

Minor Prophets: Micah

Introduction

Micah ministers in a hard time in which the people will refuse to hear the Lord's prophetic message to them because they're living on the blessings of yesterday. They do not see the dark future looming ahead of them. Micah lives through Ahaz's reign and endures wickedness and idol worship while seeing some restoration come through Hezekiah. He has several contemporaries for this well-documented time in which Samaria will fall to Assyria in the north and Judah will watch the preliminary wrath of God poured out on Northern Israel. And yet they will not heed the warnings of Micah and Isaiah, for in just a short time after this, they will experience the same fate of exile by Babylon.

About Micah the Prophet

We don't know much about Micah. Where many prophets list their lineage in their introduction, Micah lists his hometown of Moresheth. Moresheth is a town in the region of Gath of the Philistines. It was about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. He shares the time period with Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. Amos and Hosea were prophets to the Northern Kingdom while Micah and Isaiah prophesied to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Micah's name means "Who is like YHWH." At the end of the book in 7:18, he asks this very rhetorical question which his name is based upon. He is also mentioned in Jeremiah, with great respect, 26:18. His hometown is recorded and he is considered a prophet by Jeremiah's time. His prophecies by that time are fulfilled enough to consider him legitimate, although that may not have been the case in this time in Israel's history.

Micah in History

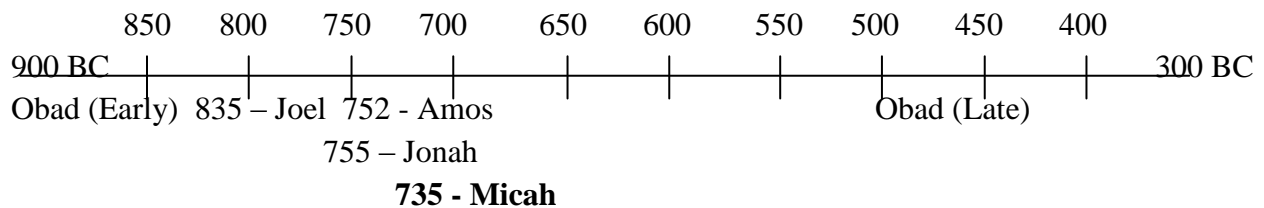
Micah mentions the reigns of three kings of Judah to date his ministry. These three kings are Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Interestingly, he does not mention the king before Jotham, Uzziah. Jotham's reign started in 750 BC and Hezekiah's reign ended in 687 BC. Because Uzziah is not mentioned, whose reign lasted until about 739 BC with some overlap between him and Jotham, We could safely date Micah's ministry from 740-687, a span of 53 years. He probably only ministered for some of that time, most suggesting about 25 years.

He ministers in a time much like Amos' time with many of the same issues, except that he ministered to Judah, which was being infected and pervaded with the same arrogance that caused social injustice in Northern Israel. Micah points out several opponents, such as land owners, political and religious leadership, and especially hits idolatry hard. While Jotham and Hezekiah were recorded as godly kings,. Ahaz was a wicked king whose reign only lasted about 12-15 years. So Micah endured the fall and restoration in a small sense of the kingdom of Judah, but it would eventually fall for good.

Historically along the lines of Micah lay the capture of the Northern Kingdom by 722 BC. The Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileaser III begins deporting the Israelites as he lays siege to the capital city of Samaria, taking it in 701 BC. Judah stands by and watches these things happen, even asking for Assyria's help during the reign of Ahaz. Micah probably writes his prophecy by 735 BC, predicting the fall of Samaria and also the birth of the Messiah in the small and unimportant town of Bethlehem.

Dates and Timelines

* I am using James Smith's Survey of the Minor Prophets as a guide.



Outline of Micah

- I. Micah rails against the evils of the civic rulers (1:1-2:13).
 - A. Micah describes the situations of both capital cities of Judah and Israel (1:1-10).
 - B. Micah travels through the land warning cities against action (11:1-16).
 - C. The Lord mourns over the wickedness of landowners and politicians (2:1-5).
 - D. The Lord mourns over the sad state of religious affairs (2:6-13).
- II. Micah rails against the religious leaders and their falsities (3:1-12).
 - A. The prophet speaks against the heads of the people (3:1-4).
 - B. The prophet speaks against the false prophets among the people (3:5-8).
 - C. The prophet returns to words against the heads of the people (3:9-12).
- III. Micah preaches restoration and hope for Israel (4:1-5:15).
 - A. The Mountain of the Lord (Zion) establishes foundations of faith (4:1-5).
 - B. The Lord will rescue Zion from its enemies (4:6-13).
 - C. The Messiah will arise to deliver Zion (5:1-6).
 - D. The remnant will be delivered by the Messiah (5:7-15).
- IV. Micah delivers the formal indictment (6:1-16).
 - A. The Lord pleads with His people to repent and do justice (6:1-8).
 - B. The Lord will destroy the wicked before the righteous (6:9-16).
- V. Micah encourages Israel to stand fast in the salvation of the Lord (7:1-20).
 - A. The dangers of living in the time of wickedness are numerous (7:1-7).
 - B. The righteous must look to the coming vindication of the Lord (7:9-17).
 - C. Micah prays a prayer of hope for the righteous (7:18-20).

The Prophetic Message of Micah

Chapter 1

1:1 The word of the Lord which was unto Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

We are introduced to the prophet in a different way than most prophets introduced themselves. And he lives in one of the most infamous times in all of history, the time of struggle between the divided houses of Israel in the north and Judah in the south in which they fought against the impending doom of exile as a result of their sins against the Lord. As is common for most, he refers to the word of the Lord that was given to him concerning specific situations in which he was living. The fact that it is from the Lord calls upon the authority of the Lord to back the message Micah will speak.

Micah unusually introduces himself by his hometown rather than his lineage. He is from Moresheth, a town in the area of Philistian Gath. There is a suggestion by several scholars that may have merit and explain why he uses hometown instead of lineage. He might be better known for his place of origin than his family of origin. Jeremiah refers to Micah in Jeremiah 26:18 as he is speaking to the council. Some believe that Micah may have been on the council, and would be known for the town he could have represented. But even Jeremiah in quoting his prophecy assures us by Jeremiah's time, Micah was considered a prophet from the Lord.

Micah also describes three reigns of three different kings in his time. This is because Ahaz, the middle king, only lasted about 12-15 years, so it was easy for him to catch the tail end of Jotham's reign, watch the kingdom of Judah start to fall apart under Ahaz, and watch restoration begin to take place in the beginning of Hezekiah's reign. Uzziah is not mentioned as in Isaiah 6, so Micah, although a contemporary of Isaiah speaking to the same nation of Judah, may have come on the scene shortly after Isaiah had begun his formal prophetic ministry.

Generally speaking, the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell about 135 years before the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The reason most will give for this occurrence is that the attack logistically was from the north and Judah had more time to prepare for the coming armies. But more than the simple logistics bears the fact that after the dividing of the kingdoms, the northern kingdom suffered more immoral and idolatrous kings in a shorter amount of time. So their wickedness become more brazen and more readily susceptible to God's judgment and wrath than the southern kingdom. Micah writes to the capital cities of both kingdoms.

1:2 Hear, O peoples, all of you! Listen intently, O earth, and that which fills it! Now let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.

This plural command speaking to the peoples of the earth will be used three times in the book of Micah. Many scholars use it as a marker of a new section, and this seems like a proper

practice. So we also have based part of our outline of the book upon this plural command. God speaks as He calls the people to hear the account of his indictment against Samaria and Jerusalem, the chief cities of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel respectively. Micah is unique in that his whole prophecy is based on the legal indictment form, suggesting that he might have worked in the court system of Jerusalem. He is abundantly familiar and adept in using this form.

The witnesses that Micah brings forth are all the peoples of the earth. The peoples here refers to all the nations. Everyone else is welcomed to hear the Lord's rebuke and indictment against Samaria and Jerusalem. In indicting the two chief cities, it is much like punishing the leader of a people rather than the people. The chief cities stand for the whole of the two nations. More than just the peoples of the earth, everything that fills the earth is called to hear the indictment. The whole of creation is invited!

The Lord now will pronounce His case against the Israelites. The double of adonai and YHWH is used here. The covenantal name is no mistake, for this is a breach of the covenant for sure! The Lord stands as the accuser, the plaintiff if you will. He bears witness against His own people, the Israelites. But this is not the Lord who has a mere complaint. This is not about some civic misstep. We're talking about the Lord who comes from His holy temple. This is the Lord who has dwelt with the people and is now bringing His complaint. It will be a complaint not just on one part of the society, but a spiritual, civic, and personal complaint. God's putting the people of Israel and Judah on trial for the entirety of their breach, not just one part of it.

1:3 For behold, the Lord is coming forth from His place and He will descend and tread upon the high places of the earth.

The Lord makes quite the entrance into the courtroom. He descends from His place in heaven, probably the place where He dwells, His throne. He comes down to earth. This shows His transcendence. They've angered not just anyone, but the one who has created and sustained them. He comes from a place of origin they cannot even fathom. He comes with power they cannot match on their strongest day.

It's almost the language of waking a sleeping giant. Finally the people have committed enough sin to warrant God's direct and personal presence to stand against them and bring His dispute. The next picture is of God walking on the mountains and high places, almost like someone walking on the stepping stones through a river. The idea here is that God walks where He wills and only the mountains can barely hold His presence. Mountains have a strong base foundation and yet they are being tread upon by their creator. God's coming after His people.

1:4 Then the mountains will melt under Him and the valleys will be ripped open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down from the slope.

The image of God coming for them from heaven, landing on earth and then walking to the place where they meet continues to astound their minds. The mountains God treads on melt like wax as he treads upon them. The image of fire is of interest because the Old Testament says that God is a consuming fire. He comes and the mountains, as strong a foundation as they have and as well built and solid as they are, they end up melting like wax, like a knife through butter. God's presence draws near to the courtroom and to His people. He is not coming to play canasta!

So also the valleys react to their Maker. They split open and apart like valleys that have gushing waters coursing through them. As the mountains crumble like wax, the valleys open up and are ripped open by the sheer weight of God's glory in His approach. This language will be used later in Revelation as the earth and creation react to the wrath of God. Nothing is unaffected by God's wrathful approach. Even the valleys that He does not walk upon are adversely affected.

1:5 For the transgression of Jacob, all this *happens*, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what is the high place of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?

Why is God coming for His people? Why does it seem that He is angry? The prophet gives the answer. It is because of the people's crimes against Him, to keep with the court imagery. The transgressions of the people have finally reached their full. Now a good Israelite would simply imagine that the sinfulness of the nations around Israel was the cause and target of God's wrath.

But this is not the case. It is not for the sins of the nations that God approaches. It is because of the sins of His own people! The transgressions of Jacob are the cause! It's their fault the mountains melt like wax and the valleys open up in surrender to God's vengeance. Jacob poetically lines up with Northern Israel while Israel lines up with Judah. The prophet asks rhetorical questions that will be answered before the people can respond.

What crime has Jacob committed? Well, look to the nation's capital city Samaria. This is the place where God's wrath will dwell. But Israel is not the only one that has sinned against the Lord and committed atrocities. So also Judah does not stand as the moral superior, for the next question asks of Israel's transgression. The transgression is the once-precious city of Jerusalem, the chief city of the southern kingdom.

Although it is true that Judah took longer to fully decay and for their sins to mount up on the scales of God's wrath, they are by no means innocent. They have committed a host of atrocities as well. Unfortunately, the same sins committed by the north are infecting the nation of Judah. Their king Ahaz imported much of the same practices as the northern Israel nation. The Lord comes for both, but will deal with the north faster than with the south. But both stand judged.

1:6 Then I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, for planting vineyards, and I will pour down her stones into the valley and her foundations I will uncover.

Now the Lord focuses in on the more egregious of the two nations, upon the northern kingdom of Israel and its chief city Samaria. This prophecy will come true in 701 when Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, sacks the capital city of Samaria. He begins laying siege to the region and nation in 722 BC but finally takes out the capital 21 years later. The deportation of northern Israel begins in 722, but the city takes longer to sack because it is much more fortified.

But God is the one who takes credit for Samaria's demise. He will be the one to use the armies to take the city. He will be the one who through conquest, siege and war, lays waste to the city and makes it a heap of ruins. It will be left desolate and alone in a field. That field will be used for a purpose other than containing a city. Now it will be used for harvesting grapes rather than a bustling population.

Those who take a city get to decide what to do with the spoils. They will choose not to use it as a city or to rebuild it. It will become a picture of an old and far off time where another nation controlled the land. This is the image the prophet brings about Samaria. The stones will be the rubble left behind from the siege of the city.

They will be poured down into the valley so that the city's foundational stones, the cornerstones and the strong establishment of the city will be uncovered and exposed. The city will not just be toppled, but it will be picked to the very foundation. Usually a city was toppled and then built on top of, but Samaria is going to be taken to its very core.

1:7 Then all her idols will be crushed to pieces and all her wages will be burned up with fire and all her images I will lay waste, for from the wages of a prostitute she collected and for the wages of a prostitute they will return.

First God will crush the city, literally into tiny stones and ruins. Then he will expose the city's foundations to the elements. And in this verse, He will crush the idols, the graven images carved by the people in stones and wood. These false gods become God's targets. They are part of the reason His people turned away from Him. So the false gods will be crushed as the city was crushed, literally and physically, but through the exile, God will crush the idea of idols out of the minds of the Israelites.

The word for crushed to pieces here is in the strongest possible tense in Hebrew. God is completely destructive of these idols. They will not be able to be put back together. He smashes them to smithereens! Then related to the image of idols being crushed is the payment or wage of a prostituted being burned up. At first glance you might wonder what the connection to prostitution and false gods may be.

There were different types of sacrifices and divination, as well as different cultic rituals for worship of God and of idols. God's worship was actually through obedience to the law. The sacrifices were a patch to make it possible for a holy God to remain with an unholy and unfaithful people. But foreign gods and idols of all kinds would have other ways of cultic or ritual worship. Some of them, especially the fertility gods, used temple prostitution of all sorts

for their rituals. These are the references in this verse and the connection to idols and prostitution.

God is simply saying that Israel and Samaria had made their wealth by getting involved with idols and foreign gods. They were willing to expose themselves to prostitution over His laws and sacrifices. If that is what they truly wanted, then that is what they would have, and the full consequences that went with temple prostitution.

God then returns to the former image of the idols and their created images. Idols are not even gods because they have no ability to hear or do what their people need of them. One might suggest a small chiasm pointing to the middle issue of cultic prostitution that God is highlighting by couching it between similar reasons for the destruction and judgment. Sexual sins tend to be more abrasive to humanity because they are more obvious. But the images of people giving allegiance of any kind to an idol was what sparked God's fury. So they will pay as they have been paid. They sold themselves in prostitution to these idols, so they will go into exile as a prostitute would. God's basically saying, "If these prostitutes want to go with their foreign gods, than they can go for it in exile. But they can't have the land and the foreign gods together."

1:8 On account of this, I will mourn and wail; I will walk barefoot and naked. I will make lamentation like the jackals and moan like the owl.

Now Micah speaks from his own experience and responds to the Lord's call for judgment and His approach by committing to go barefoot and naked. He will spend his ministry mourning and wailing, showing the moral and spiritual poverty of his people, also the physical poverty of his people, by going around barefoot. To be barefoot was to be desolate, and also to associate with those who mourn.

Barefoot and naked were probably not literal actions taken by the prophet. Although, we must not put it past the prophets to use extraordinary measures to not just speak the word of the Lord but live it as an example or an image. If a prophet would marry a prostitute and a prophet would cook his food over dung, then it is quite possible that Micah spent his ministry barefoot and naked. But at the very least, these were images used to convey the state of Judah.

The vivid language of this prophet's writing comes through whether or not he literally walked barefoot and naked. It's possible that he wore sackcloth around his waist and went barefoot and almost naked. Jackals make outlandishly loud noises, almost like the hyena who sounds like it is laughing.

This wailing will be something unmistakably loud and obnoxious. People will hear it for miles. He will wail and sing songs of lamentation. Another animal image is the moan of an owl or ostrich. The word in Hebrew here points to either of these exotic birds. The sound of an owl can be heard a long way in the night forest. The point of the images is that the prophet's lamenting and wailing will be readily heard and loud. It will not be loud because he is trying to broadcast it, but because of how deeply he feels the wound of God's judgment for his people.

1:9 Because her wound is incurable; yes, it has come up to Judah, it has reached up to the gate of my people – up to Jerusalem!

The wound here that is mentioned that Samaria in particular bears, could be the judgment of God that is about to fall on Samaria and the north. But it could also speak of the rebellion and sin in the nations. The fact that the prophet says the wound is incurable or sickly supports the idea that it is their sin that is the wound. And it is spreading! The sins of Samaria have filtered out through the northern kingdom and are now headed into Judah.

The sin and disobedience, the opulence of the rich and the social injustices as actions that stem from wicked character and false religion, has begun spreading like a plague in God's people. The wound is spreading. It is like a cancer that cannot be stopped. It must be burned out. It must be judged and penalized. Sin has a way of holding on. It is hard to kill.

This wound, this opulence and social injustice, has extended even to the gate of God's people in the southern kingdom. Sin is spreading in the people of God. That is why it is incurable. Once people turn themselves over to the full sin nature in them, they are fed immediate pleasure that keeps them from pleasing God. The gate was a wall of safety. Gates kept out the dangers of the outside world for a city. Sin has crept up on the gate of Jerusalem, the city of Judah. It is crouching at their door just as with Cain, and it still longs to master them. It is pictured here as a conquering army outside the gate.

1:10 In Gath, do not explain it! Do not surely weep in Beth-le-aphrah! Roll yourselves in the dust!

As we begin our journey with the prophet through the Shephalim, the hill country to the west of Jerusalem in which the Assyrians will begin to take the cities one by one in the ending of the 700s, we will notice that Micah is going to use word play to describe the destruction of the cities and the specific ways in which judgment will come to those cities from God through their enemies.

Although Micah writes around the time of 735, the city of Samaria will fall to the Assyrians, their king Sennacherib, in 722. The northern kingdom of Israel will fall completely and be exiled, while Judah will be saved from Sennacherib's complete dominance. However, he does advance down into the Shephalim between the two nations and does attempt to take Judah as well.

In fact, as you read the other prophets like Isaiah 37-39 and the Kings and Chronicles, you will see that Sennacherib took all of the cities, including Lachish, the second biggest city to Jerusalem. But at Jerusalem, he was miraculously stopped. He says in his records that he took all of these cities and then when he gets to Jerusalem, he suddenly decides to "leave Hezekiah trapped as a bird in a cage." This is his way of saying he did not sack the city of Jerusalem.

Some commentators suggest that Micah gives the order of attack for Sennacherib in the Shephalim, for all of these cities are found in that area. In verse 5, the prophet through the power

of God's Spirit has already predicted Samaria's fall. And now he will use wordplay to show the falling of these cities in Judah. By 701 BC, Samaria and Lachish have fallen, but Jerusalem is saved by God because Hezekiah the king was humble before Him. But that will not last as the nation of Judah is also devoted to the exile in 586 BC.

We start with Gath, the area of the Philistines. It is very close, a neighbor, of the cities that follow. In fact, Micah's hometown is very close to the region of Gath. The prophet says to not explain it away in Gath, the falling of the cities of the nation. They are not to rationalize what is happening, because it seems so impossible that so many cities would fall to the Assyrians so deep in the territory and so far away from their homeland. It will not make sense because the Lord is giving help to see the destruction come as part of His judgment.

Next in our tour is Beth-le-ophrah. The word play here is on the word ophrah, which sounds much like the word "dust." They are not to weep because they have allowed this destruction because of the sins they willfully committed against the Lord even in His grace. They are to roll in the dust. This is a form of mourning. They roll in the dust, weeping and wailing. It is a way of sympathizing with death, because in death, the human body decays back to the dust of which it is composed.

1:11 Pass by them, the inhabitants of Shaphir, naked and ashamed. Do not come forth, O inhabitants of Zaanan! The lamentation for Beth-ezel will seize its standing place.

Shaphir is related to the shophar, the rams horn from which the Israelites would make trumpets. These trumpets had different purposes ranging from sounding a battle cry to rejoicing and celebrating. But the tourists are to pass by those who inhabit this city. They are naked and ashamed. There is no rejoicing or charging into battle. They have been left defeated.

Next is another sure wordplay on the name of the next city. The name Zaanan sounds similar to the Hebrew verb, "come forth." He is telling the people of the city to not do what their name suggests. If they come out of hiding, they will be utterly laid waste. So he tells them to go against their character, to hide instead of be seen.

The final city in this verse is also a play on words. Beth-ezel means house or place of standing. So it is interesting that a place that is named as a foundation, or an established standing place will not stand against the enemies on the field of battle. This city will also fall into Sennacherib's hands. All that is left is to make funeral songs and laments for a city that has been leveled, has not stood in its place as its name would suggest. The fortress with a strong foundation has fallen to the enemy.

1:12 Thus the inhabitants of Maroth writhe for good because calamity has descended from the Lord to Jerusalem's gate.

The next city, Maroth, has ties in Hebrew to the word "bitter." This links up with writhing for good. The idea of writhing here suggests that they are in labor as a mother giving

birth. Other versions suggest waiting with anxiousness. They are only experiencing calamity and distress. The word for calamity here is the word for evil, but as before, I must stress that it is not referring to moral evil, but to natural evil, calamity from nature and an army at their doorstep. They are hoping as a smaller city that needs the support of Lachish and Jerusalem, seeing that they are being sieged by the Assyrian king.

They writhe hoping that good will come their way again, but they will be sorely disappointed. The calamity is coming because of their own sin which they refused to stop committing. Their economy and security lie in the protection of greater cities like Jerusalem to help them, but Jerusalem has its own problems at its own gates. There is no mistake that the calamity comes from the Lord. The Lord, the covenantal Lord, is the source of the calamity and distress for Jerusalem. He brings the judgment they deserve for the sins they refuse in their callous stubborn ways to turn from.

1:13 Bind up the chariots to the horses, inhabitants of Lachish, the beginning of sin was she to the daughter of Zion, because in you were found the transgressions of Israel.

Lachish is the other large and fortified city of the Shephalim that is close to Jerusalem. It was the other major city, that actually falls to Sennacherib while Jerusalem remained after his siege. The prophet commands the horses and chariots to be bound or harnessed. We don't know if this means for battle or for escape. Either way, this is the action Lachish will take as a city. But it will also fall to the Assyrians.

Lachish is mentioned as the first or the beginning of sin for Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion. The transgressions of Israel were found also in this city, as in every city. It's possible that the city is chosen to show what is happening in every city, the sin that has become rampant. Lachish is essentially a gateway city to Jerusalem, so this still shows the traveling of sin to pervade Jerusalem and Judah. For this same reason, God's judgment comes upon Lachish as the gateway city that allowed sin and transgression to flow to Jerusalem.

1:14 Therefore, you will give parting gifts to Moresheth-Gath, the houses of Achzib will be a deception to the kings of Israel.

Moresheth-Gath is Micah's hometown. He will personally experience the dangers of Sennacherib roaming around with his armies in the Shephalim. Moresheth sounds in Hebrew much like the word for dowry or betrothed. The dowry was a gift that would be given to a bridegroom as he married the bride and moved her away from her family. In that same way that a bride brings a gift with her, the city of Moresheth would give a dowry, a parting gift, to the armies of Sennacherib as they were exiled.

We do not exactly know where the city of Achzib is located, but its name bears a resemblance to the noun "deception." It says that the city of Achzib would deceive the kings of Israel. Perhaps they banked on Achzib not being taken in battle, but that would be a truly

harmful move to make by those kings. They may have trusted in this city. If it were deeper into their territory, they may have figured that Sennacherib would not go so deep. But they would be deceived by their own strategy.

1:15 Yet still I will bring the conqueror to you, inhabitants of Mareshah up to Adullam will the glory of Israel go.

The city of Mareshah is the only city outside of the line of attack for Sennacherib. As he moves toward Jerusalem systematically, Mareshah is enough out of the way that he would not have to attack it. However, according to this prophet and the word of the Lord being spoken through him, even cities like Mareshah will fall to the conqueror because all will suffer for their sins. Moreover, the wordplays continue as “conqueror” and “Mareshah” sound similar and have bases in the word “heir” or “one who dispossesses.” The city of heirs will have a new possessor, a new heir.

Even though these people are viewed as conquerors or heirs of the land, they will not receive it. Instead, Sennacherib will be the heir. The irony in these wordplays is unmatched in other forms of literature. The Bible truly does the best job of using grammatical and lingual devices. We have seen Adullam before in the Bible. If you remember the story of David running from Absalom you will find that he settled with his mighty men in the caves of Adullam.

Adullam is a Philistine city, just like the first city mentioned, Gath, in verse 10. Although Adullam was a harbor for David, a secure location and a base for operations, it will not be so used here. To these people who live in Mareshah, it will be a city through which they travel on their way into exile. The glory of Israel going up to Adullam means the cities of Israel will no longer be inhabited by Israelites. That’s what it means for the glory of Israel to go to Adullam and beyond.

1:16 Make yourselves bald and cut off for the children of your comfort. Enlarge your baldness like the eagle, for they will go into exile from you.

Some scholars suggest that “cut your hair off” is a better understanding of this first section of the verse. However, hair is not mentioned. One would have to rely upon the context of the verse to add that. The literal translation looks much more like what I have translated above. I only make a big deal out of this because the verb cut off has a much more intended meaning than the cutting of hair. It contains the idea of being cut off from one’s nation and people, from one’s family and origin in exile. That is what this refers to, not the cutting of hair.

The prophet uses a command to bring to light the imagery of mourning once again. As he earlier committed to walking around barefoot and naked, probably wearing sackcloth around his loins, so now he commands the rest of Israel to join him in mourning by making themselves bald, which would involve cutting their hair. Baldness was a sign of mourning, of not having even hair to cover one’s head. He commands them all the more to enlarge their baldness, making

themselves more bald than before. These two commands are given concerning the exile of their children.

The children of their comfort are those that are living in the lap of luxury, growing up with everything handed to them on a silver platter. The comfort would soon turn to desolate exile for even their children. The exile will take the children away from their parents, not just cutting them off from their nation and land and their people, but also cutting families off from one another and children from their parents. Because of Israel's sin, the exile coming would affect every person no matter what nation, city, age, or background they had. If they were from Israel, they would experience the judgment of the exile. The only thing that differed was the amount of time that would pass before the inevitable.

Chapter 2

2:1 Woe to those who plan injustice and those who practice evil upon their beds. When morning dawns, they do it, because it is in the strength of their hand.

Now Micah directly begins to preach against the injustices of the kingdoms. He speaks first to those who violate the inheritances of others by stealing their lands and homes. He speaks to the banks that foreclose. He speaks to those who covet property and houses that are not theirs and then act on their desires. This section opens with a “Woe” or “Alas” for these sharks of industry who spend their influence and wealth on stealing land.

This woe is issued to people who by night plan injustice. God will use this same word to describe His vengeance upon them in the Day of the Lord. These are people who scheme and plot, plan and devise, ways to take things that are not theirs. They also do or practice evil on their beds at night. The image here is of someone who burns the candle at both ends to devise a scheme to carry out in the morning.

When the dawn arrives, they act on their desire or coveting. They do the evil thing they have been planning. This is premeditated sin and the reason given for it happening in the land of promise is that the people can. By their own sheer determination and the strength of their hand, the ability and power to do it, they steal the lands and houses. They do it because they can. That is the only reason they give. They think they have the right to do these things because they have the power to do them.

2:2 They desire fields and snatch them, even houses and carry them off. Then they exploit a young man and his house, even a man and his inheritance.

The description the prophet gives of the evil landowners starts with their covetous desire. This is a desire that gives to them and takes away from those who rightfully own it. It is an evil desire that wills action. So we should not be surprised that the next word in Hebrew is “snatch” or “seize.” If they want it, they take it. Their desires demand the action of stealing the land. This is a quick interchange between their desire and their action.

But it’s not just empty fields or the fields of farmers that they steal. They also take houses and carry them off. The idea of carrying off here is the idea of taking out of the hands of someone else, of lifting the houses out of the possession of their proper owners. Not only this, but they would exploit the young man who had a house. They would do whatever they could if they could not own the house to oppress the owner of the house. They would steal away the youth of a young man who had bought the house.

And on the other end of the spectrum, they would take any man and they would steal or exploit that man’s inheritance, what was meant for his possession. Their greed knew no bounds. They would exploit anyone for anything they could get. They would steal anything, even an inheritance, which was the sacred possession of a man for his own livelihood.

2:3 Therefore, thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am planning against this family disaster which you cannot remove from it your necks, and you will not walk haughtily because it will be a disastrous time.

Because of this situation created by the evil landowners, the Lord responds in kind the judgment He is preparing for them. Any time you see, “Thus says the Lord,” in the prophets, it puts the full weight of God’s authority and power and assurance behind what is said next. Many of the prophets put God’s words into poetic form, and it is no different here.

Here we have a more unique form of the exclamation “Behold!” This exclamation is meant to grab the attention of these landowners who are so lulled into false security by their vast accumulation of lands that they might think the Lord will not come after them. But He is indeed on their heels. The same word used earlier for devising evil schemes God uses here when He tells them He plans calamity or disaster for their families. The word “plan” and “disaster” are the same as what they had done on their beds against others.

God’s way of punishing is sometimes revenge. He does exactly what the people have done to others. It’s like the Pretender, but on a cosmic and divine scale. He puts the perpetrator in the shoes of the violated and makes them live out the helplessness of their victims. But He greatly ratchets up the resulting pain and helplessness, punitively teaching them the full extent of the consequence of evil.

Not only does the Lord plan against the perpetrator disaster, but against the whole family of the perpetrator. He takes it to the next level. The evildoer does not even remotely get a free pass. He will watch others suffer for the evil he has done, others he loves. The innocent on his side of evil will experience what they don’t deserve as part of his punishment. This disaster will not be something he can get himself or others in his family out of.

They will be helpless to stop the disaster from happening to them. Their necks are on the chopping block and they cannot do anything in their power to remove themselves or escape. While they would do evil just because they had the power and ability, they will find themselves powerless now under God’s judgment.

In this time of judgment, the evil landowner will not walk as he does in the streets now when he steals land and houses. Where he struts his stuff now he will not walk that way later when the Lord rains down His judgment because the time will be a time of disaster in which the man will be too busy trying to free himself from judgment that he will not have time to walk haughtily. He will be brought low whether he wants it or likes it.

2:4 “In that day they will take up against you a taunting proverb, and lamenting, you will surely lament, saying, ‘We are violently devastated! He changes the portion of my people! How he withdraws from us; to an apostate he divides up our fields!’

The words “That day” usually connote the Day of the Lord in the prophets. The phrase directly refers to the day where God begins to judge the evil landowner for his evil deeds and thoughts, for his premeditated stealing of people’s lands and houses. That day, is the day of judgment and vengeance, the day of reckoning and consequences.

The people whose houses and lands were stolen out from under them will take up a taunt against the evil landowners. The social tables will be reversed. The taunting song will be a proverb, a saying that shames the evil landowners. Shame was a powerful motivator in the culture of the Near East. It still is today.

As the victims of these attacks taunt them with sayings and proverbs, the landowners will cry out and lament. Lamentations are songs that are sung like funeral dirges. Extremely unusual in this passage is the triple use of the word for lament! In Hebrew, one may use a verb or its cognate twice to place emphasis. This is usually translated as an intensive action, like “surely do something.” But here, the word lament is used thrice, giving it one of the strongest possible connotations it could have in the language. These landowners can’t possibly fathom how devastated they will be and how much they will lament this situation the Lord is devising for them.

The evil landowners respond to the shame and to the taunting, to the Lord’s punishment with lamenting. The lament they present uses another construction like the one mentioned above where the same two verbs are used to intensify the action. The word for devastated is used in this manner so that they are surely devastated or “violently devastated.” The devastation is twice what they could have expected or handled.

They react by complaining that the Lord has stolen their land and houses and changed their portions and the portions of His own people. They will lament that they have had done to them what they did to others. The portions are not as they were when the evil landowners owned so much. Now they will own nothing. The Lord takes a withdrawal of land from the landowners and deposits it with unbelievers.

This is what they are so incensed about. God is giving the land of the promise to those who were not promised that land, which is what they were doing to those who had the land as an inheritance. Their problem and shame come in the fact that the land is not even owned again by God’s people, but rather by apostates or those who are faithless and fall away. Their fields are divided up among those who least deserve them. This is a picture of the deportation and exile. They used to enjoy dividing up land, but now it was for someone else to divide up their former possessions.

2:5 Therefore, there will not be *anything* for you to cast the cord by lot in the assembly of the Lord.

For these reasons listed, that the Lord will re-apportion the portions of the land, dividing them up amongst the nations and apostates that take the land through conquest, these landowners will have nothing to bargain with. How they must have loved to come into the assembly and

present their vast holdings. Now, they will have no holdings to bargain with at all. The language of casting the cord is the language of dividing up the territory. They would divide up the land by cutting its corners and borders.

But in this verse, we see the result of the Lord which is worse for the landowners. Worse than anything else is not having the land as a bargaining chip so that they can cast lots and play the game of chance. The assembly of the Lord here does not refer to a sacred or spiritual assembly but the gathering of the people in civic matters.

2:6 “Don’t foam at the mouth!” they preach. “Don’t foam at the mouth these things! Disgrace will not overtake us.

Verse 6 and part of verse 7 is the response of the false prophets that are speaking out against Isaiah and Micah and Amos and any other true prophets of God. They were false weathermen. They were telling the people lies and saying that the people were experiencing God’s blessing, that the violence of the Day of the Lord and the vengeance of God’s punitive and retributive judgment would not come to Israel or Judah.

The word here that is used for preaching or prophesying we have seen in Amos when these same groups of false prophets claimed that he was “foaming at the mouth” or “driveling” in his ecstatic prophetic utterances. This word is a technical term for prophecy, however, it is being used here as a jab at the true man of God, sarcastic satire of his office and ministry as a prophet of the Lord. It can be translated, prophesy ecstatically, foam at the mouth, preach.

The word for preach is being used by the false prophets who “preach” against the true prophets. I tried to connote this by translating the word that shows up three times in this vers as foam at the mouth in their quotes against the true prophets and the professional term for preaching or prophesying for the false teachers, since this verse is them speaking from their perspective.

The false prophets are demanding, just like the priest of Bethel, that the true prophets stop preaching about the judgment of God in an age of Israel’s blessing. That’s what they refer to as they say, “These things.” They don’t want to hear about the prophets preaching doom and gloom, those naysayers and fire and brimstone guys. God’s only concerned with loving His children. He does not chastise them! He won’t disgrace His own children who so dearly love Him. This is their view.

2:7 “ ‘Is this said, O house of Jacob? Is the Spirit of the Lord displeased? Are these His deeds?’ “Do My words not do good to the one who walks straight?”

The false prophets continue to speak and present their false view that God does not discipline His children when they ask Israel, almost like a used car salesman, if God would possibly be displeased with their actions. Would a loving God dare to do any violence to the Israelites? Their answer is an emphatic no.

They mention the Spirit of the Lord here. That is interesting because later they will be called men who preach with wind and lies. Wind and spirit are the same word in Hebrew. Is God the one who does injustice to His own people? Who would ever say that exile would be God's desire or deed? This is the view the false prophets have forced upon the people of Israel and Judah.

And who would you imagine the people will go with: the sweet-talking false prophets or the hard-hitting true prophets who warn and mourn the people's situation? If history is any indicator, they will listen to false prophets. There was a king in the Old Testament who made the same mistake. He said of one prophet that he did not like him because he always prophesied bad things about him (1 Kings 22:8). People do not like to hear the truth when they can listen to sweeter falsehood. They would rather stick their heads in the sand.

Right after this the Lord replies immediately to their claims. He responds by asking them a rhetorical question of His own. He asks if His counsel has ever led them down the wrong path. He asks this because they are certainly not on the right path. His words speak life and hope and goodness into their lives. When they walk the straight road of wisdom from God, they never falter or turn to the right or the left. Has God ever steered you wrong when you heard from Him and interpreted His message the way He intended?

2:8 “Yet recently My people have risen up as an enemy against Me. You strip the mantle of splendor from passersby in safety returning from war.”

Literally, the Lord says, “Yet only yesterday” but this is understood as recently or lately. God points to what they have done, their own deeds. In His word to counter the arguments of false prophets, He points to the deeds of the people that do not square up with the straight and narrow of His Law and expectations.

The Lord declares that He is not the one who has initiated the cessation of peace between Himself and His people. He lays the blame for the breach in relationship upon the sins of the people that have brought Him to wrath. The people have made themselves enemies of God. He is merely carrying out the results of their choices against Him. This is His response to their questions asking if He would ever chastise or disgrace His children. His answer is that they have earned the disgrace He brings by not following His covenant and laws.

Then He speaks directly to the people and charges them with some of their faults. This is part of the formal legal proceedings that Micah excels in using. One of the charges is as follows, that the people will readily steal the cloak or mantle of a refugee warrior returning from war. He has a mantle of splendor on that they take, making him a rich noble. They steal from the rich. The evil deed is in the passerby mistaking their land for a safe land where he will not be taken advantage of. They take advantage of the innocent man. They also steal his wealth, which is viewed as a sin to God. Perhaps we should not distribute wealth in our country in the manner in which we are doing so.

We don't know the full situation of this man. He could have been returning from war that he fought for the people of Israel. he could have been a refugee looking for a safe and secure place to go. Either way, the Lord counts this against the people, that they would take advantage of a noble or rich man and steal what is not theirs, violating his feeling of safety.

2:9 “The women of my people you drive out from their luxurious houses. Away from their young children you seize My splendor forever.

The Lord continues His diatribe against the men of Israel as He states more offenses. The land owners in a desire to gain more wealth and land not only steal from the refugee who is a noble man and possibly rich, but they also offend the women and children. They steal women's homes from them.

These homes are the luxurious ones, perhaps like the ones Amos spoke of. Instead of the foreigners from Assyria getting these homes, the women were evicted by land owners of ill repute. They separate families and pull mothers away from their young. The word for young children here implies that they may be young enough to still be weaned from the mothers or they may be formative toddlers. Either way, the evil land owners are willing to break up families and offend visitors and sojourners for the profits of wealth and land.

2:10 “Arise and walk away, for this is not the resting place, because she is unclean, she corrupts with a harming destruction.

There are several interpretations of whom the Lord is speaking to in this verse. The most common group is the evil land owners of the previous section and in verse 8. Scholars who subscribe to this view point to the similarity in the verbs of verses 8 and 10 in the word “arise.” However, their suggestion that the verbs create a link is only one possibility. The verb in 8 is much different from the verb in 10 because the one in 10 is a command. Also, the audience of the verb in verse 8 is not specifically the evil land owners. It is more the people of God as a whole. The charge is made of the entire house of Jacob, not just the evil land owners.

I suggest a different interpretation. can be reached for the audience of this verse's comments. While it could be speaking to evil land owners, telling them to leave the newly acquired houses because they will be exiled, I would suggest that God here is talking to those who have been taken advantage of by the evil land owners. For instance, the resting place, a place of security, would be exactly what the sojourning nobleman who was returning from war would have sought.

After being robbed of his mantle of splendor, he could well attest to the uncleanness, corruption, and harmful destruction of the nations of Israel and Judah. The women who were kicked out of their homes and separated from their families would very much understand that they could not stay in this land and find rest here, for this land they were taken from. I am not

saying I am in correct in this matter, but I believe it's a possibility that God might have been speaking to this audience rather than the evil land owners.

I would much rather support the fact that God is responding to false prophets among the people of Israel and that if anyone, he is speaking to the whole people rather than one segment of the people. The only problem with my theory is that it is not supported by lesser scholars, in this case the world. But they're all fuddy-duds anyway. Ok, just kidding. The only issue with my interpretation is that it cuts up the audience hearing from the Lord unless the people who have been violated by the evil land owners are present to hear this message. Just something to consider.

The two commands "Arise" and "Go" speak to the ones who have been violated by the wickedness of God's people Israel. They have no problem leaving a place where they have gotten kicked out of their homes or had their cloaks stolen. Next, the reason is given for getting up and leaving the land and the people of the Lord. The land and people have become unclean according to the laws laid down through Moses. They are also corrupt and headed for destruction. They're end is near, so why go down with the people who harmed you?

2:11 "Oh that a man would deceive by wind and lies, 'I will preach to you concerning wine and beer,' then he would be a preacher to this people!"

The Bible is so wide in its literary genius. Here we can see out of the mouth of God sarcasm concerning the people He once loved and is now vengefully angry with. Their cold reaction to His warnings and wooing of love has caused God to take a different approach. Their false prophets do not speak for Him. They misrepresent Him.

So we find in the Lord's words a biting sarcasm rather than words of hope because the people of Israel have made hope impossible. The first word is out of sheer exasperation. "Oh I wish that a man would deceive you!" The Lord longs for someone to lead the people astray as these false prophets are doing, lulling them into a false hope that God would never react in the way the true prophets are warning.

The false prophets deceive with wind and lies. The word wind here is the same as spirit, earlier in the text. The word wind here refers to just puffing air. In other words, nothing they say is substantial or has any authority behind it. Beyond this point, the source of their message is not God, but a deceiver. Jesus says about Satan that he has been deceiving from the beginning, calling him the Father of Lies.

God sarcastically says that the people are at the point of hardness to His Spirit that if some guy came around preaching about the finer points of wine and beer, strong drink and liquor, the people would more readily accept that prophet and his message rather than the prophets He has been sending. Paul talks about this happening in the last days, when people would rather have their ears tickled by favorite unbiblical doctrines being preached than the Word of God being delivered.

The people of God no longer care about the passions of His own heart. They have turned to their own desires. God sees no connection with His people whom He has chosen anymore. He might as well send a preacher of the things that delude their consciences and take over their mind through altering drugs like alcohol. They would listen to that preacher and they would do no worse than they are already doing to hasten His wrath upon them. Who said God can't do sarcasm? The word for preacher here once again is the word used earlier of professional prophets that "foam at the mouth" ecstatically proclaiming God's heart to His people.

2:12 "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob. I will surely collect the remnant of Israel. I will fix them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture, a rambunctious mass of men."

Now we will still get a picture of hope from the Lord. He promises that He will assemble the remnant. The poetics here can be seen in some English translations. The words for gather in the first phrase and collect in the second phrase are different words, but they are synonyms. They essentially mean the same thing.

God promises that in the future at some point, He will gather together all of Jacob. Jacob was the third of the patriarchs who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. You could take this one of two ways. Either God would gather the whole people (all the people) of Israel or God would gather from each of the tribes of Israel (all the tribes that make up Jacob). The second statement hones in a little on the remnant of Israel rather than the whole of Israel. I believe God was saying that all the tribes of Israel would be represented in this event through the remnant.

The third phrase uses the verb "to set or place." I have translated it "fix" to agree with the idea that God is in control of the masses, arranging things His way, for that is the full meaning of this verb. God will bring them into unity as they stand at the gates ready to burst forth as a great army. The image here is of the people of Israel fighting with the help of the Messiah, the divine warrior, as we will see in verse 13.

The imagery is spectacular as God points to the uniting and gathering of the nation for one purpose. It will be like sheep in a fold, all together instead of scattered among the pastures, among the nations of the world. And they will be at peace, doing what they love to do, like a flock in the pasture grazing. The diversity is not lost as the mass of men will be rambunctious, almost confusion overwhelming as a roar rises from the crowd. This word is hard to translate because it means a noisy bunch, not necessarily from confusion, although it can be understood as confusion. But there is a uniting of diversity to fight a battle here, as an army prepares, each soldier in his own way. Some shout, some pray, some set their feet and refuse to give up ground. But all of these different ways are brought together.

2:13 "The one who breaks through the breach ascends before them. They break through and pass by the gate and go out through it. Then their King passes by in front of them and the Lord is at their head."

Now we have the image of the people, the massive army, moving in unity from the city guided by its King, the Messiah. We don't know who the first one to break through the breach is. It would probably be the king. It's unusual to see the army going through a breach in the wall rather than through the gate. Some of them apparently go through the gate, but others through the breach. Perhaps the army is so massive in number that it goes through both to follow its King into battle.

The King heads up the army into battle. In different cultures, the king is in different places. IN some, the king is at the back of the lines, being protected by the army and not involved at all. Some kings sit far off enough to call the shots in military tactics and command their military without the threat of capture. Others head the army because they are not afraid of being captured. When we see Jesus in Revelation, He is heading up the army and not even dressed in army garb because He is indestructible.

The Lord also is at the head. You could interpret this two different ways. The first is that the Lord is at the head of the whole army, that the King is following the Lord and the army is following the king. The other way is to see the king as the Messiah Jesus and call Him the Lord who passes before the people and heads the army of God's people into battle. Either way, this is the image being produced here, that God is the divine warrior leading His people into unity for the cause of the battle.

Chapter 3

3:1 Then I said, “Please hear, O heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel! Is it not for you to know justice?”

Chapter three opens up the next section of Micah. In this new section Micah begins by turning from wicked land owners who steal the goods of the poor to evil civil and government officials. We know this is a section break because it is the second time we hear the plural “Hear!” command. Micah adds a word usually translated as please. It is a pleading, a demanding to be heard. They must not continue to ignore the word of the Lord from His prophet.

Micah now speaks directly to the heads and rulers of all Israel. He uses both synonyms to speak to the people by using both Israel and Jacob. The word for head here is the same word that is used of the beginning or the primary one. These are the people who are the top dogs in Israel’s political scene. He then calls on those who work the civil laws, the magistrates and the governors of smaller parts of the country.

Then he asks a rhetorical question that demands a “no” answer. But the sad part about this reality is that it should easily be a “yes” answer. These leaders who deal with the day to day justices of the people, judging and ruling in supposed fairness and godliness are wicked and backwards. They have flipped on it’s head the notion of justice in Israel and Judah. It is almost in exasperation that this question comes, as if the prophet is asking how they have gotten so turned around. The word “know” here expresses intimate knowledge. Do you not know well the justice you should be dueling out to the people? The prophet is surprised there is no standard of justice left in Israel. Or is there a standard rather based on wickedness instead of justice?

3:2 “you who hate good and love evil, you who tear the skin off My people and off their bones,

The next two verses speak of the rulers and heads of the people, describing their actions in a rather disturbing manner. The prophets have never been known to be short on ruthless and vivid imagery, and we will see that talent for expressing injustice in a way that makes it sound and look as putrid as it is. First, Micah comments on how evil has become the new standard of good.

No longer are just judgments made in the favor of the right person. Instead, the wickedness and evil that pervades the hearts of the rulers comes through in their judgments. They make judgments based on a new scale, the scale of evil. They have turned from loving the good that comes from God to hating His justice. They have decided now to instead judge and rule by evil instead of good.

Micah will become a bit more graphic in this verse, and extremely graphic in the next. Hide your kids because this is going to get a bit ugly to show just how perverted the justice

system has become in Micah's time. And if we are right about his being a member of the royal court, he's personally involved in the rebuke of the new evil justice system.

The rulers and authorities by their unjust judgments are tearing the skin off the people's bones. They are violating their livelihood and tearing them to the core. This is just the beginning of the analogy here of what a hunter does to his prey after catching it, but we are to understand this happening to living human beings, not dead ones. The idea is that injustice to the poor and those who seek true justice feels just like being skinned alive.

3:3 “even who eat the flesh of My people and flay their skin off them and shatter their bones and chop them up like meat in a pot, even like flesh in a cauldron.

The prophet goes on in the analogy from merely skinning a person alive to complete cannibalism. He is literally charging the rulers with eating their own people through their actions. He spares no imagery here as he speaks of the continued hunt. After skinning the people alive, he even goes into greater detail. He says that the rulers and judges eat the flesh of the people. It is not just that they skin the people alive now. They are cannibals, eating the flesh of God's people.

He gives a method of flaying the skin, which is to separate it from the meat of the bones like peeling a fruit. Then they have shattered the bones of the people, cutting them down and grinding them up, chopping them like meat to cook in a pot. The crushing and grinding are emphasized here of the bones of the people. The idea is that the rulers with their leadership are cannibalizing their own constituents.

As with the hunter who eats his prey, the rulers have not wasted any part of the people. They have eaten the flesh and the meat and ground up their bones. There is nothing left of the people. The agony of being eaten alive in this manner, dying from the sheer and excruciating pain of being flayed and chopped up alive, would leave the people dead and then they would be cooked in the pots and cauldrons.

To be sure, this is a very vivid image, but it is a poetic image. We must not see the leaders as actually being cannibals in practice. The point of the prophet is that they are killing the people in the worst and most inhumane way through their judgments and rulings.

3:4 “Then they will cry out to the Lord but He will not answer them. Then He will hide His face from them at that time, because evil are their deeds.”

In their agony and pain, the people cry out to the Lord, begging Him for help and summoning His justice. But they will not receive it. Micah tells them that the Lord will hide His face from them. They will receive the silent treatment like a scorned lover who turns away in disgust and will not answer the prodding of the adulterer.

The Lord will not come to their rescue because their punishment, even if by the hands of fellow Israelites, There is a time stamp on God's refusal to help His people. At that time

probably refers to the time of the judgment for Judah when they will go into exile. They will not be rescued from the unjust judgments of their fellow countrymen or from exile.

They have wasted God's grace and continued to do evil in His sight. He will turn away from them, abandon them to consequences of their evil deeds. Part of God's judgment is to allow the evil that even His people take part in to bear its full consequence in their lives. We must be careful even as God's people to please Him at all times. Sin still has consequence for the believer. When we get involved in sin after we are saved, that does not mean God will always pour out His mercy and keep the kid gloves on. Let's not play with sin at all!

3:5 Thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who lead My people into error when they bite with their teeth and cry "Peace!" but for the one who puts nothing in their mouths they prepare for holy war against him:

Common to the prophets is the phrase, "Thus says the Lord." This is a phrase used to emphasize that the Lord has a message and puts the weight of His authority behind it. But it is spoken through the human prophet's lips. Micah receives a word from the Lord about the false prophets. This would not seem to fit in this section except that the middle of the chapter, verses 5-8 are concerned with the prophets as they pertain to the rulers and heads of state.

In the times of Israel the kings and rulers would look to the prophets for spiritual guidance and wisdom. If they are listening to false prophets, they will rule unjustly. These false prophets have been sending a fake message to the rulers. So they as spiritual leaders and prophetic voices must also be dealt with for their lies and leading the people astray.

One of the core principles about the prophetic ministry is to observe the lifestyle of the prophet. When a prophet speaks, Moses said that the people must, in the case of predictive prophecy, see if the prediction comes true. Another core principle about prophets is to weigh their message against Scripture. If it disagrees on any level, it is not from God.

Now the prophet could predict through the authority of the Lord events to occur in the future. That's what made them God's prophets. But often we are so enthused by this part of prophecy that we forget what prophetic ministry is majorly concerned with. More than predicting future events was the prophet's ability to approach the sins of a nation or person and depict the right course of action to once again be righteous and holy before God. They dealt in the real issues of their day, wedding the situation that was with the situation that should be, and showing action steps to get there.

These false prophets didn't meet the first criterion for prophets of God. When Micah observed their lifestyle and God makes mention of it in this verse, it smacks of both hypocrisy and bribery. These false prophets would prophecy peace and wholeness when they were well-fed, when bribes of food came to their mouths and stomachs.

Anyone who was on their good side and kept them happy and gave them what they wanted would receive the desired message, that God was okay with them and they were okay with God. But the moment that a person neglected these false prophet's desires, not giving them

the food they wanted or keeping a bribe from them, they would go to war against that person. All a king would have to do is bribe them for a desired word from the Lord rather than what the Lord was actually saying.

The words for go to war here connote the idea of a holy war being prepared for. The prophets would use their platform as prophets to roast whoever they did not like. They used their profession as a way to gain power over anyone who sought out a good word rather than a word from the Lord. Now to be sure, God was not always chiding His children through the prophets. In fact, even in the judgment there is hope!

But these prophets were reporting peace where there was not peace, all for some food. The holy war they unleashed would be through words that killed the target's reputation. This is probably what they were doing to Micah and the other true prophets in his time.

The Church is a prophetic organization for Christ in our world today. When we get involved in scruples over politics, economy, etc. When we give in to worldviews and cultural fads that do not represent Christ, we are at the same time giving up our connection with God and our right to speak to the nations concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must be able to speak the word of God to the world without our lifestyle or character being questioned. We must be different to be salt to this world. Character and lifestyle counts when it comes to being used by God to speak for Him. When people look at our lives, they don't want to be part of something that seems all too familiar to their own messed up and disorganized lives. They need a fresh light of revelation from God in us! True power comes from preaching and teaching rooted in the holiness of the Lord. We lose that power when we settle for less than the holiness and grace of Jesus. Can people make you sing a different tune for a certain bribe? Do you have your price? Would you not obey the Spirit and speak to an issue if your job depended on it?

3:6 “Therefore, it will be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. Then the sun will go down on the prophets and the day will be dark over them.

Now it is unclear if that last verse was a preamble to the words of God spoken directly to these false prophets and to the rulers and leaders whose ear they could readily corrupt or if it is a message to the leadership of Israel and the whole of the nation. We will mention both of these groups as we speak of what the Lord declares in these two verses.

Because the prophets are false and accept bribes, and we might add because the leadership is corrupt and morally bankrupt and backwards, the Lord then says that the result is that He will not just hide His face from the people when they are being abused by either their own leadership or their enemies, but He will also not speak to the leadership of their nation! God is going to take His wisdom and His prophets away from the leaders. They will lead in the dark, groping on their own, suffering the results of leading the nation where they think is best rather than knowing it is where God wants them to lead the nation.

Worse than any other judgment, even the judgment of exile, is to be removed from hearing from the Lord. His word and His will will be absent from the people and the nation. He will no longer speak to the nation's prophets and they will lose the ability to speak for Him. He will give the nation the silent treatment because it will not listen now.

This silence and absence is described in an often used biblical image of darkness and night. Prophecy is like revelation; it lights up the understanding of the mind and heart. But God will be silent and it will be like night. The nation will suffer through groping around on its own, not hearing from the Lord. It will bump into circumstances like we bump into coffee tables in the dark. It will use only human reason and will suffer much without God's guidance.

The prophets will no longer provide vision to see where to go in the darkness. The light passes away from them. They stumble in the darkness alone. God's worst judgment is to be without Him and His presence and His Word! They will not know the mind of the Lord. The preaching and prophesying of the prophets will be devoid of God's presence, His power, and His words. They will speak as "blind guides," as Jesus calls the religious leadership of His day.

The sun going down on the prophets is a referendum on their own silence. They cannot speak for God if God is not speaking to His people. There will be a period of darkness as far as prophecy goes for a while. In fact, from the time of the last prophet, Malachi, to the time of John the Baptist, around 430 years!

3:7 "Then the seers will be put to shame and the diviners will be put to shame. Then they shall all cover their lips because there is no answer from God."

Two technical terms are used for prophetic ministry here. The first is "seer." This is a term we see very early on in the prophetic ministry during the times of Samuel and Saul. But later they are called navi'im, the word for prophet. Another form of predicting God's will was through something called divination. This was a method of discovering the Lord's will through cutting open an animal and observing the different layouts of its innards. We know that pagan prophets did this, but I am not so sure that any of Israel's prophets would have used such a method. God could simply tell them His will.

All who are in the prophetic ministry will no longer have a fresh word from the Lord for Israel. Perhaps diviners are mentioned because Israel may be tempted to turn to pagan prophets when their prophets are silent. Either way, they will be all put to shame and will not be able to carry out their ministries because God is not speaking through them. The people did not want to hear from the Lord, so He will quit talking, for a very long time.

The prophets won't even try to speak anymore after a certain point. Everyone will know they have nothing to say. They will cover their lips, whether with a hand or simply go into their own sort of exile. They will have no answer from God. Things will happen and especially these false prophets will be as surprised by these horrid events as the masses. I believe there might have even been a sense of understanding that they were fakes and charlatans, if they didn't already know it.

The sad thing about belief is that a person can convince themselves even when dead wrong that they are hearing from the Lord. Perhaps, though, these prophets knew that they were violating the office of the prophet. Either way, they will have no answer from God when the exile and the enemy come because they never heard from God to begin with.

3:8 But on the other hand, I am filled with the power of the Spirit of the Lord, and justice and strength, to declare to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin.

The words of the Lord end in verse 7 and Micah speaks for himself in this verse. We know this because he uses the emphatic pronoun in referring to himself. He contrasts his own ministry with the ministries of these false prophets. While they sit in their big houses and take bribes and eat themselves into obesity and speak peace to their friends and war to their enemies, Micah has not been corrupted by such a lifestyle.

He stands in stark contrast to the false prophets. He has power from the Spirit of the Lord when he speaks. The people listen to him because they know he will tell them the word from the Lord, whether it is encouragement or challenge. Whatever God has to say, He demonstrates the power of His words through the prophet's life and mouth. Micah is a true prophet in his time, serving the people of God by speaking for the Lord.

He speaks words that are not just powerful, but words that strengthen and themselves have the strength needed to change people's hearts and minds. He speaks with just words that neither condemn the innocent nor free the guilty. He readily and humbly declares the word of the Lord to the leadership, unlike the others. He speaks to Israel about its sin and transgression, its criminal acts against the Lord and its missing the mark. He speaks the truth in love.

3:9 Please hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who loathe justice and twist all that is straight,

Once again we see the second person plural command "Hear!" with the same word for please or begging the people, especially leaders, to listen. There is a sense of immediacy and urgency in the message of Micah for this chapter. The charges begin to pile up. The people's sins have sent them overboard into legal debt.

Once again, the command to hear the word of the Lord is directed to the heads of state and rulers of Israel. They are the audience of this prophecy. The two houses mentioned here are synonymous. Then the descriptor turns to the rulers and leaders, saying that they loathe, despise, hate with a passion justice. Those who judge and enforce the laws hate being just! That's the wrong kind of job for these folks because the rulers and leaders are the ones entrusted to love justice and enjoy seeing it carried out.

Not only do they abhor and loathe justice, but they also pervert anything that is good or straight. They twist and make crooked straight paths. They seek the disorderly and the winding

of the roads. They seek taking the loner distance between two points. They don't want to deal with making just judgments or making sure that their leadership is straight and true.

3:10 who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity.

The methods of these madmen in office endanger the lives of other Israelites, their own countrymen. They have no issue with their own countrymen suffering in blood and being injured. They don't care about the people they govern. Building Zion can refer to Jerusalem and be synonymous with Jerusalem in the next phrase or it can be speaking of the future Zion, in which case they would be spending physical blood for future utopia.

They not only build Zion with the blood of fellow human beings and countrymen, but they also build the holy city of Jerusalem with iniquity, with sin and transgression. They are wicked in what they are building. People in leadership are always building something. The question is what they are building. These leaders who are spiritual guides are building violence and sin rather than what God seeks, even though they say they work for Him!

3:11 Its heads govern for a bribe and its priests teach for a price, and its prophets practice divination for silver. But still they lean upon the Lord, saying, "Is not the Lord in our midst? No calamity will come upon us."

All three types of leadership are completely corrupt. They are more about the money and what's in it for them than they are about serving the people. The heads and governors only work for a bribe, for their own benefit. It is the true picture of politics, self-serving. But they are put in places to serve the people. The paradigm is backwards for their political atmosphere.

The religious leadership scene is no different. Priests will do the work of ministry, but only for a price. They want money and that's what they're after, not representing the people before God or working as mediators between a holy God and unholy people. They want the money. Their hearts are not in service to serve in love. They have relegated the call of God to a mere vocation.

Even the prophets, as we have already seen them taking food and bribes will not do their prophetic work without silver and money. They will practice divination only for money. They will only seek the Lord for cash. This might remind you of the sourcerers and those with their crystal balls and astrology, palm readers, etc. They do their work only for money, because it is not real and it's not from the Lord. Perhaps the false prophets were doing divination in the sense of killing animals and discerning God's will from their innards!

We get a clearer picture of Micah's charge earlier that the prophets had said that God would not send calamity upon the people. Their argument is not necessarily just that the people are God's children and He is a loving, forgiving God, but also that His presence is still with the people. They are leaning on a false statement. They are assuming that God is with them in His presence but He has left! The worst kind of charlatan is one who knows full well that God is not

in what they are doing and yet they continue to lead the people astray! May we never be part of such a “ministry”!

3:12 Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed into a field and Jerusalem will be a heap of ruins and the temple mountain will be a wooded high place.

Now the Lord through His prophet charges the leaders of Israel, both civic and spiritual, with the consequence of their attitudes and actions in leadership. It is because of these fake leaders, people who work for money rather than the Lord, who serve cold hard cash rather than God’s Spirit, that they will be the reason that Zion is ruined. It will be plowed over into a field. It’s purpose will change and it will not be what was promised. They will not see Zion as they think they will.

Not only this, but Jerusalem will also be a heap of ruins. This speaks directly to those in Judah as their capital city will be demolished, meaning for Micah, that the whole country will be trashed and ruined. Not only Zion and Jerusalem will be destroyed, but also the Temple will be overgrown with weeds and will turn into a forest. It won’t be on the mountain anymore, just like Zion will not be a city but a field. The establishments will disappear as if no one set them there because the rulers and leaders have governed so wickedly.

Chapter 4

4:1 Then it will happen in the days after, it will be that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established highest among the mountains and it will be lifted up above the hills and peoples will stream toward it.

Chapter 3 ended with a chilling description of the demise of Jerusalem and of Judah. But in verse one of chapter 4, we will begin to see the hope that is commonly associated with God's judgment in the Old Testament prophets. The days after refers to the time after Jerusalem is destroyed. Historically, this is the return after the exile in the times of Nehemiah and Ezra.

But this is theologically a double fulfillment as is often the case in Hebrew prophecy. In the times of Nehemiah and Ezra Jerusalem was restored, but this prophecy speaks of something even greater than that event. This is referring to a time of destiny, of final destiny, in which everything is set right in God's Kingdom.

The mountain of the house of the Lord most likely refers to the Temple mount, the mountain upon which the temple of the Lord was constructed. This verse is saying that God's dwelling place will be the highest place in all the land, that it will be raised up or exalted and it will be noticeable, the pinnacle of the earth, the highest and most important and wonderful place.

Because of its elegance and prominence, the peoples of the earth will flock to it like the streams of a river overrunning its brooks. Have you ever seen a mass of people headed toward something with fervor? The mass of humanity swells like a river and when people are so desperate for something, they will find a way to it no matter what the obstacle. This is what the prophet sees, a time when people will hunger and thirst for the Living God with fervor, devotion and desperation. This is the idea stressed by John in the Revelation of the new heavens and new earth with the new Jerusalem resting on the mountain. People will run to the place where God's presence and glory dwells with His people.

4:2 Then many nations will walk to it and they will say, "Come, let us ascend to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of Jacob so that He may teach us His ways and we will walk in His paths." For out of Zion will go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The last time Israel was this popular among the nations was in the golden age of David and Solomon. People flocked to Jerusalem because of its prominence among the nations and they went for everything from goods to hearing the wisdom of Solomon. But at its current state, Israel and Judah are threatened almost on every front of their land and the kings live in fear of being taken by the empire to the north in Assyria.

Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, is about to begin his campaign very shortly after Micah's prophecies. He is going to come first to the northern kingdom, but then he will try to take the land of Judah as well. That is the situation in which this prophet speaks to the masses of

Judah. He speaks the clear message of the Lord that even this feeling of fear and trepidation will one day cease and Israel will experience the prominence of the Lord once again. In the midst of fear and certain death, the prophet brings a message of hope and destiny.

Notice that the goal of the Lord is seen here by the prophet. God had always desired that Israel would be His missionaries to the nations, that they would spread His reputation among the nations. But Israelite nationalism and pride got in the way. This is not a New Testament concept but an Old Testament concept. God has always desired for the nations or the Gentiles to join in the relationship with Israel. Even the nations will long to be in God's presence and part of His people. They will be part of the people, the immense crowd flocking to God's mountain. There will be unity in seeking the Lord from Jew and Gentile alike in this culmination time.

Shortly after God's promise to stop speaking through the prophets, we have this beautiful statement by the nations as they seek to join God and His people in His abode. While going to the mountain, the nations issue a call to one another to go up to the Lord's presence and dwelling. They seek not just to be in His presence, but also to learn His ways and to live them out. When you see the verb "walk" in the Bible, it is usually understood as living out a path or road or religion.

The prophet envisions a time when the nations will once again seek God out in the confines of the nation of Israel and Judah. There will be a time when God not only speaks with His children again, but dwells with them, and because of His fame, they will be the happening place to be in the culmination of time. They will be prominent because their God is prominent.

The people will learn the Torah again, which is the word for instruction or law. God's law will once again be observed not just by Jews but by Gentiles as well! Everyone will seek to please the Lord. And God's precious word will once again be spoken to all the peoples of the earth. The disappearing presence will indeed once again return to Israel. God may grow silent, but it will not be that way forever. What a wonderful promise! Even in the darkest of nights when your prayers seem to hit the ceiling like brass, yet we can still hope in the truth that God will not remain silent forever in our prayer lives!

4:3 He will judge between many peoples and mediate for strong nations far away. Then they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not rise up the sword against nation, nor will they continue to learn war.

Once again God will promise to be the judge within the bounds of human history. God will rule as He did in the theocratic age of Samuel before the people sought for a human king. He will be the King and Judge! God will be their representative among the nations, doing the work of international affairs. He will be their source of political success and He will judge justly once again. This promise would be near and dear to the poor who have so often received injustice from the current administration and political and civic leaders.

When God is their ambassador, the whole world will begin to experience shalom peace. This is a peace beyond the cessation of hostilities. It is a time where every nation and every

person has the full mature ability to enter into their destinies unhindered and unencumbered by obstacles. They will be as they were made and operate within the perfect function with which they were created! They will enact their full God-given potential.

Another point to be made by the prophet is that war will be useless in such a Kingdom in which He reigns. Everyone will have no need to fight amongst themselves or jockey for positions of power, because the power will solely belong to God alone. They will instead turn from focusing on how to war with one another to how to live in peace and prosperity. They will get rid of their weapons of war and turn them into tools for planting and harvest, for work and satisfaction and celebration, for blessing and prosperity.

This will be a time in which no nation need even learn how to war with another. There is no need for war because peace will be eternal. God will decide disputes rather than the sword. The language here of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning knives is probably common language for peace. It is a poetic way of saying that tools once devoted to ending life will now be used to prosper life through farming and harvesting. The language is used by several prophets throughout the Bible, especially Isaiah. When the Lord is judge, war is worthless and counterproductive.

4:4 But they will sit, *each* man under his vine and under his fig tree and no one will make them tremble, for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken.

The image produced in this verse speaks of the desire of each person's heart changing. Instead of using their ambition for power grabbing, they will use it for taking part in sustaining a peaceful coexistence with humanity. Sitting under one's own vine and fig tree has several points of interest. First, the land and trees are owned by the person, not taken from him through war or government. Second, the person can produce on his own what is needed because he has plenty from God.

Third, you will notice that the man need not war against anyone or even be upset or angered, for he feels safe and secure on his own land doing what he loves to do, and was created to do. He cultivates the plants and receives a good harvest for his hard work. He is not hindered by any obstacle. He is not afraid for the Lord is His protection and His judge. The Lord protects against any possible fears. He doesn't tremble because there is nothing to fear when God is your shield. God's promises are His bread and sustenance. This man walks with God and operates as Adam did in the Garden of Eden. It is a return to God as our source and the intimacy of the moment as God originally intended.

4:5 For all the peoples walk each in the name of his gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forevermore.

The prophet ends this futuristic point of peace and shalom by reminding the people how it is possible. It is not a possible future of a people that do not serve their God and obey Him

alone. It is not the future of a people that are constantly waffling between the God of creation and the gods of human hands. While the nations walk in their false gods and religions, Israel and Judah must turn to their Lord and never let Him go. They must stay on the path He has appointed and not waiver in any way. They must pledge to keep to His path forever. If they were to do this, it will not just be in worship or in doctrine, but also in practice. This would be a call to do justice and obey the Lord's law.

4:6 “In that day,” declares the Lord, “I will gather the lame and I will assemble the outcast and the one whom I caused calamity upon.

The opening phrase of verse six breaks up the section from the last section, yet at the same time links it to 4:1, the era surrounding the days after the fall of Jerusalem and the restoration depicted in 1-5. This is a continuation of the environment of those days when God restores. The Lord is speaking personally through the prophet here, as the formula “declares the Lord” often indicates.

The Lord promises that He will gather the lame, the outcast, and the one upon which the calamity of His wrath was poured out. All three of these nouns are singular, referring to the collective as a whole individual, in this case, the nation of Judah. These three nouns describe the nation as it has been taken through God's wrath against it for its wickedness and for turning away from Him to idols.

It is lame and cannot walk among the nations. The nation has become an outcast among the nations, and has literally been cast out of its own homeland. It has been cut off from its place among the nations and left to fend for itself, broken up into individuals rather than a nation. Finally, another word describing it is a substantive participle referring to the nation that has suffered the affliction and calamity brought upon it by God in His anger.

The word here as before is the Hebrew word for evil, but it is not to be understood in the English default sense of moral evil. Rather this is calamity from the Lord. The Lord does not do evil. He does bring calamity in His wrath, but it is not sin evil. It is calamity evil. It is not good for the person receiving the wrath. So it is the word used from the point of reference of the one suffering the calamity, which is caused by his or her refusal to obey and serve the Lord as he or she had promised.

God's promise is that He will once again gather the nation together after it has suffered the separation from the land and the separation of its tribes and people. He will bring them all back together and they will be a nation once again. They have been exiled and segregated, separated out as strangers in foreign lands, but they will once again come home geographically and relationally.

4:7 “Then I will appoint the lame as the remnant and the castaway as a mighty nation and the Lord will reign over them on Mount Zion from now until forevermore.

The promise continues that after God gathers the nation back together again, He will then appoint or set up, ordain, the nation that used to be lame and outcast and suffering calamities as the remnant that has endured. It is the lame, those who cannot walk among the nations that will become God's remnant, a special group of people that God protects and guides back to the land.

The outcast or castaway, the nation God threw to the wolves, will now be ordained or ordered by God to be a mighty nation once again. More importantly, God will once again rule over that nation, which is what will make it a mighty or strong nation. They will no longer be ruled by human wisdom or means, but by God's wisdom and resources. God will change their place among the nations, making them the flagship nation of the earth. They will suffer great things and then be honored greatly.

The covenantal name of YHWH is used here to denote their King. It is the Lord who has made His covenants with them that will rule over them as divine King. He will set all things right and restore their position. He will gather them together as a shepherd gathers his flock. He will lead them and rule over them with great care. There is imagery of the shepherd and his sheep in this verse and the next. God has often used such language to connote a different kind of dominion than the human dominion that the nation is used to.

Mount Zion is the place where God dwells, from which He also rules His peoples. This would be seen historically as the place where the temple is built. That is just one of the ways you can take the place of Mount Zion, for throughout history, it has meant the Temple Mount, the people of Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and the people of God. Here it is a place, probably the city of Jerusalem is being given as the place from which God will rule. That would also fit nicely with the New Jerusalem in Revelation.

The other important words here show the fact that God will rule and reign forevermore! He will rule from the very moment in which He takes the captives back from evil places until the end of time and beyond. This phrase can be translated "from age to age" or "the ages to come." It contains the concrete of the abstract idea of eternity, and is one of the reasons this verse and section point in part to the return of the exiles and in full to the culmination of human history in the end times.

4:8 "Now to you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, it will come, even the former realm will come, dominion for the daughter of Jerusalem.

We continue the thought of God's care and leadership in verse 8. The Lord speaks to the tower of the flock. This is a high place that serves as a lookout for shepherds to watch the sheep even from afar. The idea is of the watchtower that keeps the sheep safe and sound. They have security even if they can't see the shepherd right in front of them, and the tower helps the shepherd to see farther off dangers than when he is on the ground with the sheep.

This phrase gives the impression that God will be the shield and safety of His people as He reigns in His kingship. The hill of the daughter of Zion is usually understood of as the place leading up to the Temple mount, usually where the king's palace would be. But most scholars

point out that here it is less specific and generally refers, as most of these references, to the whole nation of Judah.

The promise is that the reign of God the covenant-keeping Lord will come. The promise extends farther than God's rule over what they have right now as an inheritance. The Israelites have seldom ruled over the amount of land given to them in the book of Joshua. God now promises that in this era or day in which history begins to culminate, He will also give them the former dominion, the places that they are supposed to control but do not control now. They will be the nation of God in the land God promised.

More than this, they will be the kings of the earth. They will be the kings of the nations. The nation of Israel will be the chief nation that will rule and reign with the Lord as its King. Their place in history is not over yet. God has more plans for them. Kingship will rest with God and His people. They will rule the land and the earth.

4:9 Now why do you cry out? Is there no king among you? Has your counselor been destroyed that you are seized with labor pains like a woman giving birth?

Because the first person verbs stop flowing here, I have designated the last verse as the ending of the Lord's speech until verse 13. Here the prophet after receiving such a word from the Lord relates their destiny to their present circumstances. They lack the prestige and honor that a royal nation should have right now because of their sin and disgrace among the nations. They have put themselves in a place hard to perceive this blessed promise from God.

Micah speaks to the people about their current situation. They are nowhere near the place God has ordained in the culmination of history. He asks some rhetorical questions in this verse to show them how far they are from God's desire for them. Sometimes we need the prophetic word to pierce our hearts and show us how far we are from God and His plans for us. All too often we would rather hear good things from prophets, but even in the bad things we hear, there is always hope. God is a God who only tears down to build back stronger. It is always for our good when we receive a less than favorable word. Such a prophecy can be the catalyst for change that fuels our fire to draw close to Him once again!

Micah says of the people that they cry out. He asks why they are doing such a thing. Perhaps the people were crying out against the idea that they would go into exile. But the prophet asks a second question as a possible answer to the first. Do they not have a king among them? This is simply to say that their king is no king like YHWH will be. They have a king, but he is not what they need. He cannot provide the leadership they need through the Lord's kingship.

Next the prophet asks where their advisor or counselor has gone. Has he been destroyed? Counselors were very important and held the role to the king as political advisors, much like the President's cabinet. The idea is that the royal wisdom with which Judah is supposed to operate is gone and no one knows where it is. Without wisdom to operate, the nation becomes a nation in pains and weakness. It struggles through life without a counselor to guide it on the path.

This image which is repeated in the next verse is quite a vivid image depicting the worst pains known not to men, but to women. It is the pain of giving birth, of writhing in pain as the next verse will point out. It is the pain of labor, the struggle to produce life in a world of decay, disease and death. They are reacting to their surroundings politically as a woman suddenly seized with labor pains, as a woman who is now struggling to give birth. The pain has come upon them suddenly and without warning. They are freefalling in crisis as a nation, and there is no leadership or wise sage to guide them through the chaos.

4:10 Writhe and burst forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman giving birth, for you will go out from the town and dwell in the field. And you will go up to Babylon. There you will be saved; there the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

There are two commands from the prophet here directed to the nation in pain. He tells them that just like a woman in the throes of childbirth, they should writhe in pain and that they should also burst forth. Now the context of the word for burst forth does not mean to give birth, but to let out a cry or scream as the delivery progresses. It is a way of relieving the stress of the event. Like the woman in labor, the nation of Judah should also writhe and burst forth in vocal aggravation.

Why must they cry out and burst forth with cries? Because they as a nation are going into exile. The amazing part of this verse is calling out a kingdom, an empire, that has not yet taken its stand among the nations. Micah writes roughly about 735 BC. Babylon is not on the heels of the nation for quite a while yet. The more dangerous land is that to the north, the Assyrians. But many years before it happens in history, Micah calls out Judah's captor, the Babylonians.

Those who used to live in their comfy homes and towns will now wander in the fields like refugees in their own land. They will suffer the loss of their cities and in the open country be forced to live like outsiders. Babylon is the power mentioned that will guarantee their exile, not Assyria. This might have come as a surprise.

As happened in Egypt when the Lord redeemed them and saved them from their masters and out of the house of slavery, so they will experience salvation not in their own land, but in a foreign land, in the land of Babylon. That is the place where God will save them. The word for save here is a military term for a rescue mission, although there will be no military rescue. The Lord will move the hand of Cyrus, King of the Persians to begin the return of the remnant. But out of that land the people of Israel will be saved and redeemed.

The word here for redeemed is the same word used of the kinsman redeemer in Ruth and the idea of one who buys back what was lost. God will buy back the remnant, the people that have been taken in the exile. He will buy them back right out of the hand of their enemies and the foreigners they live with. This is the idea that the New Testament understanding of redemption and salvation is brought to light. It is one of the many ways to describe salvation as depicted and explained in the New Testament. But for Israel, this will be their rescue and the beginning of a post-exilic people for God.

4:11 Even now many nations gather against you, saying, “Let her be defiled and let our eyes behold Zion!”

It was no surprise that the nation of Judah had been surrounded on all sides by enemies. The Edomites to the south were a constant issue as well as Israel to the north and Assyria above them. There was no nation that did not want the land of Judah. Ahaz had been seeking alliances with Egypt to the south against Assyria and the northern coalition of nations against Judah. There certainly was political unrest in the land.

The prophet knows this and takes this moment to remind the people of Judah that they are nowhere close to God’s ideal politically. The vultures are circling and He is their only hope. There is still time for them to turn to Him before they are exiled. The nations know that Judah is weak, barely managing to stand its ground. They desire to enter the land of Judah and take it as their own, to defile it with their presence. They want to see Zion, which here is most likely the city of Jerusalem. There is a possibility they are referring also to the temple in which the articles of worship are valuable.

4:12 But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord and they do not understand His plan, that He has gathered them like sheaves on the threshing floor.

As the nations gather against Judah and lick their lips, hungry for the spoils of a war they are practically guaranteed to win, the prophet takes the moment of fear that the nations will attack and be able to defeat Judah to remind the nation of its special place in God’s plans. Those nations that will attack do not know at least one thing about Judah; God’s got plans for her that they cannot see.

They will be fulfilling those plans if they attack, unwittingly bringing their own downfall in the process. They don’t know God, so they cannot be intimately or factually familiar with His thoughts and plans, with what He intends to do in human history. Even if they knew the facts of His plan for Judah, they would not understand it. They would not be able to comprehend it or stop it.

In their desire to make war with Judah, the nations will make themselves victims of God’s plan of redemption and the day will come when they will see their place in His plan as the nations receiving what they dealt out to Judah and Israel. Although once on the offensive, they will now be offered up to Judah and Israel to be harvested in wartime, to be threshed like the sheaves in harvest time. They will be winnowed with a fork and will be blown away by the wind.

4:13 “Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for your horn I will make iron and your hooves I will make bronze and you will pulverize many peoples and you will devote to the Lord their profit and their power to the Lord of all the earth!”

Now once again we have the first person singular in the verbs as the Lord again speaks through His prophet Micah. In looking forward to that day of victory for Judah, He commands the nation to arise at the proper time and to thresh its enemies. He calls the nation daughter of Zion, meaning the people of God, His intimate and chosen people. He will prepare them to work out His wrath against the nations for their crimes in doing His will now.

The nations carried out the judgment of God on Judah and Israel more brutally than necessary, and they will experience the same brutality from the Lord's hand through His people Israel. He will raise them up for the vengeance and use them in that fashion through war. He will prepare them for that battle by strengthening their resolve, their horn which calls them into battle.

He will make the horses' hooves like bronze as they attack their enemies on the offensive. The Lord also promises that they will crush their enemies into little pieces, pulverizing them completely. Great will be the destruction of God's enemies and He will use Judah and Israel to carry out the judgment upon them. Once again we see the language of Joshua in taking the land as the Lord says they will devote the spoils to Him in destruction.

This was what Joshua did in taking the land the first time, devoting to destruction and under the ban the things of the nations they captured. Specifically, God says they will devote unto Him their profit or gain, the things they received in an ill-gotten manner or stole in their brutal killing of the nations of Israel and Judah.

Not only will their profits be offered up to the Lord in the taking of their lands and lives, but also their strength or power or even translated wealth. This is their life force, their ability to be strong and to be wealthy. That also will be devoted to the Lord in battle as part of the spoils. It will all be given to the Lord of the whole earth. 5:1 probably ties in better here as well, but we will open with it as verse 1 of chapter 5 rather than as it is listed in Hebrew as the 14th and final verse of this part of the prophecy.

Chapter 5

5:1 (4:14 Heb) Now your troops are slashing themselves, O daughter of troops, siege is ordained against us, with a rod they strike on the cheek the judge of Israel.

This verse has become the odd man out in interpretation and translation. It has a word or two that are hard to nail down and it is placed in different sections of thought in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible, this verse is considered to be the final verse of chapter four whereas the Christian Bible puts it as the first verse to chapter five. While this seems unimportant, it does give a different flavor to each section.

If you take it as the Hebrew Bible has it, and it is quite obvious that it is the last of the section because it has a samek to end the section, then you would understand it as returning to the idea of Jerusalem preparing for a siege they cannot win. This is a great way to end the section because the very next section starts by talking about a king that will come through for Israel rather than lose the battle.

But if you take it as the first verse leading to the perfect king, as in the Christian Bible, then it becomes a background or setting for the King to arrive. The strange word in here then would be translated differently based on your opinion. This would be the background for the rescuing of the King from Bethlehem, from a small town that doesn't matter in the overall scheme of things until now.

Either way, this verse is showing at some point the siege of Jerusalem, the shame of being taken in battle, and the disgrace of being taken captive. The word that is hard to interpret is the word used here in my translation for slashing oneself. If you are with the Hebrew Bible, then it is the idea of the troops slashing themselves in anguish and despair that they cannot win the battle and that the city will be sacked. Some suggest it is a command, but I do not see it that way. I see it as an imperfect, which means it is showing the actions of the troops. In every other context, this word speaks of slashing oneself. That is how I have translated, sticking to the Hebrew text and translating with the same gloss that is found elsewhere when this word is used.

However, the Christian Bible makes the verb a command from the prophet and suggests the correct understanding of its meaning is to gather the troops for a battle. Then they put the verse as the introduction to the Messiah in verse 2. My problems with this are that the verb is first of all not a command and second of all not containing that meaning. So in this study, we're going with the idea that this verse harkens back to the other passages of chapter four that describe the fall of Jerusalem. Then it sets up the beginning of the next section by saying the soldiers and the human king cannot keep the city from its enemies while the Messiah will be able to defend His land.

One other point to defend my position comes in the cultural implications of this verse. Those who hold to the other interpretation say that the prophet would not command the people to slash themselves or cut themselves (cutters in our culture today) as a sign of mourning because it was a pagan practice and the Lord commanded them not to do this. My response is that it is not a

command, but rather a description of what is happening on that day that Israel falls and the soldiers fail to keep it. Their mourning is so out of the ordinary, so full of despair, that they descriptively resort to pagan practices despite God's commands for them to not do so. There are plenty of examples of the people not obeying the Lord.

Finally, the prophet describes how Jerusalem could not have won the battle no matter how many troops she would bring because it was planned and ordained, fixed by God against them because of their sin. This was going to happen anyway. There is the utter shame of being captured and exiled. To be struck on the cheek was a shameful place to be. But to be struck not even personally with the hand, but rather a rod, would add pain to the shame. So the shame is the worst thing that could happen culturally to the Israelites, but the pain added is too much to bear, hence the slashing which is not a practice they were supposed to engage in. It is a practice of utter despair, which the Lord promised to be their hope and they would not need to do, but they are doing it because of the hopelessness of this event.

5:2 (H 5:1) But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, smallest among the clans of Judah, from you will come forth to Me one who will be a ruler in Israel, and whose origin will be from antiquity, from ancient days.

Now we come to the Messianic passage in the book of Micah. This is the passage that is quoted by Matthew in the mouths of the scribes of Israel to Herod the king when he asks if they knew where the Messiah was to be born. This tells us that by the time of Jesus, the Jews had already seen this as a Messianic section, despite its references to the Assyrians. We will present our ideas about why they are specifically mentioned as it arises in the text.

Micah brings out the ironic nature of prophesying about the greatest ruler to ever rule over Israel coming from the lowliest place in all of Judah, Bethlehem Ephrathah. This town is located about six miles from Jerusalem. It is not a bustling town or even a very well populated town. By the way, that is why the great massacre of boys two years and under may not be in any historical documents, because it was not a great massacre. There were not many boys that age in a small town. It wasn't worth recording in history because of its small size.

Bethlehem's smallness is not hidden even then from God. He works in the smaller areas. That's an encouragement to anyone who feels like they're too small for God to do something. God works just as much, if not more and most significantly, through small means. Our church may be small, but God is doing things among us that He cannot do in large churches! We should be encouraged that God wants to use us in these ways.

God declares that despite Bethlehem's smallness among the tribes and among the places of Judah, it will be the place where the greatest of rulers will begin. From that small place, God will birth and rise up the greatest leader in all of human history, the Messiah who will bring political and military justice where there is none now. He's not the kind of king to let Jerusalem be sacked.

What is very interesting throughout the prophets is their descriptions of the Messiah. Here, one more divine description is given by Micah. Isaiah tends to do this as well. Micah tells the nation that the Messiah's origins will not be like any other's. He will come from antiquity, from an old place, a place in the deep past. He will come out of the days of the ancients. To the people, this would refer to the patriarchs, but it is not early enough! They wondered when John came if he was one of the prophets like Elijah (who did not die and so could return to bodily form). It comes out of the idea found here that the Messiah would be very old in the sense of knowing ancient history. And we know that Jesus, the Messiah, is God and existed before the beginning of time, before the patriarchs and any of the ancients.

5:3 (H2) Therefore, He will give them up only until the time she surely gives birth and then the remnant of His brothers will return to the people of Israel.

This verse tends to confuse not just the English reader, but also the translator. Some interpretation may occur with the translation to make sense of the verse. It is hard because in Hebrew, the pronoun references are not made clear. So we will do our best to piece together what is meant in this verse.

We will take it this way. The therefore seems to refer to the idea of God sending a ruler through Bethlehem. The idea is that He will give the people up or abandon them for a limited period of time. We know that even after the exile, God did not speak through the prophets again until the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. That is a long period of time, and indeed goes right up to Jesus' birth.

This verse, although hard to understand in detail, does contain the necessary understanding for the people. They will go into exile. But it's not for a literal nine months or even the literal amount of time a woman is in labor. It is compared to labor, not made a time of labor. So God will abandon His people for a specific amount of time that has an end. This is a message of hope after sorrow.

It is at that time, the time of this special ruler's birth, that the people will return to the land and the brothers will return, that the remnant will come back. In that time, the ruler will protect them. Some might think this is fulfilled in several periods of history. One certainly cannot pass up Judas Maccabeus in his time doing this for Israel politically and militarily.

In fact, many wondered if he was not the Messiah. But it is best fulfilled in Jesus, who at His birth brought spiritual freedom with His Kingdom, and in the end will bring an enduring kingdom of 1,000 years to Israel, the complete fulfillment of this verse, starting with the promise and freedom at the cross after his birth and ministry, and ending in the culmination of human history before eternity.

5:4 (H3) Then He will stand and shepherd with the Lord's strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God, and He will dwell even now He will be great unto the ends of the earth.

This Messiah, this great ruler, will stand for the people. He will be their foundation as a leader. He will shepherd the people. The word for shepherd is a great term to illustrate the type of leadership the Messiah will bring. He will not be one who simply commands and demands of people. He will be the kind of leader that desires the best for the people. Just like a shepherd who guides the sheep away from the dangers all around them, the Messiah will protect the people from dangers.

But He will not do this leading on His own. He will do it with God's strength and power behind Him. God will stand with the Messiah and grant divine authority and power when needed. He will be unstoppable as their Messiah and Shepherd. Not only will the Lord's strength be evident upon Him, but also the beauty and the majesty of God's reputation, of God's name, will also be His resource. He will have a personal linking relationship with God, who is His God. He will call on God and God will answer readily!

The word for majesty here brings the connotation of height or loftiness, the exalted state of the Messiah will be much like the King. This looks forward to when Jesus will reign from Jerusalem on the throne of David in the Millennium. People will worship Him for who He is, God incarnate, the true King of all human history. This Messiah will dwell in greatness over all the earth. The prophet says, as one looking ahead, that even now He dwells. This is an affirmation that the Messiah is living in His time, also. The Messiah, Jesus, has been living forever and will live forever. When He reigns on earth, His fame will know no bounds.

5:5 (H4) Then He will be their peace when the Assyrian comes into our land and when he treads in our palaces, then we will arise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.

This verse holds our interest in the idea mentioned above, that the prophet speaks of the specific historical situation as an example of how the Messiah would handle the Assyrians who are about to swoop down through the north and upon the west side of Judah and come up from the south against them, taking cities one by one on a hook course toward Jerusalem. The current king, even though he is a good king, cannot stop them with divine power.

The Messiah would be able to do this. In fact, they would not even get close to Judah if the Messiah was King. The Messiah, Jesus, will be the peace of Israel. He will bring them their wholeness so that none of their enemies would be able to stand against them. If the Assyrians would attack Judah as they are planning now in Israel's history, He would keep them from success.

When they come into Israel's land and walk around in their palaces, or try to take anything that isn't theirs, as the verb tread connotes, then the Israelites would easily be able to muster the military might needed to defend themselves and restore whatever is done against them by the Assyrians. It is not so now in their history, but the Messiah will make it so when He comes. This historical reference is meant as one example that would be the same for anyone who

would interfere with Israel when ruled by the Messiah. You can place the name of any country in Assyria's place here and the results would be the same.

Not only will they have the strong leadership of the Messiah, but they would easily raise whatever leadership they would need to deal with the situation. Here it says seven shepherds, who are leaders that do what's best for Israel in wisdom and foresight, and also eight princes of men or leaders of tribes. They will have the leadership of God on their side and be able to deal with any incursion of any sort.

5:6 (H5) and they will shepherd the land of Assyria by the sword and the land of Nimrod at its entrances, and He will deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and when he treads within our borders.

There is a second type of "shepherding" used here. The shepherding leadership above is a peaceful and benevolent leadership toward Israel, but that same leadership will treat it's enemies to the sword. It will be a leadership that maintains Israel's peace even in the face of enemies that might try to bribe leaders. The leaders will lead and shepherd Israel's enemies in a different way than it shepherd's Israel.

The poetics of this verse show that the next line is similar to the first. Nimrod is the man in Genesis 10:8-12 who is given the tradition of building the city of Nineveh in Assyria. So the reference to Nimrod is another name for Assyria here, possibly showing how ancient this Messiah's origins really are. It uses the same language of conquering for Nimrod as well, guarding it at its entrances so that the people are trapped in their own land.

The next line goes on to say that the Messiah will deliver Israel from Assyria. Remember that Assyria is just a nation that is the enemy of Israel at the time of this prophecy, and it is representative of any enemy nation that Israel would face in the time of the Messiah. So we are not saying that Assyria will be a nation that the Messiah will have to deal with, but any enemy nation that seeks to overstep its bounds into Israel's borders or treads on land that is not its own. The word for tread here gives the impression of owning the land.

5:7 (H6) Then it will happen that the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass which do not wait for a man nor even wait for the sons of man.

This next section speaks of the place of Israel among the nations of the earth when the Messiah is reigning. It will be much different than in this historical context where Israel faints before the nations and empires of the world. Instead, Israel will be the empire among the nations. The remnant in that time will be among the nations. This means that there will be nations on all sides of Israel.

This will happen quickly and will be unchangeable. The nations will not be able to get rid of Israel. Israel will be in their midst and be very numerous, like the dew that comes on the grass

in the morning or the spring showers that water the land. They will flock to the place of Israel and live in the midst or between all the nations. They will have a chief place in the nations. And they will be in charge and no man or descendant can change this.

5:8 (H7) And the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flock of sheep, which, when it passes by and tramples and tears to pieces and there is no one to save.

Israel will be the strongest among the nations, the leader, the predator. The Messiah will make Israel like its golden age once again among the nations. It will be a place that no one wants to go to war against. It will be too strong for the nations. They will have to deal with Israel's presence.

The nation of Israel will be like a lion among the beasts. The image of lion here shows the fierceness of Israel's ability and resolve. The lion is the king of the jungle. Every beast of the field is vulnerable to the lion, especially when lions travel together. Israel will be the predator now, no longer the nation that cowers in the corner and fears its own demise.

The next image of Israel in this Messianic age is the image of a young lion, a cub, among the flocks of sheep. The image is exactly the same except for the size of the animals. The young lion is not as experienced as the lion in preying on the weak, but even that lion cub will be able to take the sheep in the flock.

The prophet next describes the lion's abilities and what the lion will do when it stalks its prey. First, the lion or the cub would pass by and observe the herd or the flock to pick out the weakest, what will be its next meal. Then it tramples upon the flock or the herd, striking fear into the animals until it isolates the weakest. Then after trampling upon the herd and scattering it, the lion tears its prey to pieces, finally getting the spoils of the hunt.

Among the nations, it is very clear that no one will step in to save the nations or defend them. Israel will take what it wants and will be entitled to all things among the nations. The Messiah will reign in majesty and strength and the nations around them will be like the weak animals in the herd that are picked off when the lions are hungry. Israel will take its place as God's strong people. And no one and nothing will stop Israel.

5:9 (H8) Your hand will be exalted over your enemies and all your haters will be cut off.

The prophet continues to show Israel what it will be like in the Messianic age as he tells them that their hand or their power will be elevated or exalted, lifted up higher than the power or hand of the other nations. Israel will enjoy the favor of God in its Messianic reign. The word for exalted here implies that the hand is taller than other nations. In comparison, Israel will have the "upper hand." The word for hand speaks of the ability to do something, so it is often symbolic of political or military power. Anytime Israel and its Messiah go to war, they will easily defeat their enemies.

The second line of this prophecy points to their haters or adversaries. These are those who are not at all fond of Israel or its Messiah. They will be cut off among the nations. Those who oppose Israel and its Messiah's reign will find themselves on the outside looking in, find themselves lost and alone, abandoned and left to fend for themselves, with the lions circling. They do not want to be cut off. It is the worst thing that can ever be done, to be cut off from a people, to be disowned.

5:10 (H9) “Then it will happen in that day,” declares the Lord, “and I will cut off your horses from your midst and I will ruin your chariots.

This third section of chapter five is the Lord speaking to the nations, not to Israel anymore. The prophet has been describing Israel's change in status when the Messiah comes, but now the nations are spoken to directly by God. As Israel will be the strong nation, these other nations will be left without strength. The Lord will now turn and seek vengeance through Israel as He sought vengeance against Israel when she committed idolatry against Him.

In the day of the Lord, the judgment day when the Messiah judges the nations and wars against them in righteousness, God will take the horses of the nations and the chariots of the nations. They will not have the ability to equip an army against Israel. The armies of nations had horses to drive the chariots into battle. It was hard to defeat a chariot because it could move quickly on the battlefield and also was hard to get to the driver because he was on a higher plane of ground than the combatant. But they will not have any horses or chariots. They won't be able to succeed in war against Israel.

5:11 (H10) “Then I will cut off the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds.

But if they persist in being haters of Israel and opponents, God won't stop with just keeping them from seeking military power. He will also destroy their cities and cut them off from the land. This is probably referring to taking the cities by the sword. He will take their cities like the Assyrians have been taking Israelite cities, through war and siege.

While the cities will be reduced to rubble, the strongholds will be torn down by the Israelites. A city in itself was quite fortified. It had a wall and at least one gate. Now these walls could be quite thick. Some cities had double walls. They were pretty well fortified. But the strongholds were extremely well fortified. They would be even more secure, and yet Israel with the power of God in its Messiah will tear down every stronghold and cut down every city of its enemy.

5:12 (H11) “Then I will cut off sorceries from your hand and fortune tellers and it will not happen for you.

The Lord continues to speak to the nations that might choose to be against Israel in this Messianic age. Not only will these nations experience physical woes such as no cities or strongholds and the inability to equip an army that can win in battle, they will also suffer spiritual woes.

The Lord will next take away those who give the enemy nations a sense of spiritual control over their situations. The Lord will cut off or separate out and destroy the sorcerers who make potions and try to reach the dead and those sorts of practices. This could even consider perhaps the medicinal sorcerers who could concoct potions. These will be taken out of the nations' hand, meaning the nations will no longer have access to its sorcerers.

Beyond the sorceries and sorcerers are the fortune tellers, those who can through divination give the nation a sense of direction spiritually. The fortune tellers were more like predictors of the future. They would be like the magicians in Egypt who could do some of the same things Moses could do or people that made a living interpreting dreams. They would also do divination to determine future events. The better ones could predict with more accuracy. But it was not the same as YHWH's prophetic office in Israel.

These people who could do this type of predictive ability were much like our weather forecasters today. They would attempt to use signs to denote what might happen in the future. The difference for them in these nations is that God will make their fortune or future telling worthless because whatever they predict will not happen for the people of that nation. God will make them inaccurate and therefore useless to the rulers of those nations.

5:13 (H12) “Then I will cut off your idols and pillars from your midst and you will not bow down anymore to the work of your hands.

Beyond the divination and sorcery of their spiritual paganism, these nations have idols made by their own hands out of wood or stone or some other material. They worship these items and materials and pray to them, knowing full well that they made them with their own hands. The key to understanding that idols are nothing is to remind oneself that you cannot produce something greater than yourself. If you make an idol, it is already diminished more than its maker. Yet God does not have a maker!

God will destroy their idols from their midst. They will not have an idol to worship because it will be a heap of rubble. God will show His power and strength and might over the idol by busting it to pieces and cutting the people off from worship of false gods. He will also destroy the pillars or ceremonial monuments. These are much like the Asherah poles mentioned in the next verse, images that showed their gods doing things for their people, religious propaganda in physical form like statues.

These people had the habit of worshipping their stuff, the things that were lesser than them. If you make it, you are greater than it. But the people of these nations have been using these idols for so long that they believe they actually have some kind of power. But you can't bow down to a god who has been crushed by an actual God. And you can't worship something

that has no power to even restore itself from demolition. The people won't bow down to idols because they will be removed from the presence of the people.

5:14 (H13) “Then I will uproot your Asherah poles from your midst and I will exterminate your cities.

The third verse concerning the nations' religious activities mentions the specific Asherah pole. Asherah was a fertility deity that was worshipped by building a pole in the ground. God with explicit language says He will uproot those poles because they worship idols. He once again says that He will exterminate the cities, using a much stronger action word than before in verse 11 where He said He would cut off the cities. The Bible, much like almost every culture out there except Western ones, links together religion, civics, politics, etc. There is no separation of parts of life. All of life is together and integrated.

5:15 (H14) “Then I will in anger and in wrath make vengeance upon the nations which did not obey.”

It is not until this final verse that we confirm that God is not speaking to Judah but to the nations around Judah. But I mentioned at the beginning of this section in verse 10 that God was speaking to the nations and not to Judah. We know this throughout the text because it talks of idols and Asherah poles as well as fortune tellers and sorcerers. Truly, these things do appear in Israel's checkered past, but they are not all happening at once in Judah. So this is speaking to the nations and condemning them.

God has one message at the end to sum up every detail He has laid out as He goes from specific thoughts and actions against them to the reason for those actions and the general thoughts He has toward them. He will make vengeance or do His vengeance against them through the means and methods of anger and wrath. He will pour out His red-hot wrath upon the nations for their idolatry and for their disobedience. The anger is seen in the language of this declaration and the nations are left with nothing to say. Being on God's angry list is not a good place to be.

Chapter 6

6:1 Please hear what the Lord says, “Arise! Plead your case before the mountains and let the hills hear your voice.

Once again for the third major time in this book, we see the second person plural command to hear or listen to what the Lord says. This final two chapters will mark the Lord’s formal indictment of the people of Judah. This is the actual document of lawsuit, listing the grievances of the Lord and the situation of the relationship between God and His people.

The lawsuit will be spoken directly by God to His people and will begin by telling of His saving acts of kindness to His people. Micah is believed by some scholars to have been involved in the court hearings of the king’s court and expertly puts together this charge against the people of Judah as a prophet. It is a document that agrees with the form of a lawsuit in the times of Micah, so many believe that he worked in the king’s court as well as was a prophet of the Lord.

Here the prophet tells the people through the command to listen to whatever the Lord wants to say. Then the Lord’s speech starts as He opens by commanding creation around the people of Israel to come and hear the lawsuit against them. He calls creation itself to witness the indictment. He tells the people to get up and plead their case against the Lord, because He’s bringing His case against them. Oftentimes in the legal system, the defendant may have a counter suit against the plaintiff. God is telling Judah to prepare their response as He brings the lawsuit.

The audience, the witnesses of the event will be creation. The mountains will hear the indictment of the Lord against His people. The Lord tells the people to prepare their response for the mountains to hear and for the hills to listen to their voices as they respond.

6:2 “Hear, O mountains, the indictment of the Lord, and enduring foundations of the earth, an indictment from the Lord against His people and against Israel He will argue.

After the Lord turns from commanding the people to get up and make their pleading before the mountains and hills, He now calls to the mountains and enduring foundations of the earth to listen to His indictment of the people. The term for indictment is a legal term of argumentation. This is Micah’s unique gift to the prophetic office. Each prophet tends to have unique ways of addressing the social situation with the words of God, great imagery and vivid examples of God’s points of protest against the people.

Now the Lord calls the mountains to hear His argument, for creation to listen in. Once again He mentions the indictment, the argument, against His own people. This is a situation that should not have happened. The people of God should have never needed to have a formal indictment brought against them. But they are hardened to God’s voice.

Mountains are fortresses in themselves, giant and big and immovable. Jesus in fact uses them as an image of unbelief and the loss of perspective. He says to the people that if they have faith, they can move mountains. Along with the immovable mountains are the enduring

foundations. These are the foundations that God laid in the beginning of time. God is invoking old friends to hear this argument against His people. He is calling on things that have been around since the beginning of the world to hear Him speak against His people.

The next two lines introduce the indictment and the arguments. God formally introduces the defendant, the people that He has blessed with a covenant and loved unconditionally and the nation of Israel that He has chosen for His purposes. The two last lines of the verse are parallel with one another, saying the same basic thing in different terms.

6:3 “My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Answer Me!”

The Lord begins His argument first by trying to establish what wrong He has done against His own people that they would wrong Him so profusely. Another way of asking this is, “Where have I been unfaithful that I deserve to be cast aside for idols and sin?” The two questions here can be placed as one and are also parallel. The Lord is asking specifics on how He could ever be at fault for the sad state of affairs between Him and His people. The covenant has been broken by them, but did He give them reason to break it?

The word wearied here has the suggestion of being helpless or made powerless. God is asking what He has done to weaken the people or to leave them helpless. To prove His point of always helping His people, He will in the next verses recount their history and how His direct involvement has always given them freedom and less burdens. Then He demands of them that they answer His questions. This is a command that contains the idea of being humble. So they have acted as if they were impatient with God and that He has wearied them, but He demands that they answer with humility His charges against them and that they tell Him what right they have to be unfaithful to Him if He is indeed always faithful to them.

6:4 “For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, even from the house of slaves I redeemed you. Then I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam.”

If you can picture the image of a husband and wife or two friends entering into dispute with one another, this is the image of the indictment here. It plays out just like one of these intimate relationships would if there is a dispute. The Lord in verse four now begins to recount all of the things that He has done, the ways that He has helped the people of Israel and the moments of His faithfulness.

The people are silent in the face of His argument. They do not readily stand against Him and disagree with anything He says in pointing out His own faithfulness to His people. First, He starts at the very beginning when they were a people in slavery. He bought them out of slavery, literally taking them to a place they could call their own. He paid for their leaving Egypt, the house of slavery and then He gave them the present or the gift of the promised land. He did not have to do any of this!

Not only did He bring them out of slavery and redeem them as a people, but He also went out of His way to provide leadership in the desert. He took a murderer and a man of weak public speaking skills and turned him into the leader of Israel in the desert. He made Moses' brother Aaron the priest who led the people in worship. He gave them Miriam to bless them in song. These leaders were not perfect by any stretch of the imagination. Miriam is given a leprosy disease of the skin because of her insolence and Aaron helps the people worship the golden calf. Moses himself is not perfect either as he strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. But God gave them all these gifts!

6:5 “My people, please remember what Balak, king of Moab, devised and how Balaam, son of Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal, so that you may know the righteousness of the Lord.”

Back in verse three we saw this vocative of address. God is speaking directly to His people. This is a term of endearment for God. It is a term of intimacy. This is not some far-off God who wants to make the people think He cares. This is a God intimately involved in relationship to His people who cannot simply forget the covenant because He is so faithful. He is the wronged lover pleading for them to commit to Him alone once again.

The Hebrew injunction for “please” shows up here as God almost begs His people to stop sinning and listen to Him. He will continue proving His faithfulness to them throughout their early history. He now brings up Balak and Balaam, the Moabites and the things He did to keep His people from being cursed as they traveled in the desert by their enemies.

Moab has always been an enemy of Israel. We saw that Obadiah took up the issue of the Moabites. But the Lord here mentions His part in keeping the king of Moab, Balak, from cursing His people so that they would fail in the desert and in the land. Balak's story takes place in Numbers 22-24. He was afraid of the Israelites as they were passing through the desert next to his kingdom. He feared their great numbers and tried to hire or bribe Balaam, a seer who interestingly could communicate with the Lord.

But anytime that Balaam would prophecy over Israel, it was always a blessing instead of a curse. This is what God did for Israel in this situation that He references here in Micah. God protected His chosen people from Balaam's attempts at a curse and from Balak's desire to get rid of them. Then He mentions what happened in Shittim and Gilgal. This reference comes from Numbers 25.

After the Moabites discovered they could not simply curse the Israelites and see their downfall, they set in place a program of intermarriage that caused the Israelite leadership to commit to the idols of their Moabite wives. The story in this reference comes from this chapter of Numbers in which one of the sons of the priests drives a spear through a tribal leader and his Moabite wife because of their idolatry and thus the idolatry was stopped and God was pleased with this young man. But many died before the idolatry stopped. Even so, God protected them from the influence of the Moabites again. Those are just some of God's righteous and saving acts

that He has readily done on their behalf, and this is how they will repay Him? So comes the argumentation and indictment from the Lord.

6:6 “With what shall I come before the Lord, bow before God on high? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?”

Verses six through eight present a discussion between the people and the prophet. The people are set to ask what God wants of them and why He brings this formal indictment against them. In a sense they are saying that they cannot please God, that He is too hard to make happy. The questions are asked by an individual, but are representative of the people’s response.

They are overly concerned with the ritual rites of sacrifice in the face of God’s disappointment and anger in His argument against them. They ask what they are to do. Where is the line with God? How much is required of them? What do they truly have to offer God if He is indeed so high and mighty and great? That is their first question. What would be good enough for Him?

Then they begin to point to some of the sacrifices they normally make. As a small aside, it must be pointed out that the sacrificial system was a patch to the Law. The sacrificial system was put in place along with the Law because God knew that the people would fall short in living completely holy lives. He knew there would have to be something to bridge the gap so that a holy God could dwell in the midst of an unholy people. That was the goal of the Law, but their failure to obey it constituted sacrifices.

I say this as background because the people are not asking what God wants in the way of obedience. They are in sacrifice mode rather than obey mode. So the people expect that God demands these sacrifices of them. They’re asking why He wants all these things. What does God need with burnt offerings? What good is it to take a baby calf a year old and sacrifice to Him? What’s the loss of life worth to Him? They have the wrong understanding of what God’s all about. God did not want sacrifices. He wanted them to be holy! They were living off of the provision for failure rather than attempting to succeed in obedience.

We get wrong-headed ideas about God as well. Some people believe that He just loves to beat us up for our sins. But Jesus died for our sins. When we are believers, God doesn’t keep records! The feelings we have are those of the separation of intimacy with God that sin causes, not the guilt and condemnation. We must be careful to not get off base of what God is really like. We must be constantly searching out His character and how He treats us in Scripture to keep our minds straight and avoid the pitfalls of wrong understating of God.

6:7 “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with myriads of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my rebellion, the fruit of my belly for the sin of my soul?”

The next question the people respond to God’s harsh rule and yoke is if God would be pleased even if they offered at the altars a thousand rams. This is a huge number, so their sins

must have been a vast quantity! They had a misunderstanding of the place of offerings and sacrifices in worship.

The answer to this rhetorical question is a negative. The people are almost chiding the Lord for lofty expectations they cannot barely succeed in fulfilling. They are complaining to the opposite of what Jesus proclaimed. They are suggesting that God's yoke is difficult and His burden is heavy. It is not this way as the prophet will respond in the familiar verse eight.

After the solid number of a thousand rams for sacrifice, the people introduce a great big number that almost would not register in the Hebrew mind. This is usually translated "ten thousand." However, it can also be understood as innumerable or as myriads or multitudes too great to define with a number. In other words, the people are asking if God would be pleased even if they offered an insanely large number of offerings of oil, of flowing rivers of oil. Would that be enough? It's never enough for God! That is their quarrel.

Then they suggest that if the sacrifices aren't good enough for God or can't appease Him, then perhaps their firstborn children would do the trick. Then this wonderful imagery, the fruit of my body or belly for the sin of my soul comes into play. This phrase rhymes in Hebrew and has quite a beautiful cadence. The people poetically express their frustrations with God. As if bringing innumerable offerings and sacrifices to Him is not enough, then even their own children would not satisfy His hate for their sin that they can't help committing!

The people have run into two problems that they should very well have known would be problems if they accepted them instead of what God actually demanded and laid out for them. First, they are to obey, not sacrifice. The striving is not in the sacrificing; the striving is in the obeying! Sacrifice is only God's grace when they fail in obedience.

Second, the people underscore a point that God demands things of them that they cannot give Him, like their firstborn children. God is not like the other gods. He does not do child sacrifices! And that would not appease His demands anyway because God isn't about wanting their stuff. He already owns everything in all of creation. He doesn't need their sacrifices. The sacrifices are to show them that life is lost when sin is done! Sin costs us dearly! That is the point! Not that God will take stuff because we sin against Him.

The phrase "fruit of my belly" can also be translated "fruit of my womb" or "body." It is the children that they have that they refer to here, their firstborn specifically. It is almost like a trade-off. "I'll keep sinning and you can have a thousand bulls, and all the oil I've got, oh and I'll throw in my firstborn... So can I sin now, please?" This is surely the wrong approach with God. Such an approach and such a way of thinking and acting might even make Him angry enough to leave His heavenly abode as in Micah 1 and come down and argue in a formal indictment with His people. Oh wait...that's what is happening!

6:8 He has announced to you, O man, what is good. Now what does the Lord seek from you except to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to humbly walk with your God?

Verses six and seven give the people's exasperated and impulsive response to God's pleas and indictment. Verse eight is the prophet's personal chiding and response to their false understanding and practices. The prophet begins by responding with just one simple rule of faith. He reminds the people that God's yoke is not difficult and His burden is not heavy. He only asks that they treat one another and Him with the same qualities that He has shown them in the Law!

God has not focused on offerings and sacrifices. The book of Leviticus is an act of pure worship, showing the people how detailed the sacrifices must be, how exact, because sin costs so much and leads to death. He reminds them of what is good! He announces and tells them about a positive target, not a negative one. So many times we take the law to be a negative list of don'ts. But we need to realize that God is giving us the prescription for abundant life by helping us avoid all the things that are bad, that cause us grief in this life.

Micah hits the nail on the head when he addresses the complaints of the community of God's people who have falsely understood God's Laws and His mercies in the sacrificial system. He simply delivers the answers to their questions in a question of his own. What does the Lord seek or require? What's God looking for us to do? Simple. Only three things God desires to see in each of His children.

We might find it surprising that the very first thing God seeks from us is an action rather than an attitude or a thought or a word. It is to do justice. The word justice here has the connotation of doing the right thing at the right time. This is an action, not an idea. Justice is doing whatever is the right and best thing for another. Justice is something we actively pursue for others and for ourselves. It kicks against the sin that separates and violates. It demands action against unjust action. Justice cannot be spoken. It must be done. It is a way of living!

The second thing the prophet reminds the people of to set them straight is to love hessed. Hessed is a very special word that most translators use the word "kindness" to explain in English. While this is accurate, it does not fully represent the idea of hessed. But let's talk about the action word "love" first. In the Shema, the great declaration of Israel that God is one, the following statement based on God's being one and being Israel's God is this: to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. That same word for love is used here.

To love is to commit oneself to something. To love is an action, not a noun. It is not a thing. It is something you do. Love requires the proof of action. To love God with all our hearts means to use our reason and emotions to worship Him, to glorify Him. We think about Him and His attributes and we respond to His wooing and goodness with our emotions. To love with our souls is to love with our lives, to live a life that proves that we love Him completely and solely. The word for soul and life is nephesh, interchangeable in this Hebrew word. Then to love God with our strength is to love Him with our body, with our abilities and with what He has given us, our resources and our power. So love is not some idea. It is what we do and the heart, soul/life and strength are the instruments, the methods, of that love.

So here also, it is no different. We are told that we are to love hessed. To love hessed is to apply it to ourselves, to notice it when God gives it and to thank Him for it and then to apply it to

ourselves and then to others. To love is to do hessed! Now hessed is a very important word in Hebrew literature. It most often refers to God's faithful or covenantal love, that unconditional love that never lets go no matter how unfaithful the people are. Hessed is a one-sided, faithful, unconditional love regardless of how unfaithful the object of that love is!

Hessed has the idea of showing kindness or mercy to someone, of letting them know that they are loved unconditionally. It is most often used of God. It is a faithful and foundational love that does not give up in any circumstance. It is the very basis for God's covenant with His chosen people. It is the very basis for His grace toward us! So to love hessed is to notice and fully embrace and apply God's faithful and unconditional love for you and for me! It is to live in that love and trust in it, to know that it is never wavering and that we never walk without it holding us to God's heart. It is a tight string of God's care, provision, and protection not because we deserve it but because He simply wanted to give it to us! To love hessed is no chore. To love hessed is to rest in God's steady embrace.

Finally, the third has also been violated by the people of Judah. Micah brings into focus now the idea of humbly walking with their God. First let us see the contrast in the arrogance of the people that drove God from His throne in heaven to come down to earth and deal with them in such a legal matter of a lawsuit against them. They have reacted with arrogance and impatience with God's charge so far. They have been insolent and incredulous. So the prophet merely brings up the idea of humility.

Humility is the opposite of what the people have been doing. They have dared to do what none of the forefathers or their leaders had done who knew God face to face. Abraham in his discovery of how good God is when he interceded for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was very humble, almost afraid to push God further. Moses was given the title of one of the most humble men on the planet. Humility means that we come before the Lord in thankfulness for privileges rather than demanding our rights and entitlements under the "agreement."

To walk in the Scriptures rarely means to put one foot in front of the other. It is most commonly used to point to our lifestyle, or how we live life. The road upon which we walk, the way or path, is the wisdom that we choose to exercise in our lives. So to walk humbly with God is to seek His wisdom in our lives and then obey that wisdom, strongly enacting His wisdom so that we can see the best results. When we walk with God, we live out His presence in our lives.

Finally embedded in this simple verse but overlooked all too often is the point that the people had also forgotten, that even the Law was about relationship, about making it possible for God to abide in relationship to His people through a covenant. Micah says to walk humbly with "your God." The word humbly precedes the word walk. The manner in which we live is given before the action of living with God is given.

Then the most poignant point the prophet makes is that God is not far off. He is a personal God. He is our God. He does not want to be separated from us. All of this happens in communion, in fellowship, in day-to-day relationship with Him. The people had lost this understanding, this spirit of relationship with God in their anger and in their arrogance. They

were simply turning to other gods because God was too demanding. But they weren't living in relationship. They were living in stipulation.

**6:9 The voice of the Lord calls out to the city and it is sound wisdom to fear Your name.
“Hear of the rod and the one who summoned it!**

After the prophet's simple laying out of the basics of what God has demanded of the people, the easy things He has called them to do that do not require their hard labor to please Him, the prophet now turns back to what the Lord will declare. First, we have seen the Lord present His case and defend His own actions in this lawsuit. Then we heard the people playing the place of the defendant explain how hard God's laws and sacrifices are upon them, and then the prophet intervened and now we will have God pronounce His verdict.

The prophet completes His words by calling on the voice of the Lord that cries out or calls out to the city, probably Jerusalem. Micah speaks to capital cities so that the whole nation is taken into account. He then recommends that the people fear the name of the Lord and do what He says and take the punishment He deals out. The word here for sound wisdom is very hard to bring into the English language, but it has the idea of bringing successful existence. It is sound wisdom, firm and sure to put into practice in our lives. The proverbs say that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Now the prophet speaks directly for God when the command to hear comes into place. The Lord now will speak of His judgment that is coming for a people who arrogantly refuse to walk humbly with their God and live out His loving kindness and do justice to one another. The rod here is not the rod of a shepherd, but it is a rod of correction that will be painful to the touch. It will unleash uncomfortable penalties because of refusal to obey and serve the Lord only. The Lord is the one who summons or appoints the rod against the people.

6:10 “Are there still in the house of wickedness wicked treasures, and a scant measure is cursed?

This verse was very hard to translate. It almost appears if a word or two might have been missing, but this is the most literal way of translating and making sense of this verse. The idea I will take away from it is that God will not judge just a bit of sin when the whole house is wicked. He will judge it all and in the same way.

The wicked treasures are the things that the people hold in higher regard than God or the things of God. These are the idols, the injustices, the religious falsities and the lies they believe. It is the stuff they keep that they hold in high esteem but is not godly. The Lord is telling them that if there are treasures that the people adore in wickedness, He will root those evil things out. He will not put a band-aid on their sinfulness and wickedness. He will not address only a slight bit of sin. He will judge the whole of it He will curse the whole of sin, not just a small measure of it.

6:11 “Shall I purify with wicked balances and a bag of deceitful stones?”

The methods of God’s purifying are also different from what they are used to. Remember that these people had perverted justices, flipped the tables so that what is evil was upheld as righteous and what is wicked was called good. So God will re-assert what is good and righteous. He will not judge with evil scales or wicked balances. He will not use stones that are of the wrong weights.

God will restore true justice to the people. But the wicked will not like it. No longer will there be these wicked balances Micah talked about with the merchants in chapter two. God will use balances that are not cheating. No longer will God weigh with more weight what should have been less to make a buck. He will judge correctly!

6:12 “Her wealthy are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongues are deceitful in their mouths.

The city, and therefore the nation, is referred to in the feminine. This is a common grammatical move by authors throughout the Old Testament. The wealthy people are incited as being full of violence. They are the ones that violently do injustice to the poor. The poor suffer under their power and under their hand that violence, from lying and cheating to stealing from the poor.

All of the inhabitants of the city are held in contempt because they do not know the truth anymore. They all speak lies and falsehood. They lie against the truth, literally reversing belief. For these reasons, both the wealthy and the inhabitants have deceitful tongues in their mouths. Nothing of what they say can be trusted to be true or accurate.

6:13 “Therefore, I strike you to make you sick and make you desolate because of your sins.

The Lord is not shy in dealing with His people in their sin. Sin causes sickness and death, and we see Him here unleashing sickness upon them for their sins and their lies, their falsehood and their violence. Today we live in a culture of violence as well. I just saw a segment on a news opinion show a couple of weeks ago where they were surprised that sex is no longer selling movies.

One of the commentators told the truth though, that in this generation, violence sells many more movies than sex does. We haven’t gotten better. We’ve just switched our depravity to a new category. For these great and grave sins, God will strike the people with sickness and because of that sickness and weakness, they will become desolate and a waste. Their sin has a direct response from God in this verse and He is coming to the point of judgment. The rod is appointed for them.

6:14 “You will eat but not be satisfied, and there will be hunger within you. And you will bring into safety but not preserve, and what you preserve I will give to the sword.

Beyond sickness, the people will also suffer from not living in the grace of God. They will eat as to not starve, but they will never be satisfied. They will not be able to stuff themselves because the food will not do what it normally does in satisfying them. God will continue to provide, but it will not be over-provision. They will be unhappy with their food as well. They will not find satisfaction in anything.

They will continually be hungry, seeking for food and eating it when they find it, but it will never be enough. Long past are the days of God’s favor. They have sinned and refuse in their arrogance to acknowledge that sin, so God will not allow them to enjoy a relationship that separates them from Him.

Not only will they always be hungry, but they will never feel the safety and security they once did. Even when they build up forts or bring things into security and safety, imagining that they can protect and preserve something, God will expose it to the armies and to the sword. He will destroy any sense of security they make for themselves because He is supposed to be their security. Their pride will make all of these things happen and their continued sin will not allow God to bless them again.

6:15 “You will sow but not reap. You will tread olives but not anoint yourselves with oil, and you will tread grapes but not drink wine.

This will even affect their farming and crops. Even though they sow a lot of food, they will not reap the full yield. They will not be able to be strong in production of food as long as they continue in sin. Sin does not just have an effect on human relationships with one another and with God, but it also affects the whole of creation. This might be the source of their hunger problem as well.

Not only just for food, but also the very necessities of life God will not permit the earth to give its full measure for their work in the fields. Even when they tread out the olives, the oil will not be there for them to use. They will have problems in every area of production. To tread on olives was to make the olive oil. They would put all of the olives into a giant vat and then squish the oil out by walking on them. The oil could be used for baking and cooking, but here the Lord talks about the inability to anoint, a religious activity for which oil is a means. There would be no oil for the practical uses of life, whether physical or spiritual.

Finally, the same would happen to their grapes. The grapes would go through the same process of the vat and the treading. Here the word for grapes is the idea of new wine. It’s almost as if God is saying, “You’ll have new wine, but I won’t let you drink it or enjoy it.” Amos mentioned the northern Israelites building beautiful houses that someone else would live in. It’s a possibility this is a precursor to saying that the Israelites in Judah would be slaves who make the wine but don’t drink it. The other idea is that God would prohibit them from having the wine

they made. This is the sense of some of this text through and through, the punishment of seeing something and knowing it's there, but not being able to enjoy it.

6:16 “For you have kept the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab and you have walked according to their counsels so that I must make you a desolation and your inhabitants a hissing, and the scorn of my people you will carry.”

Now we see from the Lord the final damaging evidence against the people in this chapter. They have been doing idolatry, worshipping other gods. Omri and Ahab were two northern Israel kings who legalized idolatry. Ahab alone had a horrid wife named Jezebel who brought in hundreds if not thousands of prophets of Baal! This is being declared to the southern kingdom of Judah, which although better off than the north almost under attack at the point of this writing, is headed downhill fast.

Not only do they hold in higher esteem the desires and statutes of these kings, but they also live and walk in the actions stemming from these horrible kings' counsel. In other words, they look to these kings rather than the righteous kings for how to live and what to do and which gods to worship. They are looking to the wrong sources for counsel. In the Bible, when people use the wrong wisdom, they are shown the consequences of that wisdom. Here are the consequences of following after the wisdom of the northern Israel kings Omri and Ahab: God will make the people a waste and a desolation.

They will be gone from the land and exiled because the consequence of idolatry is desolation. The inhabitants God will make a hissing, a whisper. It's almost as if the inhabitants won't be there, like the wind it's only evident that they're there when the wind blows. Otherwise, you would never know the wind existed. The inhabitants of the land that stay in the land will not be noticed. These rulers of Israel, the civic and religious leaders will be the ones to bear the shame and carry the scorn of God's people. They will have no one to place the blame on. It will be because they followed the wrong former kings and the wrong wisdom and counsel, so they also will be the ones to carry the guilt of Israel's scorn.

Chapter 7

7:1 Woe to me, for I have become like the harvest of a summer fruit, like the gleaning of vintage grapes; there is no cluster to eat, no early fig my soul craves!

For this final chapter, we will see the prophet apply to his own situation in history the message of the prophecies and the lawsuit against the people of Israel. He speaks now of what it is actually like in his world. He starts by explaining the tough situation in which he lives now, the tension of desiring justice and seeing it never happen.

He starts by condemning himself with a woe. We have seen this throughout the prophets and with those who encounter God. Isaiah woes himself because he is a man of unclean lips living among an unclean people when He meets the Lord. He is just one of many examples. Here, Micah also starts by looking at himself. I think this is a wonderful approach to dealing with the words of God whether they encourage or exhort us. We should start by hearing the word, and then beginning to apply it to ourselves first. How does what God says affect me in my life. What do I need to change. What should I do about this word?

Then Micah explains why he says “Woe to me.” He says that he has become like the summer fruit harvest. A second image is that of the gleaning of vintage grapes. The ripeness and the delicious taste of God’s people is gone. That is how he interprets God’s word. He is woefully in a land of evil instead of good, woefully destined to not receive justice or be heard because the righteous and the good are all corrupt. It is a waste, like not eating the ripened summer fruit before it is overripe. It’s just like not enjoying the presently ripe grapes but letting them sour before biting into them.

The prophet uses these food images to show that Israel is rotten to the core, especially Judah where he is prophesying. He cannot take any delight in the people for they are all corrupt like over-ripened fruit. They have seen their greatest days and are now in decline morally. Their injustice is obvious and not only tasteless, but distasteful. As he travels throughout Judah, he cannot find one righteous person in whom his own soul delights, let alone the Lord’s soul delights. He walks in a valley that had so much potential, yet it is so rotten and wasted. And he says this of himself! And I believe from the next verse we will see it in the rest of Israel.

We need to be able to apply that to ourselves too. There are times when we are spiritually empty, when we have no feeling that we are alive and thriving. These times are dangerous times for the believer, because we can become depressed about ourselves and lose hope. We must be careful to do what the prophet does later on and restate our faith in the Lord and our desire to see Him and not the evil around us.

7:2 The faithful one has perished from the earth, even the upright among humankind does not exist. They all lie in ambush for blood. Each hunts his brother with a net.

The people who are trustworthy are gone. Micah can't find any who are faithful, whom the Lord could trust. They are all worthless. The word for perished here means to be destroyed. It is as if evil has wiped out the goodness of Judah. A parallel and synonymous phrase comes next to complete the couplet as he re-emphasizes that the one who is upright in deeds, whom the Lord would take pleasure in for actively doing the good does not exist. Such a person is gone. He has perished and his existence is gone. This bears similar to the "no one righteous" passage in the psalms.

Now he says about the whole of his country, the whole of Judah, that everyone he knows waits in ambush or lies in wait to attack. They are all hungry for blood. They don't want justice. They prefer violence. They would rather shed a man's blood than seek justice for him. In fact, each man is willing rather to hunt his own brother, his own kinsman like an animal than to see justice. They love doing evil. They have turned completely away from good. They no longer even remotely honor the Lord.

7:3 Their palms are on evil to do it well, the prince and the judge ask for a bribe; even the great one speaks the desire of his soul. And thus they weave it together.

The palms of their hands hold evil things. Their paws are on evil stuff. They've gotten involved with evil motives and evil actions. They're lending the strength of their hands to evil and wicked actions. In practice, they are worshipping everything but the true God of Israel who loves justice. Not only are they doing evil, but they are getting very good at it, more efficient, more profoundly profane and wicked in their understanding and executing evil. They are becoming experts in evil.

Some examples of that statement appear next. These are their leaders who are leading by example. The prince and the judges are all asking for a bribe to do whatever the briber wants. They seek payment and whoever pays them the most is the one who gets their side done. In other words, if the evil rich guy wants injustice, and he can pay more, he'll get from the judge or the prince what he demanded with his bribe.

Then Micah refers to the great one. This is the person with respect among the people, the person who is held in high honor. Rabbi literally means, "My great one." I am not saying that the religious leaders are meant here, but they would be considered great by the people of Judah. So it is very possible with their amount of influence at the grass roots that Micah is referring to them. But it could be anyone held in esteem by the people. The great one speaks out of the desire of his own soul. This is not a good desire either. It has the connotation of being an evil desire. People who talk speak of injustice and teach others how to do injustice.

The last phrase seems to indicate that their society on so many levels was so corrupt that it all was simply weaved or twisted together, like the political machine that stops for nothing to do what it is built to do, or the system that refuses to yield even when unjust or wrong for just one person. It is unstoppable. The whole society is corrupt from the top down. It is weaved in a

tapestry of evil strings all put together to make the whole rotten to the core. Nothing is spared and nothing good is left.

7:4 The best of them is like a thorn bush, the upright *like* a hedge of thorns. The day of your watchmen, of your visitation has come; now is their confusion.

Micah continues his lament here as he points out that the very best among the people of Judah is a thorn bush. So morally corrupt is every single person that the ones who are not as bad as still thorny, they still don't know anything about justice. They probably have simply not perfected their ability to do evil effectively. The next line mimics the first, once again pointing to the upright, which by very definition are those who act in a righteous and God-pleasing way, are like a whole hedge of thorns, a whole line of these thorn bushes.

The next image is not one of agriculture but of military. The day of your watchmen is the day in which the men who watch the city cry aloud that the enemy comes to their gates. It is the day of laying siege the city. It is the day of defeat and confusion. The visitation is that of an army upon the people, but also of the Lord's just furious wrath upon those thorns and thorn hedges. He will exact vengeance in that day. And they will be in confusion, like the armies the Lord fought against for them, because they did not expect this day to come. They thought they were not the cause of God's wrath.

7:5 Put no trust in a neighbor. Put no confidence in a friend. From her who lies in your bosom, guard the doors of your mouth

Verses five and six conclude the statements about the current events of the prophet in his own time. His response to the wickedness around him starts in verse seven and continues to the end of the section in verse 10. Here, he points to the corruption of even their most intimate relationships because of the wickedness that saturates their society. There will be no trust, no faithfulness, no confiding in anyone.

A secret will no longer be safe. An intimate detail will no longer be cherished. Everyone is out for himself and the law has been forgotten. So the prophet speaks wisdom to the unwise. He calls for them to not trust their neighbor. He is essentially saying that in a time of lawlessness and arrogance and selfishness, it is true that "good fences make good neighbors." There can be no trust in people who are going to turn on you if it suits their own needs.

Now it goes from general to more specific. Even those who call themselves your friend, who aren't just living next to you as neighbors, cannot be trusted with a confidence. You cannot be completely sure that even friends, a more intimate relationship than the neighbor, will be trusted with your information or communication or person. So your relationship, which is built on trust, with a neighbor or even a friend is no good when it comes to watching your own back.

Finally, the prophet goes to the most intimate relationship a human can have with another human. He says that you cannot even trust, believe it or not, in this culture of destruction and

selfishness, your own wife. In Jewish culture, the person who lays in your bosom would be your spouse, here the wife of a husband.

It could technically be a prostitute, or a mistress, but the idea here is the increasing increment of the intimacy of each relationship. A neighbor is almost an acquaintance in most instances. Then a friend knows much more about you, but a spouse knows you most intimately. The prophet counsels every person to watch what they say even in their most intimate relationships. The imagery of the doors of the mouth, the lips, being locked tight and shut, keep the person from giving the treasure of their information to even their most treasured companion.

7:6 for a son treats with disdain a father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law is against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies are the men of his own house!

Why would the prophet command this to his countrymen, give them wisdom to not trust a single soul they know? Because of the deterioration of their relationships within the family, the nucleus, or foundational basis, of the whole society, they cannot trust. Trusting another no matter how intimate the relationship would be one's own destruction and undoing. If you can't trust family, who can you trust?

So the verse starts with a "for" or "because" clause explaining the wisdom of the previous verse. The son treats the father with disdain, dishonoring the father. He treats the father like a child, like he knows nothing. The daughter treats her mother with contention, rising up against her in every matter. Children are talking back to their parents, which, not that they care, violates one of the Ten Commandments.

Even the extended family is destroyed in relationships. The daughter-in-law speaks and acts against the mother-in-law. While in our society in-laws are not necessarily ever really treated well, in this culture, and in the culture that should be for us, in-laws became part of the blood family. They were just as intimate relationships as the nuclear family.

The prophet summarizes the wise commands and their explanation with this simple truth about the home life of the man of the house. His enemies are not outside of his house, but rather inside. When he goes out to work or to the city, he is treated better than in his own home. The shame of such a situation could be incredible in this culture. The man who should be fighting battles outside is fighting battles when he goes to his home, the place that is supposed to bring the most comfort.

7:7 But me, I will be watching for the Lord! I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me.

Now from verses 7-10, the prophet shows the contrast in his own life. Although his countrymen have decided to live in selfishness and distrust, he will place his trust not in a human being, but in the Lord God. The verb that Micah uses here is the idea of being on the lookout,

searching out the Lord, waiting on Him to do what He will do and say. This is the idea of being someone who is watching for Him. Micah's on a stake-out to see the Lord instead of this injustice and idolatry.

No one else is on the lookout for the Lord. The prophet turns to the Lord in a culture that turns away from Him. He says that he has made the personal decision in a culture of godlessness to look to the Living God, to wait on that Lord to come in His justice and righteousness and vindication. In the idea of waiting for the Lord is hoping in the Lord. Hope is an unseen thing that is evident to us. Hope demands trust in what its premise. In waiting on the Lord, Micah is trusting in the hope of His promise.

The promise that God will save or rescue Micah is what he places his hope in. God is the one who orchestrates deliverance. Micah is more willing to wait upon God to save than any human solution or any other solution. More often than not, we find ourselves more interested in the human solution because of expedience or because we think it could be best. But we need to learn to wait upon God and be reminded, as Micah states next, that God hears us when we call out to Him. He listens. He is not a God who ignores us, but is intently waiting to answer us. Sometimes our search for human solutions slows down God's reply. Sometimes we get in His way by distrusting Him.

7:8 Do not rejoice, O my enemy, over me. When I accidentally fall, I will rise. When I sit in the darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

This trust that the prophet exudes leads him to know that he is protected in God's care. He tells his enemies not to rejoice in the disasters that befall him or his nation. He provides examples of when the nations around Israel would rejoice. The first is a time of accidental falling. This could be a literal physical fall that is much like tripping and not being able to catch oneself. It could also be a spiritual fall, like falling into idolatry. Accidental spiritual falls could result from people not realizing the insidious and powerful nature of sin's result.

Micah also uses the common biblical imagery of light versus darkness. He speaks of sitting in the darkness. The word for sit here means to dwell or to inhabit as well as to sit in a seat. So even in long-term periods of dwelling in the darkness, of not having true revelation, this prophet will not rely on his own senses. He will look to the Lord to be his revelation and light, his guide and his help. That is why the nations should not rejoice over Micah or the failures of his people Israel. God will be their defense, and the enemies will not be rejoicing when God defends His people.

7:9 The rage of the Lord I will carry because I have sinned against Him until He argues my dispute and applies the judgment for me. He will bring me out into the light. I will look upon His righteousness.

Verses 8-10 are very similar in content and idea to Isaiah's Suffering Servant passages. He personally identifies with the nation of Israel that is going through a time of God's wrath being prepared for it. The verb for carry hear is to take on a burden, to be weighed down. The burden or weight is the result of God's wrath and rage-filled anger with the people for their sins.

In fact, Micah gives the reason for Israel's burden from the Lord, the reason why Israel is enduring God's righteous rage – because of their sin against Him. Amos had responded to false prophets that said God would not be angry with His people ever. But we know from Amos' response that God was indeed angry with His people and was putting them under judgment in Northern Israel.

The length of this period of wrath lasts from now until the time that God's redemption draws near for Israel, which Micah referred to in verse 8, the time in which the light of revelation comes to Israel from God. There is coming a time when God will once again defend His people, when He will take on their case and argue on their behalf against the nations overjoyed at their current downfall. God will be the one to argue the case, to bring the dispute into His own court, and bring the judgment in favor of Israel and against Israel's enemies.

In this time of God's bringing Israel's defense, Israel will see the light of revelation. They will realize who God is and what He is doing for them. The four Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah culminate in the same first-person references to carrying God's judgment, to taking on Israel's sin and being the sin sacrifice for Israel.

This is a messianic passage referring to Jesus. He is the one who argues their case, and indeed, every human being's case before God and comes to their rescue. He is our Light that brings us out of darkness! When God does this for us, when Jesus comes, we will once again see the Light of revelation and understand God's plans. Then we will in the light look upon God's righteousness and worship Him for His great attributes. God truly will come to the aid and rescue of everyone who sins against Him. He does this at the cross.

7:10 Then my enemy will see, and she will cover her shame who said to me, “Where is the Lord your God?” My eyes will look upon her. Now she will be trampled down like the mud in the streets.

There are further consequences to God's bringing the argument against Israel's gloating enemies. Not only will Israel be rescued and set right once again, and see God in proper revelation, and worship Him for who He is, but also the enemy of Israel will see God in all of His radiant glory. Whereas Israel will worship God for His goodness and righteousness, the enemy, pictured here as a woman who is shamed, will cover itself because of the shame it has in having wrongly taunted and accused Israel.

One of the taunts leveled at Israel during the arrogant enemy's victory dance and rejoicing was asking where God was. This question is common to Old Testament prophetic and poetic literature. It is a taunt because it is saying that an all powerful God did not come to His people's rescue. It is essentially pointing out God's impotence where He is not impotent.

In that time of judgment for the nations and vindication for Israel, the nations will be ashamed that they ever doubted God's existence or His care for His people. They will be ashamed because they were wrong about God's helping His people. They will also endure not only shame, which was one of the most powerful punishments for them in that culture, but will also be trampled down by armies and drug through the mud of the streets. They will be placed in the same position that Israel is in right now as the prophet vividly describes. The tides will one day be turned on the nations that laugh now. They will weep later.

7:11 A day for the building of your walls; that day your boundaries will be extended.

Verses 11-17 now prophesy a future time in which Israel will be restored by God. Verse 11 starts that prophetic future by talking about a day, probably either the Day of the Lord or the day that the people begin to return from exile. I suggest that this refers to the Day of the Lord, although the day of the exile is documented in history. This Post-Exilic day in which Jerusalem begins to be rebuilt Jerusalem does not completely fulfill this prophecy. Remember that Micah was sent to the southern kingdom of Judah and is speaking to the people of Jerusalem.

This day is a day of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which partially happens within Jewish antiquity during the time that Nehemiah is a governor. The whole book of Nehemiah is about this one event mentioned in this line. He is the one who helps through encouragement and ability for the walls to be rebuilt. But the rest of this prophecy is not fulfilled in his time.

In the same breath of the restoration of Jerusalem is the expanding of the borders farther than they are now. Israel will be restored on that day not just in its cities, but in the amount of land that God has promised being under Israeli control. Since the Exile, Israel has either rarely or never possessed and governed the land that God has promised, so this second part might be referring to the Millennial Reign period. It is possible that even the building of Jerusalem may occur in that time as well.

7:12 In that day, it will come even to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, from Egypt to the river, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.

The descriptions of that day continue. The subject of the verb "it will come," is most like the nations as individual nations. The verb does not match in number its reference point and most translations translate "they will come," referring to the nations of Assyria and Egypt, and the nations of the world.

The nations will come to Israel. It will be the center or the hub of the world in many aspects. This is clearly the Day of the Lord, which inaugurates the Millennial Reign of Christ. The city of Jerusalem is rebuilt, or restored, and the nation's boundaries are restored, and then its reputation is then restored. The nations begin to come to Israel from Assyria and Egypt, historical enemies of Israel, to every other nation from across rivers and seas and mountains.

7:13 But it will happen that the earth will be a desolation on account of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds.

Contrary to the wonder of Israel will be the state of the rest of the planet in this time. The planet will be a desolation, completely destroyed and bankrupt of resources. While Israel is the place to be, the rest of the world would crumble. I believe this refers to the final couple of judgments in Revelation, for a third of the earth is gone and many people are dead for standing up to Jesus, God's Anointed One.

Micah gives the reason for the world's destruction that matches God's reason for divine wrath in Revelation during the Great Tribulation: the sin of humanity. Here that sin is shown as the results of what people do, the fruit of their deeds. The inhabitants are the culprits of the world going to decay and destruction. It is their action that causes the desolation. The other possibility is that instead of God's wrath because of sin doing this desolation, that humanity itself becomes so depraved and corrupt that the earth is collateral damage. The Great Tribulation also squares well with verses 9-10.

7:14 Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance who dwell in solitude, a forest in the midst of an orchard. They will graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old.

Now comes a command to shepherd, synonymous with leadership, the people with a staff. We don't know who this is talking to. It is not talking to the leaders of Micah's day, I don't believe, because we are still in futuristic prophecy. Perhaps it refers to the way that the people will be governed by Jesus in a caring way. Israel is referred to as the flock of inheritance who dwell all alone or in solitude. Israel will be a nation that stands alone in this era of destruction.

Israel is further described in this period as a forest in the midst of an orchard. I would take this to mean that Israel will flourish and grow high and deep but it will be in the midst of a place that is not so easily growing. Israel will be the forest in the midst of a mere orchard. It will be nurtured to grow while the orchard is left to grow as it naturally grows. The people of Israel will have the finest of pickings. The area of Bashan was known for its fine grazing status. It was the premier place to take one's flocks to graze. Gilead was another place with good grazing. Amos specifically mentions Bashan as he talks about the women who have more than enough and get what they want. These are the days of old that Micah refers to, or quite possibly the time of David and Solomon which is known as Israel's Golden Age.

7:15 As the days you when you went out from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders.

The time of Israel's popularity in this special moment of human history will be not only like the days of old, or the golden years of David and Solomon in which the world looked to Israel, but it will also be like the days of freedom from Egypt, when the nations first tasted

freedom through the Lord's intervention. The person God is showing wonders to is probably the nation of Egypt, referred to collectively as one man, or it refers to any of the nations collectively. The wonders are miraculous and extraordinary signs concerning Israel's absolute specialty in God's plans.

7:16 The nations will see and be ashamed of all their strength; they will lay their hand on their mouth. Their ears will be deaf.

The last phrase of verse 15 and this verse seem to refer back to verses 9 and 10 in this chapter. God promises that the nations will be shamed and that He will shine forth for Israel and be their light. The wonders will stupefy the nations. They will be ashamed that they had raised their hand or their power and strength against the nation of Israel. This can refer not only to what Judah and Israel are about to go through in the Exile but also to the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the Great Tribulation in which the nations rise up and are easily defeated. So when Christ reigns, the nations will be ashamed that they even went against Israel and attacked this nation.

Two images are presented by Micah that show how they will exhibit such shame. The first is to put their hand over their mouths. This is a reaction of shock and horror at what a person has done. Usually when someone is shamed, others look away from them at the moment of their shame. But here, the shamed cover their mouths in amazement at the wonders God does and the fact that they were complicit in going against God. The second image is one of them covering their ears, or their ears being deaf, or unable to hear. Many times when we don't want to hear something, especially self-incriminating evidence that we are shamed before God, we cover our ears and try to block out the noise of judgment.

7:17 They will lick the dust of the earth like a snake; like a crawling thing of the earth they will come trembling from their strongholds on account of the Lord our God, and they will shiver in fear from you.

The vision of the coming Day of the Lord, the future of Israel, settles in a description of the nations and their relation to God and to Israel. The nations are described as snakes that crawl on the ground and eat the dust or lick the dust. They will be humbled and lowly. Their fight against Israel and God failed and the consequence is to be the servants of the victorious nation. Even though they have strongholds and fortresses, they will crawl out of them trembling in fear, shaking from the terror of God's might and Israel's strength. When Israel is allied with God, they will be unstoppable.

The snakes and creepy crawly things of the earth are related in that they are close to the surface of the earth. They are lower animals, and here are the symbol of surrender and subjection and humility. Not only will they live in terror of Almighty God, the God of the nation of Israel, but they will cower in total fear of the nation itself. The nations will shiver or shake violently

because of a fear of Israel. The nation will enjoy quite a privileged status in this time of God's reign.

7:18 Who is a God like You, carrying iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not let His anger grow strong forever, because He delights in steadfast love.

This finishing section of the book of Micah is a personal prayer to God, blessing Him for His kindness to the nation of Israel and resting on the promise of His action and character in the life of the nation. It is very applicable to how we live in between the ages of God's promises and fulfillments. The prophet starts by asking the famed and common Hebrew question, "Who is like You, God?" This is a contemplative question that sets up intimate times of meditation for most Christians and Jews. It is a question that prompts the mind to think on God's character and attributes.

Also, this question forms the translation of Micah's name. His name means "Who is like God." There is a slight variation in which Micah puts God's name in the middle of the question rather than at the end, but the point is still made. How cool is it for Micah to start his book by using his name and end it with a prayer that bounces off the meaning of his name!

Then the prophet continues to follow this contemplative meditation by pointing out some of God's actions. He carries the burden or the weight of Israel's sins and He passes over Israel's transgressions. Every violation is looked over, sort of like when someone sees a fault and ignores it or glosses over it. That's what unconditional love does! God carries our burden of sin. He does not make us carry it. Jesus carried our sin to the cross. And He passes over our sins, He favors us and sees us as His Son Jesus, blameless before Him!

The remnant of His inheritance is the people of God. It is for the sake of Israel, and as we know from later revelation, the Church, that God carries our sin and passes over our sins, so that He can have us for His own. The prophet points out that God's anger doesn't last forever. He doesn't keep being angry with sinners. He doesn't just pour out His wrath on everyone. The reason for this is that God does not love anger. He loves love instead!

The word here is the word *hesed* which we talked about in 6:8. It is a very loaded special word for God's unconditional and covenantal love for Israel, and of course, extended to the Church. It is the love that is acted upon through fidelity to His people and constant acts of saving mercy. We tend to love wrath and anger. When we are wronged, we would love to take vengeance. God is not the same as us. When He is wronged, He does not turn to wrath as His first method for dealing with us. He turns first to the grace of His loving kindness. That love is the greatest love the Bible can refer to.

7:19 He will return His compassion; He will subdue our iniquities. Then You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins.

Some translate this first phrase to the affect that God will again be compassionate. The verb here is the same as repent or return for the Israelites. When God calls them to repentance, He calls them to turn again to Him. Here, Micah says that God will after His wrath turn again to compassion for His people. It would be improper to refer to God repenting, because the word repent in English carries the meaning of moral sin, while turning again to something or returning to it does not contain that moral facet.

The next phrase says that God will subdue our iniquities, or sins. The word subdue here is used to show that God will captivate or take our sins away from us, as one is removed from shackles. But His action here against sin is a violent subduing. In some contexts this is the word used for rape, the subduing of a woman so that she cannot get away. God will lock our sins up so they cannot rule over us. That is what this word entails.

The next phrase is very interesting because it points to a Jewish belief that what is in the sea, or the depths of the sea, is considered the underworld. God will take their sins and captivate them by tossing them into the depths of the sea where they no longer can affect the person. Interestingly, John in Revelation 21:1 mentions that the sea is no longer present in the perfect new heavens and new earth. The underworld where sin and death reside is not present in the new creation.

There is no need to create a place for them because they don't exist there. God's casting their sins into the depths of the sea is a way of saying they are out of sight and can no longer have any mastery over the person. Another way to say this is that God takes a page out of the mob's book and puts concrete shoes on sin and throws it in the river never to be found again. God forgets our sins and counts them against us no more!

7:20 You will give trustworthiness to Jacob, steadfast love to Abraham, which you have sworn to our fathers from the days of antiquity.

This verse as it continues to extol God's virtues and attributes points out His faithfulness, His fidelity and trustworthiness to Jacob. Jacob and Abraham are mentioned in conjunction with the fathers of Israel as a way of bringing up the covenant. Often in covenantal language the fathers will be invoked. And God Himself will refer to Himself in those terms. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." In other words, "I am God and I've been around longer than you so listen up!" Here, the prophet invokes the idea of the fathers because the promise was not just to the fathers but to all of Israel throughout history. The covenant binds God to His people Israel. It is an unconditional agreement that includes conditions in it.

The word give here has the idea of showing or presenting, of acting in this manner. God will always be faithful despite the faithlessness of His chosen people. You can put your hope and trust in that characteristic of God. For the third time hessed is mentioned by Amos, first in 6:8 and then a little earlier in the chapter here. Hessed is that special reference to God's unfailing love for His people. He always responds with hessed as the measure of His method of dealing with His people.

So the book is finished by the prophet invoking God's promises upon a nation that is about to go through the fire of judgment through exile to other nations, a nation that is about to lose the land promised by God because of their great and many sins against Him. Even still, God will turn to them in love and faithfulness despite the way they have treated Him. He is the God who always responds in this way to His people first. His holiness causes Him to judge, but He loves in His judgment.