* is irony for although thieves might hide their evil in the dark of night, the courts were conducted in the ancient Near East when the sun rose as a symbol of the end of the dark that hid the crime. These legal-sharks perverted the legal system at daybreak and mocked the law. They rise, not to work their farms or business, but to change their nocturnal schemes into selfish action. What about the land owners? The weapons of bullying, cheating, oppression, lies, deceit, etc. highlight behaviour that is both ancient and modern in grabbing land and possessions. Micah describes these plans as *iniquity (wickedness)* and *evil* in **verse 1**. There are honest business deals involving land but this is greed and oppression. The small landowner and his family are made destitute and dependent on others with no government assistance. He also loses his *inheritance* which would have provided for his children. These references describe the erosion of Judah's social structure where the rich become richer by evil manipulation and a 'new poor' arises. The underlying pattern is not clever business but cunning and determined evil coveting. Naboth's vineyard; **1 Kings 21: 17 & 27-29**.

Micah's words against evil in Jerusalem are similar to Amos's against the wicked in Samaria; **2: 6&7, 3: 15, 5: 7-11, 6: 4-6, 8: 4-6**, including fraud, oppression, corruption, self. God's instructions were clear; **Exodus 20: 15 & 17. Exodus 22: 1-4; 23: 1&2, 6-9. 24: 1-18** the Covenant confirmed. **Micah 2: 3-5**; now the Lord speaks and the punishment matches the crime, for *you cannot save yourselves*. There is irony in God's judgment for the wealthy landowners will complain at their judgment; How can God let these foreigners (Assyrians) take our land and divide it among themselves? Their personal goals were their gods. Micah has touched the pulse of both his and our times, for we have the desire for permanence and of belonging to this world. Such desire is not in itself wrong but this is not the whole story. The significance of land runs through the O.T. account with the patriarchs, Hebrew kingdoms, and people mourned for their land during the exile. Land provided sustenance for living with crops and cattle. Land and possessions can grow into greed, cause war and social collapse. God's words and judgment through the prophets shatter the illusions of any who imagine that the possession of land can bring permanence to earth's citizens. **Luke 12: 13-21**.

2: 6-13: FALSE AND TRUE PREACHING

Micah's bluntness evoked opposition from the wealthy crooks but particularly from false preachers who may have been in the pay of the land-grabbers. Here is confrontation for Micah speaks God's word and is opposed on two fronts. There are some uncertainties in translation and punctuation. **Verses 6 & 7 & 11**; shallow preaching, good news, fun, user-friendly and entertainment. The two thrusts from the false messages are, *Do not preach ...* and their counter of Micah's message, *disgrace will not overtake us*. They must not upset their wealthy patrons. True prophecy was and is the declaration of the word of the Lord; whereas false prophecy was and is the agenda of their masters. The subtlety was in presenting half-truths that appealed without referring to obedience, justice and righteousness to God's word. False preaching can only continue when people want to hear it.

Now an amazing change despite the innocent suffering with the guilty, there is the Immediate & Messianic in **verses 12 & 13** (next week).

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

JOHN D CALVERT

Study 3. Micah 3: 1-12 WHERE IS JUSTICE?

Review: Chapter 2; Micah flings at his audience a job-description for the type of preacher they want. He would proclaim lies with preaching a theology that would intoxicate them in drunkenness and hide reality from their thinking.¹

2: 8-10 Micah's continued message of truth against the land barons. Peaceful citizens lose their cloak which was a garment by day and blanket at night. Money lent to the poor with their cloak taken as collateral, but the law required the cloak be returned at night: **Deut. 24: 10-13. Verse 9** women and children driven from their homes. He will not weaken the word or accommodate it to his hearers for it is God's word, not some ivory tower utterance.

2: 12 & 13 are both immediate and messianic. Immediate in this context for a remnant would be spared when judgment came and illustrates God's pastoral care for His people in the midst of disaster The *throng* in **verse 12** is not the crowd within Jerusalem but the besieging Assyrian army outside the city who threaten them. Also points to deliverance as one flock and one Shepherd, **John 10: 14-16, Galatians 3: 26-28, Ephesians 4: 4-6.**

Messianic as **verse 13** describes the release from Jerusalem with the Shepherd-King breaking open the blockade, followed by the masses breaking out from their situation and their King taking his rightful place in triumph at their head. **Hebrews 2: 14&15, Revelation 7: 9 & 10.**

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free.
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.²*

Chapter 3; Micah addresses the civic and religious heads of Israel in a context where Godly justice was absent and replaced by chaos, falsehood and injustice. Privilege requires obligation, integrity and responsibility whereas neglect results in corruption. For the prophet to condemn specific crimes like land-grabbing by the wealthy was only part of the situation. He needed to fire at the fundamental structures of his society for they launched the iniquitous acts that spread like a disease across society. The three sections in this chapter are each linked by the key word justice; **3: 1, 8, 9.**

Before we ask; **where is justice?** We will inquire, **what** is justice? Justice is an attribute of God which He communicates to us and which manifests his holiness. We can also say 'righteousness'. Human understanding regards justices as right rule, right conduct, each receiving his due whether good or bad. God metes out both rewards and punishments. As sinners we cannot offer

¹ Mays, 72.

² Charles Wesley, 1707-88, *And can it be*, verse 4.

satisfaction for sin or remove it. Righteousness was provided as Jesus Christ, the human representative, who met all the righteous demands of the law and paid the total price of sin in our place, as our representative. So we trust only in Christ's righteousness and are justified only by God. The gospel is the good news that through the Saviour the absolute requirements of divine justice have been met.³ **Romans 3: 1-8, 9-20, 21-31 and 4: 1-7.**

Civic rulers: 3: 1-4. The leaders and rulers are public officials in Jerusalem and responsible for the administration of justice. The earliest use of such terms is by Moses; **Exodus 18: 25&26** (13-27). Isaiah refers to men in Jerusalem who are responsible for justice; **Isaiah 1: 23.** To *know justice* means skilled in normal legal traditions of justice and sound in authority. The failure of justice in the law courts was a recurring practice; **Isaiah 1: 17, 21-23 & 26.** The wealthy and powerful could buy the "justice" they wanted. For the poor and weak there was only injustice from the courts. Micah viewed these leaders in the understanding of **Deut. 1: 9-18**, which define the obligations of righteous judges who are not partial and above bribery. The righteousness of the judge was not simply human ethics or correct legal dispensing but an obligation to YHWH.⁴ **Verse 3** describes these leaders as hungry butchers & cannibals. The section concludes with Micah pointing to a time when such men will receive their deserts. The suffering they dispensed will come on their own heads. **Verse 4**, the Lord will not answer their cries, Yahweh will *hide his face*, signifying the absence of his presence in relieving their distress. They will know the terror of helplessness. The twist in the account is that when the judges refused to hear the cries of the oppressed they were unjust; but when God refused to listen to their pleas he was totally just.

Priests and Prophets: 3: 5-8. The people turned to the prophets (clergy) but they were as corrupt as the judiciary. Divination produces false prophecies and God sends the prophets lying visions in conformity with their depraved appetites; **Deuteronomy 13: 1-5 & 18: 14, 21, 22.** Pay a high price and receive a pleasant word, but the poor were abused; **verse 5.** Micah does not deny the vocation or prophetic gifts of the false prophets but condemns the abuse of their ministry and the prostitution of divine gifts for personal and profitable ends. So, divine judgment will cancel their prophetic gifts, no-more night time visions, or divination that penetrated darkness. Disgrace and shame will replace their office, and no word will come from God **verses 6&7.** There is *shame* and *disgrace* so like unclean lepers they will *cover their faces*. The contrast for Micah in **verse 8** shows that in justice he spoke to Israel's injustice. His task is to proclaim the rebellious sin of Israel and Judah.

Concluding judgements: 3: 9-12. **Verse 9** = listen, **verses 9-11** = accusation, **verse 12** = judicial sentence. Micah's denunciation includes Judah's government as rampant injustice involves rulers, judges, priests and prophets, for they distort what is right and build with blood and wickedness; *they lean upon the Lord* in self-justification, and say *Is not the Lord among us?* **Verse 11**, cf. **Jeremiah 7: 1-11.** *Therefore because of you*, **verse 12.** Micah's public declaration would hardly have been popular! His preaching was remembered a century later, **Jeremiah 26: 16-19.** Theocracy is replaced by oligarchy, for the Holy One of Israel forsook his holy Temple: **Matthew 23: 7 – 24: 2.** We commenced in **Micah 1: 1&2** emphasising that the ministry of the prophets was inseparable from their hearing of the word of the Lord; **Jeremiah 23: 16-22.** They are sent by God with his word; so Jesus in his ministry as Prophet was sent from the Father and speaks what he has seen and heard from the Father; **John 4: 34; 6: 38-3; 7: 28 & 29.** As the Son he never pushes his own initiative but submits to the Father in all things, never adding or omitting anything; **John 12: 49 & 50.**

³ B.L. Goddard, 'Justice' in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 593.

⁴ Mays, 79.

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Study 4. Micah 4: 1-13 THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

Micah ministered during a time where war was both a threat and a reality. He concluded the previous section with divine judgment on Jerusalem. Now a radical change as he describes a centre for righteousness, justice and peace.

Verses 1-5: YHWH is Lord of all

The expression *in the last days* = ‘in the days to come’, cf. **Genesis 49: 1 & Hosea 3: 5**. So, Israel’s return from exile; **Acts 2: 17** the Holy Spirit, **Hebrews 1: 2 & 12: 22-24 & Revelation 21: 1, 10, 22-27**. The picture, particularly **verse 3**, is not political peace but the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Kingdom through the Word; **Isaiah 2: 2-4**. ‘The longing for peace cannot exist as hope if it is separated from the expectation of the coming divine kingdom’.¹ The Biblical authors lived on the inspired words of their predecessors, but in addition, *the Word of the Lord* came freshly to them in their own day; **Ezekiel 37: 14, 27-28. Verse 2**, cf. **Hebrews 12: 22ff & John 6: 63-65**. The Hague, Geneva and the UN are not enough. National leaders may quote the phrase ‘men of goodwill’, **Luke 2: 14**, but *goodwill* or ‘good pleasure’ is not human goodwill but God’s. It means being right with God and only then right with others. God will bring peace *for men on whom his favour rests* (NEB). The emphasis is on God not us, therefore those whom God chooses, the healing of estrangement caused by sin and evil, not those who choose God.² This is the vision of foreigners visiting Zion for divine instruction: **1 Kings 10: 23-25**. The *word of the Lord* in **4:2** initiates **verse 3**. Yahweh as King will settle the conflicts between nations. The court of Yahweh will replace the battlefields of the world. Cultivation replaces death and war becomes agriculture.

So in **verse 1** the prophet sees Zion raised above and peoples drawn to it. In **verse 2** he hears the nations exhorting one another to go up to the mountain of the Lord’s house to receive the law and the divine word for their hearts are changed. In **verses 3&4** the prophet reflects on the fruit of changed lives in which God judges or arbitrates among the peoples. He settles disputes by *Word* not by fighting. He both brings and is security.

Verses 4&5; security and fellowship, **4b**, for the *Lord Almighty* has spoken. This is the military title for God so focus is on the one who makes the prediction not the prediction itself. The reliability (steadfastness) of God’s word **1 Kings 4: 25 & Isaiah 40: 6-8**, and God’s peace, **Isaiah 41: 10**. The contrast is clear in **verse 5** for *their gods* are the delusion of their own minds.

¹ Mays, 93.

² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, IVP, 1977, 86

Verses 6-10: Exile and Restoration

The Messianic era is described as *in that day* for God's flock is helpless, scattered and afflicted for Judah is in exile far away, but God will gather them, **Ezekiel 34: 16**. Yahweh is the shepherd, **Ezekiel 34**. In **4: 6&7** *the lame* point to **Genesis 32: 31** as we acknowledge our weakness. The *remnant* is described as a *strong nation* not a surviving residue, but only strong in the Lord. They are divinely spared and guided and His rule transforms them for they are destined as the means by which the Lord will rule forever in a chaotic world. **Verse 8** the watchtower is a fortified tower around which a group assembles for protection. Israel's greatest king had watched over his flock so the new Jerusalem will serve the same way. This Messianic pointer shows the Great Shepherd of the sheep ascended to the heavenly Jerusalem, declaring that *the gates of hell would not prevail*; Matthew 16: 18 and *none can snatch the sheep from his hand*, John 10: 28. He promised *to be with his people to the end*, Matthew 28: 20. *Stronghold* = hill or acropolis. The word city is feminine in Hebrew so Jerusalem is personified as a daughter. But the promise of restoration is not Israel restored to her pre-fallen state of expressing her own will, and syncretism, for the church is the *strong nation*, **1 Peter 2: 9&10**.

4: 9&10 are mocking words for Israel will be forced from Jerusalem to Babylon and can only be saved by the act of God, her redeemer. The word *Counsellor* means in Hebrew, one who formulates plans, performs action, maintains life and brings security. The *pain of labour and writhing in agony* = hope in suffering to salvation and victory, and is a pun on pain, the pains of captivity. God's work in history is in contrast to human understanding. What appears to the enemy as victory in battle leads to defeat in war. Despite the way things seem, God knows what he is doing, **Isaiah 9: 6 & 28: 29**. 'God chose Babylon because in Micah's pagan world it functioned as the equivalent of Rome in the Middle Ages and of Mecca in Islam'.³ *There you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you*, **Ephesians 1: 7**.

Verses 11-13: YHWH's strategy

4: 11-13, Zion's enemies surround her and *many nations* refer to Assyria. *They say, "Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion"*, for they seek to destroy the walls protecting the sanctity of Zion's sacred courts and the Temple and the Holy Place and rid the earth of God's holiness, but Yahweh's plans will prevail. 'When nations see themselves as the centre of history and seek a destiny that fulfils their power, they can tolerate no Zion; they are gripped with a compelling need to destroy whatever stands in judgment and restraint on their pride'.⁴ **Verse 13**, *Horns of iron* are symbolic of strength and power. All the spoil gathered by the heathen will be devoted to the Lord. All acts of judgment by Israel or other nations will establish beyond doubt the sovereignty and reign of God in the world. **Verses 12&13** cf. **Isaiah 10: 5-12**. The pagan peoples are the unwitting tools of their own destruction for the Lord uses their own pride and anger to bring about their own defeat. So Satan at the Cross, **1 Corinthians 2: 7 & 8**.

³ Bruce Waltke, *Micah*, IVP, Tyndale, 179.

⁴ Mays, 109.

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Study 5. Micah 5: 1-6: A PROMISED RULER

Verses 1-6 move from the present distress to future salvation, more particularly from the humiliation of Jerusalem's king **verse 1** to Messiah's victory, **verses 2-5**. There is a progression from Messiah's salvation which has its beginning with God, who raises him up as his governor/ruler **verse 2**, through the faithful community that gives him birth **verse 3**, to the Shepherd-King who, by faith in God, extends his rule to the ends of the earth so that his people live securely **verse 4**, and finally to his subordinates who subjugate Assyria **verses 5b-6a**.

The present distress begins with the imperative *marshal your troops*, followed by *for*. Micah saw that the ideal David would reappear as the Messiah - theological shorthand for Israel's ideal future ruler. The *siege* is by the Assyrians under Sennacherib, and the Davidic *ruler* in the city is Hezekiah, but he seemed totally ineffective against the enemy threat. *Troops* = the small remnant left of Israel's army gathered behind Jerusalem's gates *cf* **1:8-16 & 2:12**. Isaiah also likened the Assyrian army to a *rod*, **Isaiah 10:5, 15, 24**. To *strike . . . on the cheek* signifies humiliation; the victim is so defenceless he cannot even defend his face, *cf.* **Job 16:10; Psalm 3:7; Isaiah 50:6; Lamentations 3:30**.

Verse 2: *But* reverses the situation from one of the present defeat to Messiah's triumph. The kings born in proud Jerusalem failed; the Messiah incarnated in lowly Bethlehem triumphs. The Lord addresses personified *Bethlehem* with the announcement that he will launch the Messianic age from there. He chose Bethlehem to exhibit Messiah's inauspicious and yet at the same time his most auspicious origins. *Ephrathah*, meaning 'fruitful', is the name of a district in Judah where *Bethlehem* was located. **Psalm 132:6 & Ruth 1:2** reach back for the Messiah's origins in the pure springs of Jesse and David and ignores his later decadent and disappointing lineage born in Jerusalem. Isaiah presented the same truth by comparing the Messiah to a branch springing from the stump of Jesse, **Isaiah 11:1**. The implication becomes explicit in the last clause, *whose origins are . . . from ancient times*. Micah takes us back to the cradle of David's line and exhibits the Messiah as representing a new beginning out of a famous heritage. As God unexpectedly anointed David and rescued his people upon the failure of Saul, so he will give his people David's true successor after the defeat of David's descendants.

The expression *Bethlehem Ephrathah* is literally, 'insignificant with regard to its existence among the clans of Judah'. David was regarded as the least of his brothers, so Bethlehem played only a very limited role among Judah's clans. The adjective rendered *small* describes not a quantity but a quality. Elsewhere it occurs in connection with 'weak' and 'despised' **Judges 6:15; Psalms. 119:141** and is rendered 'least' and 'lowly' in the NIV *cf.* **1 Samuel 9:21**, where it is contrasted with the normal word for 'small'.

Matthew 2: 6 makes its meaning plain: by virtue of its divine choice as the site for the Messiah's birth the most insignificant place will bring forth the most pre-eminent person. Bethlehem was too insignificant to be mentioned in Micah's catalogue of Judah's cities of defence, 1:10-15; cf. **2 Ch. 11:5-12**, but is today the centre of pilgrimages from around the world and is universally renowned because Jesus Christ fulfilled this verse. That fulfilment confirms both the word of God and its message that the Lord delights to choose the weak and despised things of this world to shame the wise and strong, that man may boast in the Lord alone **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**. *Clans* designate the military-political subdivisions of a tribe consisting of about a thousand men each. Matthew reads 'clans' as 'chiefs'. The next clause, *out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel. For me*, may owe its inspiration to **1 Samuel 16:1**, underscoring the fact that the Messiah, like David, serves the Lord's plans. Note how Micah speaks instead of a ruler, and *from of old – from everlasting*, was probably based on a presumption of Christ's pre-existence. The Hebrew used with either the created order or God himself, can mean *from ancient times – days of eternity*; cf. **Psalms 25:6 & 90:2**. It can also designate 'ancient times' within history, *i.e.* the distant past. *Origins*, in Semitic languages, may celebrate a supernatural, quasi-divine origin of the king. The word underscores Messiah's supernatural origins. The Messiah, humanly speaking, will have the finest royal blood flowing in his veins (*ie*, he will be a servant of the Lord) and be an heir of God's eternal covenant with David, **2 Samuel 7:8-16 & Psalm 89:34-37**.

Verse 3: From God's proclamation Micah draws the logical inference *therefore Israel will be abandoned (i.e. the now of distress, 4:9, 11 & 5:1, including the exile, 4:10)* until the Messiah comes to inaugurate the new age. The verb is best translated impersonally, *one will give them [Israel] up. She who is in labour to produce the new age is Zion cf 4:10*, meaning the covenant community. God will use the believing community as the agent through which the Messiah will come into the world. The community and family that gave birth to Jesus Christ were characterized by faith, prayer and the fullness of the Holy Spirit Luke 1:5-2:40. The nucleus of the new age centring on the Messiah will be constituted by *the rest of his brothers*. Who are they? They are the Messiah's people who were naturally joined to him by blood and who, by conversion, spiritually join him and the believing remnant, **4:7**. *The rest* refers to the totality of brothers of which the remnant was a part. *Return* has the idea of conversion. With the conversion of elect Israel, the Messiah will inaugurate the new age that spoils the nations. One hundred and twenty of the Messiah's brothers were gathered in the Upper Room when he sent the Holy Spirit who turned the world upside down, **Luke 3:16 & Acts 2**.

Verse 4: Having launched his kingdom with his brothers, the Messiah *will stand, i.e. endure forever; Psalms 33:11 & 111:3, 130:3; Isaiah 14:24*, because he rules in the strength of the Lord and to the ends of the earth. Unlike David's unfaithful sons who broke covenant with the Lord by trusting in their military might, **5:10 & 11**, the Messiah, like David, 1 Samuel 17:38-47, (*verse 47 for the battle is the Lord's*) keeps covenant by trusting God **Psalms 91:14; 20:2, 3, 6-8**. His government is depicted under the imagery of shepherding, which again evokes memories of David's government **2 Samuel 5:2 & 7:7 & Matthew 2:6**. Jesus appropriated this imagery to himself to picture his care of and for his subjects **John 10, Hebrews 13:20 & 21, 1 Peter 5:4**. The Messiah's *greatness*

evokes the promise made to David **2 Samuel 7:9** but in contrast to David, whose kingdom consisted only of the promised land, his greater son will fulfil the greater vision of a universal kingdom, **Deuteronomy 33:17, Psalms. 2:8; 22:28; 59:13; 72:8.**

Verses 5&6: Verse 4 connects the peace and security of the flock with the Messiah's universal conquest of hostile forces. In verses 5&6 the defeat of Assyria and the ensuing peace are representative of the Messiah's yet wider triumph. Moreover, the mention that *seven shepherds . . . eight leaders* will defeat Assyria signifies that the Messiah will conquer through his people. Note, *he will be their peace* **verse 5a** and *he will deliver us* **verse 6b**. Micah guards against any thought that the leaders act independently of the Messiah. By using *we/us* the prophet identifies himself with the Messiah's undefeated community of faith. Micah mentions *Assyria* because the Assyrian armies were invading the land at the time of composition. We need to recall that prophets addressed their contemporaries and referred to the future in terms drawn from their own historical circumstances, **Isaiah 25:10-12; Amos 9:11&12**. The reference to the *land of Nimrod* = Babylonia. It is mentioned only here and in **Genesis 10:8-12, 1 Chronicles 1:10**, where it clearly coincides with Babylonia. Today the Messiah defeats his arch-enemy, Satan, and brings the world under his dominion through under-shepherds endowed with his Spirit, **Ephesians 4:7-12 & 1 Pet. 5:1-4.**

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

JOHN D CALVERT

Study 6. Micah 5: 7-15: THE REMNANT OF JACOB

We begin with a new oracle, linked to the preceding one in the Hebrew text by the same initial word, *will be*. In **verse 5** *he will be their peace*, **6**, *He will deliver us*, **7 & 8**, *The remnant of Jacob will be. Rescue or deliver* in verses 6 and 8, foretells more specifically that the Messiah will expand his kingdom among the nations through the remnant, introduced in **4:7**, *I will make the lame a remnant*. Then **verses 10-15** the repeated, *I will* of the Lord. The similar structures in this section contrast the remnant's twofold concurrent ministries among the nations: being a source of salvation to some, and an instrument of destruction to others. In either case, God makes them triumphant. The prophecy finds its fulfilment in the early church. Paul, including himself with the other apostles, said that God always led them, the aroma of Christ, in triumphal procession. Among those being saved they were the fragrance of life, but among those perishing they were the savour of death, **2 Corinthians 2:14 - 17**. This same double ministry continues to be exercised by the church today in proclaiming the Word.

Verse 7: Despite present circumstances the chosen people would once again be like God's dew and showers, bringing God's own message to the nations. The future tense, *will be*, connects the fulfilment of this oracle with the coming of the Messiah. The weak *remnant* forged out of the Babylonian captivity will become the strong nation that overturns the tables of history **4:7**. After the Messiah comes, the vanquished remnant will become the victors. They conquer not in their own strength but with the Messiah, who rules in the strength of the Lord **5: 4**. Micah refers to the remnant by the name *Jacob*, for that patriarch too was 'lame', cf. **4:6** before he became 'Israel' and was strengthened to fulfil the dual promise to Abraham that those who cursed him would be cursed and those who blessed him would be blessed. In either case Abraham prevails, for all nations bless themselves through his seed **Genesis 12:3; 22:17 & 18**. Because God was faithful to the promise and fulfilled it through the remnant, Abraham is the father of many nations, **Romans 4:16—17**. *Dew* and *showers* are always signs of divine benediction. They evoke both the mysterious heavenly origin of the remnant and its life-giving efficacy that refreshes the earth. *Wait for* would be better rendered 'wait upon', for it does not mean to 'delay', but 'to look for something with eager anticipation'. Dew and rain do not come through the manipulations of humans but through the providential actions of the gracious, omnipotent, faithful God. The word rendered *linger* can also mean 'hope for' or 'expect' and is a close synonym for 'trust', the preferred meaning because of its parallel *wait for*. The key to the simile's meaning is given in the phrase *from the Lord*.¹

¹ . 'Man is singularly impotent over water supplies. He can store rainwater and tap underground springs, but his native helplessness before the cruel sun comes to the fore in times of prolonged drought. Ultimately man can neither help nor hinder the supply of so basic a commodity.' Allen, 353

Verse 8: Micah had likened Zion among the nations to a threshing bull before the Assyrian horde **4:13**. Now he compares the remnant despite their present weakness and looming defeat like a *lion*, powerful and fearless in the Lord's strength to the nations, wreaking a terrible carnage among sheep. ('young lion' is doubtful) Four predicates unpack the metaphor: *as it goes* (the first verb in the Hebrew text) speaks of sovereignty; *mauls* (better, 'tramples') of subjugating, destructive power; *mangles* of death; and *no-one can rescue*, of God's inescapable punishment, cf. **Deuteronomy 32: 39; Job. 10:7; Psalm 50:22; Hosea 5:14**. The Spirit of Christ in his church extends his rule universally in spite of even Satan and his minions **Matthew 12:28; 16:18—20; John. 16:33**. In human terms the surviving community had a miserable past and dismal future. But the number of survivors was not important as any hope for the future was only in God's strength not their numbers.²

Verse 9: In the light of the promise in verses 7 and 8 the remnant is now addressed and commanded to fulfil its mandate. The command explains that death is dished out to their enemies and, by implication, life distributed to those who submit to God's rule. Micah validates the command in **verse 15**; ie. the Word of God, **Matthew 28:17-20**.

In the final oracle of chapters 4&5, which is against the nations, note **verse 15**, the Lord, consistently using the first person with the initial verb of each line of verse, proclaims that he will protect his kingdom. First, by purging it from the unholy within and so preserve it from his wrath **verses 10-14** and, then by punishing foes without and so protect his people **verse. 15**. His punishment of Israel is remedial, and of the nations penal. All Israel, not the remnant, is addressed in verses 10-14 for they need cleansing from the three forms of apostasy, lumped together by the words, *I will destroy*. They had replaced confidence in God with military might, **verses 10—11**, magic and witchcraft, **verses 12**, and idolatry, **verses 13 & 14**. The Lord himself will burst Israel's titanic bubble of pomp and pride. By this proclamation he aims to sober unbelievers and to strengthen the hands of believing Israel. The oracle presumes an enemy is attacking without and that Israel is responding with human power. Through the Lord's miraculous salvation Israel learns to trust him, and the enemy experiences his anger. The prophecy see **4:1**, finds immediate fulfilment and greater fulfilment in the Messianic age. **Verse 10**, *In that day, declares the Lord*, cf. **Colossians 2: 13-15**.

Verses 10-15 are linked to verses 7—9 by the catch-words *destroy* in verses 9, 10 – 13, and *your hand*, verses 9 & 13. Here is depicted a blind military buoyancy of trust in human ability. Preparations assume that the enemy is Assyria; Micah perceives that Judah's real enemy is God. **Verse 10a**. *In that day* (see 4:6) links the Lord's protection of his kingdom with the whole drama of Israel's future redemption as set forth in chapters 4 & 5. The Lord's slaughtering of the Assyrian in answer to Hezekiah's prayer serves as an example and pointer of its fulfilment in the messianic age. **Verses 10 & 11: Destroy** specifically means 'to purge', ie. to remove unholy by punishment in order to preserve the community, **Leviticus 20: 1 - 6**, etc. Confidence in horse-drawn chariots and

² Craigie, 43.

fortified cities threatened Israel's covenantal relationship with God, which was rooted in trust, so did magic and idolatry. Perhaps pride of place is given to this false security because it had first place in Israel's heart. The land bristled with military hardware at the time Sennacherib invaded the land cf. **2 Kings 18:13, 24; 2 Chronicles 32:1-5; Isaiah 31:1**, hence Hezekiah's still extant water-tunnel. The church today will not prevail through her own resources: an educated clergy, the technical know-how of expositors, educational directors, modern buildings, but only through faith in God. She must confess as with David: *some trust in horses, and some in chariots, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God, Psalm 20:7*. This psalm by Israel's military genius shows the Scriptures do not decry the use of means; they discredit confidence in them, **Deuteronomy 17: 16 & 17; Psalm 149: 6 - 9; Nehemiah 4: 9, 13 & 14**.

Verse 12: Isaiah in his parallel oracle **Isaiah 2:6 - 8** gives pride of place to sorcery, because he wants to emphasize its foreign source. Eastern occultism and Philistine divination were totally alien to Israel's covenant; **Exodus 22:18; Deut. 18: 9 - 14**. Apostate Israel, like secular man, wanted to indulge her appetites in their day apart from spiritual and ethical considerations, and at the same time guarantee her continued prosperity into the future by her own might and the occult. In complete contrast the ethical monotheism of the prophets, insists that future peace and prosperity are dependent on faith and integrity in the present.

Verses 13 - 14: Pagan religion sought to manipulate the innate forces of life within nature through magical words, ritual and carved images, all part of the magic. In the high places the sacred stones served as representations of the male deity, Baal; **2 Kings 3: 2; 10: 26 & 27**, and the wooden Asherah represented the female deity. Cities = 'blood-spattered altars', perhaps a reference to the hollow in the sacred stones to receive the blood of sacrifice. *The work of your hands*, means that the carved stone images are the products of human engineering and represent another expression of man's attempt to have life apart from the Creator. Secular man more effectively manipulates life by his use of science than his ancestors did by magic, but no more than they can he secure eternal life for himself. By continuing to substitute the creation for the Creator, humans deprive themselves of eternal life and hasten their eternal death. The prophet's message is designed to shatter the nation's exuberant ideas. Military build-up plus the images and idols of false worship advocated by the false prophets will all be destroyed in judgment. In verses 10-15, *I will* is mentioned six times.

Verse 15: Men will trust in anything practical or seemingly new and different for their security and salvation. Conferences, programmes, speakers, books, methodologies, the 'in thing' particularly from overseas, all have their attraction and price. In contrast YHWH will eliminate weapons and idols for idols are man made. The Lord always preserves his kingdom against attack. He will execute his power on behalf of his elect when Christ appears; **2 Thessalonians 1: 8 & 9, cf. Luke 18: 7 & 8, Revelation 6: 10 & 11**. In the meantime the church must not distrust her Lord by seeking to avenge herself or by trusting in her own resources; **Deuteronomy 32: 35, Hebrews 10: 30 & 31, Romans 12: 19**.

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

JOHN D CALVERT

Study 7. Micah 6: 1-8: THE LORD'S CONTROVERSY

Micah begins with formal legal language, a litigation speech preventing Israel from protection in the Temple because they broke covenant obligations. **Verse 1 & 2**, but this is no ordinary courtroom for God is the judge and Micah is prosecuting counsel. Metaphorically he summons the *mountains and hills* and the *everlasting foundations of the earth* to hear the case. When the members of court are formally assembled the defendant announced: *the Lord has a case against his people, he is lodging a charge against Israel*. The Plaintiff's speech **verses 3 - 5**. The evidence is that God has not let them down but his people have chosen their own way. With pathos and tenderness aimed straight at Israel's heart, he twice calls them *my people*. The speech, full of grace and truth, aims to reprove and to woo Israel back to her covenant obligations, not to pronounce sentence upon her with withering words. Why have they done that, look at the historical evidence? **Judges 2: 1-5 & 6:7-10, 10: 10-16; Isaiah 1: 2&3, Jeremiah 2: 4-13**. A summary accusation: Israel is without excuse for not reciprocating the Lord's love. **Verse 3** has no answer. The Lord opens his case by asking two questions. First, *What have I done to you?* Then, *How have I burdened you?*

The Lord delivered them from Egypt, redeemed them and provided leadership **verse 4 & 5**. The Balak-Balaam incident at Shittim, Numbers 22:1 and the crossing of the Jordan to Gilgal, Joshua 2:1; 3:1; 4:19 evokes their memory that as Israel crossed the Red Sea in the face of Pharaoh with his magicians, so also she crossed the Jordan in the face of Balak with his prophet, Balaam. If Israel's God ruled the floods and conquered Israel's political and spiritual enemies at the beginning, why could he not now deliver Israel from Sennacherib. Both events occurred at the same season **Exodus 12:1-3** and Jos. 4:19; cf Deut. 6:21-23; 26:6-9; & Joshua 24:2-13. The evidence before the court substantiates the fact that whatever the reason for Israel's failure, God is not responsible. Israel cannot dispute the crime of which she is guilty and in addressing the court asks what she can do to make things right? The speech is developed by the repeated use of *what*, **Verse 6**, *with what shall I come before the Lord and bow down ...?* The defendant (Israel) does not understand what is happening. Israel assumes that the answer to its crime is in ritual activity. No sacrifice I make is too much for God, even my first-born son, suggesting that God, like man, can be bought. The nation had lost the significance of faith in God and ritual had become an end in itself, not an expression of covenant relationship with the Lord. The sacrificial system and worship of the temple had been debased into a type of spiritual insurance policy. We can sin and worship other gods as long as we appear at the temple. The nations defence in court is that hypocrisy can be atoned for by further hypocrisy, religious performance on a grand scale to impress God.

The court is concluded by the words of God's counsel. His requirements have nothing to do with sacrifice and offering. The Lord wants ethical purity illustrated in three sections; **verse 8**. This command, orientated towards God (in contrast to the first two, which are directed towards man), does not refer to self-effacement but covenant obedience. The prophet does not reject ritual; he reasserts that the moral law has priority over the ceremonial.

Verses 9-16: Up to now Micah has accused Israel's leaders; now he accuses the people, for market day, essential to the economy is an opportunity for unscrupulous merchants, **verses 9-12**. Commercial crime, rigged scales, violence, lies, deceit. These particulars of moral law are eternally relevant. Christians, like Micah's contemporaries and the Pharisees of Jesus' time, are also in danger of substituting monetary gifts and a dead moralism for God's requirements.

Micah now shuts the door that left open the possibility of restoration verses 1- 8, and publicly proclaims the sentence condemning the city to destruction. They have eaten to the full the deadly fruit of unethical practices and must die. In practice the king and his officials had to set the standard of **2 Samuel 14:26**. These corrupt officials who refused to conform their lives and administration to the Lord's righteous standards took advantage of the potential for cheating their fellow men due to their powerful positions. Ancient balances had a margin of error of up to six per cent, and archaeologists have found few weights inscribed with the same denomination to be of exactly identical weight, so only approximate modern equivalents can be given. Should the Lord turn a blind eye to the unscrupulous business practices of merchants, he would become an accomplice.

Verses 13 – 15: The Judge, whom they had ignored, now hands down the sentence to fit the crime, note *therefore*. The sentence fulfils the 'futility curses' threatened in the covenant, cf. **Leviticus 26: 14 - 17; Deut. 28: 15 -19 ff**. The curses in the covenant also threatened the pillaging of crops and **Deut. 28:40 etc**. The prophet repeats the curses as a code in order to enable Israel to interpret the horrors and devastations that reverse the order of creation and the order of history.

This is the only verse in the prophetic messages that mentions kings by name. The text assumes that the sins of infamous Omri and Ahab, who lived more than a century before Micah, have become legendary and serve as a paradigm of apostasy cf. **1 Kings 16:30 - 33**, turpitude, cupidity and injustice cf. 1 Kings 21. Ahab's swindling and extortion of property from others is in view here. **Verses 13 & 16:** *Therefore* implies that the Lord has no alternative. The wages of sin is death, regardless of the sinner. The curses of the covenant also threatened international disgrace **Deut. 28: 37 and Hebrews 3: 7- 4: 2 & 6**.

NEW CREATION TEACHING MINISTRY

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

JOHN D CALVERT

Study 8. Micah 7: 1-20: LAMENT FOR A LOST SOCIETY

The scene shifts from public ministry in the market place to Micah's private lament for his nation. **Verse 1**, *What misery is mine!*: a simile of frustration like someone entering an orchard for fruit but none remain. Not just absence of fruit but where fruit should be is stripped bare, **Luke 13: 6 – 8**, **Psalm 80:8 - 16**, **Isaiah 5:1-7**. By contrast, the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ, promises to produce sweet fruit from those who abide in him, **John 15:1-16**. There are no godly or upright men, **verse 2a**: the depraved leadership are hunters preying upon the people, **verses 2b – 3**. He laments the general corruption of society, with violence and exploitation instead of honesty. Not lazy people for they are diligent to pursue evil, **verse 3**. His city should have been laden with the fruit of righteousness but has been stripped. Powerful people who do not hide their criminality but openly seek advice to achieve their desires, even the best and most upright are *thorns* and *hedges*, they obstruct justice, **verse 4**. If an innocent person seeks relief from an oppressor by appealing to them, he will be hurt by their stubborn complacency and indifference.

In summary, **verse 3** adds to the idea that the king and his officials together weave the deadly net that destroys their subjects. The king and his depraved associates flagrantly pervert the covenant not merely by accepting bribes (cf. Exodus 23:8; Deut. 10:17; 16:19; 27:25), but by actually wringing them out of their hapless subjects. To gratify his own appetites Solomon's successor dictated policies that tore apart the nation's covenantal solidarity. The word *desire* (v.3) is the same word for *crave* in **verse 1**. To satisfy his own lusts the king robbed the Lord of the fruit he deserved. The time of confusion is at hand, **verse 4b**, with general society to specific illustrations of neighbours and relatives, for parents and children are all infected by evil corruption, **verses 5 - 6**. Jesus used this application of the verse to illustrate the division that his advent would produce in Israel cf. **Matthew 10:35 - 39; Luke 12:53**. Micah, who compared himself to a disappointed vinedresser, likens these decadent officials to hunters, **Psalm 10:8 - 9**. His people had abandoned their birthright of righteousness and justice and the pursuit of evil brought divine judgment. *The day*, about which the nation had foolishly tried to silence the prophets, has come, with Sennacherib's army besieging the city and the invasion throwing the city into panic. Social anarchy is now specified cf. **Isaiah 3:4 - 5**.

Verse 7; he will continue to trust in God and pray. The lament does not lead to personal despair. The prophet focuses on the Lord who called him. The dark storm of judgement approaches, but salvation also comes. The oracle begins and ends in the first person as the prophet moves from lament to confidence. He begins by identifying himself with the Lord, who had been accusing and sentencing the people in 6:10 - 16, and ends by identifying himself with the remnant, who will lay hold of God's forgiveness in 7:8 - 20.

Note the word-play on the verb *watch*. In verse 4b *watch* referred to the prophetic activity of watching for judgment, here it refers to Micah's activity in watching for salvation. Basing himself on God's promises to the patriarchs (cf. verse 20), Micah confidently looks in prayer to his Saviour. 'Salvation' has both a military and a judicial sense. It refers to God's intervention in delivering the oppressed because it is right that he should do so. It would not be right if God's promises to the patriarchs regarding Israel failed or if the evil Assyrian prevailed. If any force other than God has the last word, then that force is a god. Micah's world offers him no reason to hope. Only God is left, and that is reason enough. The verbs *watch in hope*, *wait* and *hear* are not a passive waiting for victory but an active participation through prayer and hope in the Lord.¹

In verses 8 – 20, Micah concludes with a communal lament expressing grief at present disaster and hope for the future. Here is the experience of judgement for what Micah prophesied had occurred, divine wrath had not been averted. **Verse 8**, Judah had fallen and sat in darkness. **Verse 9**, Micah's preaching made plain why disaster had come, but hope provided that God's covenant with his people would be restored. **Verses 8-10** picture defeat but God will bring *light* and *righteousness* and the enemy will be shamed for there is one God. In keeping with that confession of faith the prophet promises her that she will become the sheepfold offering salvation in a world under judgment, **verses 11 - 13**. In verses 14 – 17 the prophet prays that the Lord, who led Israel out of Egypt against insurmountable odds, will once again miraculously shepherd his people **verse 14**, and the Lord responds that he will, **verse 15**. Micah then takes up the thesis of verses 8 - 10 that believing Israel will be saved and the unbelieving enemy will be conquered, while widening it to include the nations, **verses 16 & 17**. The rising crescendo of confidence reaches a climax in the people's hymn of praise, celebrating the wonder that God can hurl their sins into the sea in order to fulfil his covenantal promises to the patriarchs, **verses 18 - 20**. Micah did not live to see these events, a significant word of hope and faith to us.

The last three verses have striking similarities with Moses' victory song at the Red Sea. Both songs celebrate in similar terms the truth that the Lord saves Israel and vanquishes her enemies, Exodus 15: 1-21. The vanquished peoples 'tremble' and become mute. As for the Lord, he is the God who does 'wonders', shows 'unfailing love', and makes Israel his 'inheritance' Both hymns ask the rhetorical question, *Who is a God like you?*, and use the imagery of a God who throws his enemies (Egyptians and sins) into the depths of the sea. But whereas Moses' song looked back upon the Lord's victory, Micah's song looks forward in faith to an even greater wonder; that God will forgive Israel and make her universally victorious, verses 8 - 10. The faithful remnant within the city accepts the prophet's inspired interpretation of history that Jerusalem fell not by chance, cf. **1 Samuel 6:9** nor by the Lord's impotence cf. **2 Kings 18:22 - 35**, but because of the Lord's wrath against her, **verse 9**. With such a world-view misery can take on spiritual

¹ As the ship of state broke apart, first internally from corrupt officials and then externally from the Assyrian invasion, Mays (p. 157) the prophet 'does not give up and surrender to depression, but "waits", the most powerful form of action by the helpless (Psalms 38:15; 42:5, 11; 43:5; 130:5) who express in their waiting the knowledge that God comes to them in the form of salvation (Psalms 18:46; 22:5) .

meaning and lead to repentance, endurance and hope. Her hope rests on God doing what is right. If he punished Israel for wrongdoing, how much more will he punish those who have wronged his elect city and blasphemed him, verse 10. Whereas *light* in **verse 8** spoke of God as the present source of salvation, **verse 9** speaks of his future act of salvation.

The Lord's righteousness entails Israel's salvation, verses 8 - 9, and the punishment of the taunting woman, verse 10. The blasphemer will be made to blush with shame and then will be trampled upon as the mire that is trampled in the streets, never to rise again. History validated Jerusalem's faith. Where is Asshur, the patron deity of Assyria?

Verses 11 - 13. In response to Jerusalem's confession of faith, the Lord delivers a message of hope: peoples of all nations will be saved within the walls of Jerusalem (verses 11—12) while the rest of the earth will be destroyed on account of its sins (v. 13). Walls does not mean 'ramparts' but 'wall' in general, including the enclosures of and, as here, of flocks. Jerusalem's future is not one bristling with arms as in the days before its fall but is likened to a sheepfold where the faithful of all nations may seek refuge from the destruction God will visit on the rest of the earth on account of its sins, **verse 13**. The Lord will so enlarge this 'eschatological sheepfold', his divinely imposed limits on it will be so remote, that all who want salvation can find it there, **Matthew 1: 21**.

The repetition of *day*, verses 11 & 13 signifies that the three activities; the building of the enclosure, the expanding of its limits, and the coming of the peoples within it; belong together. By specific geographical expressions *from Assyria* in the northeast to *Egypt* in the southwest (the limits of Micah's world) and generally *from sea to sea* and *mountain to mountain*, the universalism of salvation is projected. The verb *come* is singular, suggesting that individual choice is involved. The prophet does not envision all peoples of all nations coming; rather individuals coming from all peoples. From Egypt to the Euphrates evokes remembrance of the Lord's oath to give Israel these borders, Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:31; Deut. 11:24 and Israel's golden age under Solomon 1 Kings 4:21, 25. The 'eschatological day' should be understood generically cf. **4:1**. It was partially realized in Micah's own day when Jerusalem emerged into the light after the darkness of the Assyrian invasion, note *now* in verse 10, to which the *day* in verses 11 & 12 is connected; it found a further fulfilment in the restoration from exile, and finds its fullest historical fulfilment today as the elect from all nations come to the sanctuary of the heavenly Jerusalem, **Hebrews 12:22 - 24**; cf. John 17:2; Acts. 3:25; 2 Corinthians 6:2.

Verses 14 - 17. In response to the oracle promising salvation to the elect, the prophet responds in prayer. *Shepherd*, a common figure in the ancient Near East for an ideal king, depicts an inward spiritual relationship of love and trust between king and people, outward protection and provision. *Inheritance* metaphorically signifies their permanent position by virtue of ancient right. *Pasturelands* or Carmel (see NIV mg.) suggests a garden-like forest, a place fit for the King's sheep to live. *Bashan and Gilead* evoke both the memory that Moses at the beginning of Israel's history gave Israel these lands by mighty wonders, note *as in days long ago*, and the desire for their famous pastures and fertile lands.

Verse 15; the Lord, using the first person, interrupts the petition and promises to show Israel in the future such salvation-wonders as when he smote the first-born of Egypt, provided a way through the Red Sea and Jordan river, preserved them in the wilderness and overthrew numerous nations mightier than they. Israel saw that same outstretched arm when the Lord miraculously smote Sennacherib's army at Jerusalem's gates; again when Cyrus commanded that the exiles be restored and their Temple rebuilt; and, above all, when the Lord Jesus vanquished death and Satan in his death and resurrection. Micah responds to the oracle with a meditation: the nations will be *ashamed, vanquished, dumb and deaf* and in *turn in fear to the Lord*. Verses 16 and 17 link closely with verse 10, but widen the humiliated enemy from one (Assyria) to all nations. In **verse 10** Assyria fell in defeat, here the nations renounce their power and pride. *Laying their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf* signifies their humiliation: they themselves will no longer either taunt Israel as the rival did in verse 10, or listen to the vain boasts of others. *Lick dust*, from other parts of Scripture, **Genesis 3:14**; **Psalm 44:25**, and in many reliefs from the ancient Near East, depicts the vanquished kings grovelling before their conqueror. Confronted with the Lord's power, they realize their impotence and prepare to move out of their old strongholds to worship the Lord. The Lord so utterly vanquished Satan and death in the resurrection of Christ that nations today also learn to fear him.

Verses 18 – 20: the opening line of the hymn of praise that concludes his song of victory put into the mouth of the faithful remnant who will survive the Assyrian onslaught. No God compares to the Lord in pardoning sin. If God had lacked that quality, Micah's ministry would have been pointless. Of what value would his oracles of reproach have been if God stayed angry forever? He would have had the satisfaction of venting his spleen, but the people would have become hardened in sin and despair, **Psalm 130:3- 4**. Because God is merciful, he offers hope to the repentant, from whom a new age can be born. Because God cannot lie, there will always be a repentant remnant comprising his inheritance even until the end of history, Romans 9 - 11.

Over against the pile of words for their sin; sin, transgression, iniquities, the people heap up God's benevolent attributes and ways: pardons, forgives, does not stay angry, has compassion, delights to show mercy, will be true, the last four of which are found in the great confession at the time of Israel's sin (the new stone tablets) Exodus 34:6. That ancient creed guarantees each generation of the faithful that God will keep his promise to the fathers and not terminate Israel's history in a cul-de-sac.

Verse 18 founded the cause of Israel's blessed prospect in God's attribute of forgiveness; **verse 19** presents the consequence, their sins will be removed. As God began Israel on her journey by hurling the Egyptians into the Red Sea, so he will restore them on their pilgrimage and hurl all their iniquities into the depths. As God kept his promise to Abraham in the age of Moses and Joshua by bringing Israel up out of the bondage of Egypt and into their inheritance of Canaan, so also he keeps it in Micah's time by delivering them from the hand of the Assyrian. He kept his promise to Abraham by raising Christ from the dead and by giving him a spiritual seed from all the nations of the earth, **Romans 4:17**; **Galatians 3:6 - 29**. The elect continue to count on this incomparable God in every trial.