

# Micah - Introduction & Background

## Title

The book is titled after its central character. The Hebrew title of the book is *Michayahu* or its shortened form *Michaia*. This name means, "who is like Yahweh?" Micah implies the meaning of his name through his statement to Yahweh's incomparability (7:18). Here, he asks, "Who is a God like you?" Thus, his name is appropriate for the book's contents where God's incomparable mercy is extolled regarding how He will ultimately keep His promises made to Abraham in spite of the present experience of covenant discipline. His name also rebukes the people for their folly in turning away from their magnificent God to follow vain religion. The LXX entitles the book *Michaias* and the Latin Vulgate entitles it *Micha*. The English title Micah is adopted from the shortened form of the Hebrew title.

## Authorship

According to the book's own testimony, Micah is the work's author (1:1). Critics contend that the book was written after the time of Micah by the prophet's disciples. However, conservatives have noted the improbability of this view since Micah's disciples would not have included a prophecy that apparently failed (3:12). As far as Micah's biography is concerned, Micah's hometown was Moresheth-Gath (1:1, 14). This town was located in the foothills or *Shephelah* of Judah, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, on the border of Judah, near Philistia, and near Lachish. The city was located in a significant agricultural area. Because this city represented an important trading place and guarded a key route into the hill country of Judah south of Jerusalem, Rehoboam fortified it in 922–915 BC (2 Chr 11:5–12). Sennacherib eventually captured the city in 701 BC when he attacked Jerusalem. Thus, like Amos, Micah was originally from the country.

Micah was keenly aware of his divine calling as a prophet (3:8). Apparently, the prophet's name was a popular one. Taking into consideration minor spelling deviations, a total of nine OT characters bear his name. Micah's ministry enjoyed some degree of effectiveness. According to Jer 26:18–19, Micah's preaching led to Hezekiah's reforms thus postponing judgment upon Jerusalem. Other than the scant biographical information found in this text and in the Book of Micah itself, nothing else is known of this prophet. Micah's family background and occupation remain a mystery.

## Scope and Date

The general date of Micah's ministry can be ascertained from the book's opening verse (1), which indicates that Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham (750–731 BC), Ahaz (731–715 BC), and Hezekiah (715–686 BC). Thus, 750–686 BC can be fixed as the general scope of Micah's ministry. However, several internal clues allow the date to be fixed even

further. First, Jotham co-reigned with Uzziah and then became the sole ruler in 739 BC, which was the date of Isaiah's calling (Is 6:1). Since 1:1 fails to mention Uzziah, Micah's ministry must have begun after 739 BC. Second, because the book predicts the fall of Samaria (1:6-7) that took place in 722 BC, a large portion of Micah's ministry must have transpired before that time. Third, Micah's ministry must have extended into at least some of Hezekiah's reign since Jer 29:18-19 indicates that Micah's preaching prompted Hezekiah to inaugurate his reforms.

Fourth, because Micah seems to hint at Judah's distress upon being invaded by Assyria (1:10-15; 5:6), his ministry must have extended at least to 701 BC, which was the date of this incursion. Fifth, the date of Micah's ministry should not be pushed beyond 700 BC since the height of Hezekiah's reforms transpired after that date. Micah's strong denunciation of idolatry and immorality seem to indicate that he prophesied before these reforms reached their Zenith. All things considered, a general date of 735–700 BC for both the scope of Micah's ministry and the composition of his book seems appropriate. Because both Isaiah (1:1) and Hosea (1:1) prophesied during the reign of the same kings that defined Micah's era (1:1), all three of these prophets were contemporaries. While Hosea prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel, Isaiah and Micah prophesied to the southern kingdom of Judah.

### **Recipients and Place of Writing**

While some of Micah's message is aimed at Samaria (1:1,6-7) and the northern kingdom (6), several factors indicate that the bulk of his ministry was directed toward the southern kingdom of Judah. First, Micah's own hometown (1:1,14) was located near Jerusalem in southern Judah. Second, all of the kings mentioned in the book's opening verse (1:1) were from the southern kingdom. Third, while Samaria is referred to in the third person "her" (1:6-7), the second person "you" is used to speak to the cities of Judah (1:11,13). Because Jerusalem and the temple are prominently featured in the book (1:2,5; 3:10—4:4,8,10,13; 7:8-11) it is possible that Jerusalem is the likely place of the book's composition. However, an even more likely suggestion is that Micah penned his book in his hometown of Moresheth-Gath (1:1,14).

### **Structure**

After providing introductory information (1:1), the Book of Micah consists of three separate sermons. The beginning of each sermon is discernible through the use of the verb "hear" or "listen" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). The first sermon conveys God's majestic coming in judgment (1:2—2:13). The second sermon communicates the coming of the Messiah to deliver (3–5). The third sermon speaks of God's concern that His people practice true religion (6–7). All three of these oracles introduce both judgment and hope. This hope motif includes the restoration of a repentant remnant. Bramer captures this structure as follows.

	Scripture	“Hear/listen”	Judgment	Lament	Hope	Remnant
<b>First sermon</b>	1:2–2:13	1:2	1:2-7; 2:1-5	1:8-16; 2:6-11	2:12-13	2:12
<b>Second sermon</b>	3–5	3:1	3:1-4, 5-12	None	4:1–5:15	4:7; 5:7-8
<b>Third sermon</b>	6–7	6:1	6:1-5, 9-16	7:1-6	7:7-20	7:18

## Historical Background

Micah prophesied during a time of national apostasy. The writings of both Amos and Hosea reveal the apostasy of the northern kingdom. This trend resulted in the eventual collapse of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. Things fared no better for the southern kingdom. The prosperous reign of Uzziah was replaced by the wicked kingship of Jotham who refused to remove the idolatrous places. Ahaz continued this apostate trend through his decision to seek assistance from Assyria rather than God when threatened by Rezin and Pekah (Is 7). Although Hezekiah ushered in reforms and withstood Sennacherib’s siege by trusting in God (Is 37), he continued the trend of apostasy by showing the temple treasures to Merodach-Baldan (Is 39).

During this time period, Assyrian power reached its apex thereby posing a threat to Judah. Prominent Assyrian kings during this time period included Tiglath Pileser III (745–727 BC), Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC), Sargon II (722–705 BC), and Sennacherib (705–681 BC). Five significant historical events involving Assyria transpired in Micah’s day that form the background for much of his message. First, Ahaz sought assistance from Assyria rather than God when threatened by Rezin and Pekah (735–734 BC). Second, in 734–732 BC, Tiglath Pileser III infiltrated into Syria, Philistia, Judah, and Israel causing the first three of these nations to become tributaries to Assyria and Israel to lose most of her territory. Third, the northern kingdom was completely conquered by Assyria in 722 BC.

Fourth, Hezekiah and other nations attempted to break away from Assyrian bondage in 705 BC by refusing to pay tribute (2 Kings 18:7). Fifth, Judah was overrun by Sennacherib forcing Hezekiah to pay additional tribute to Assyria from the temple treasury (2 Kings 18:14-17). This economic burden furnishes the background for the situation described in the Book of Micah and explains the content of many of the prophet’s messages. It created oppression and exploitation of the Judahites, loss of land and property (2:2), and caused the Jews to enslave and evict one another (2:9) in an attempt to satisfy the national financial burden.

## Message

In his three oracles Micah explains through covenant lawsuit imagery that while the nation and its leaders are guilty and therefore deserving of imminent judgment on account of their social injustices, there is still hope since the messiah will eventually come and usher in the kingdom and shepherd God’s people.

## **Purposes**

Micah wrote his book in order to accomplish several purposes. First, Micah wrote to present to the nation God's complaints against them on account of their covenant violations. Thus, the southern kingdom would be disciplined just like the Northern kingdom. Second, the book was written in order to explain that God would introduce covenant judgment on account of the nation's covenant sins. Third, Micah wrote to explain that present covenant disobedience and coming covenant judgment did not cancel or annul earlier given Abrahamic commitments (7:20) promising eventual national restoration and kingdom manifestation. Fourth, Micah included the promise of restoration so that the righteous remnant would have hope in spite of present apostasy and judgment. Fifth, Micah wrote to reveal that personal holiness and justice constituted genuine covenant obedience (6:8).

## **Theological Themes**

Several theological themes recur throughout the Book of Micah. First, the book reiterates the themes of the judgment and mercy of God toward His people. Second, the book focuses upon justice and holiness as the pathway toward covenant obedience (6:8). Third, the book emphasizes the complete corruption of Israel's leaders at the time of Micah (3). Fourth, the book reveals God's concern for the downtrodden and oppressed. Fifth, the book emphasizes national restoration and future Davidic kingdom. Sixth, both the disciplinary and restorative components of the Mosaic Covenant are given treatment. Furthermore, the immutable Abrahamic covenant is emphasized (7:20). Seventh, the remnant is included in each of Micah's three messages (2:12; 4:7; 5:7-8; 7:18). Eighth, Micah offers rich Christology in his description of Christ's first advent, reign, and shepherding role. Ninth, Micah focuses upon Jerusalem and the temple. Tenth, covenant lawsuit motif forms the basis for each of Micah's three oracles (1:2; 3:1; 6:1-3). Each lawsuit is inaugurated with a divine summons for people to come and listen to God's complaint against His people.

## **Unique Characteristics**

The Book of Micah boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, in his oracles, Micah consistently moves back and forth from judgment to hope. Second, Micah's heavy emphasis upon the remnant makes him unique among the prophets. Third, Micah concentrates upon the Mosaic Covenant's social ethics. Fourth, Micah shows many resemblances to Isaiah not only in terms of style (vividness, multiples figures of speech, judgment balanced by hope, and advocacy of justice) but also in similarity of scriptural citations (1:2a/1:2a; 2:3/2:12; 2:11/30:10; 2:13/52:12; 3:5-7/29:9-12; 4:1-3/2:2-4; 4:10/39:6-7; 5:2-3/7:14; 5:4/40:11; 5:6/14:25; 6:2/3:13; 6:6-7/7:1-11; 6:8/1:17 and 58:5; 6:14/9:20; 7:7/8:17; 7:8/9:2; 7:12/11:11 and 19:23-25; 7:19/43:25).<sup>10</sup> Despite these similarities, some differences exist between these prophets. For example, while

Isaiah is more focused upon the royalty of Judah in general and the city of Jerusalem in particular, Micah is more focused upon the nation's commoners. This distinction is explainable by the fact that Isaiah was from Jerusalem while Micah was from Moresheth-Gath.

Fifth, Micah is quoted elsewhere in instrumental ways. For example, the elders quoted Micah's prophecy of coming judgment upon Jerusalem in order to preserve Jeremiah's life (3:12; Jer 26:18), the religious leaders quoted Micah's prophecy to pinpoint the birth place of the messiah (5:2; Matt 2:5-6), and Christ quoted from Micah in order to explain the high cost of discipleship (7:6; Matt 10:35-36).<sup>11</sup> Sixth, relative to other prophets, Micah's prophecies contain a larger percentage of foretelling in comparison to forth telling. Seventh, Micah's prophecies offer encouragement for the poor, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. Eighth, Micah contributes to the development of a worship theology through his condemnation of ritual devoid of inward reality (6:8).

Ninth, Micah exhibits many word plays and puns. For example, when condemning the cities of Judah (1:10-16), he makes use of *paronomasia*, which involves the employment of words that sound similar to other words yet have a different definition.<sup>13</sup> Tenth, the Book of Micah furnishes one of the clearest messianic prophecies (5:2) found anywhere in the OT.

Eleventh, each major section of the book is introduced by covenant lawsuit imagery.

Twelfth, the book contains a chapter depicting all of the elements of a *rib* or covenant lawsuit (6). These include opening appeal and calling of witnesses (6:1-2), questioning of motives and actions (6:3), specific charge (6:4-8), declaration of guilt (6:9-12), and sentence (6:13-16).

### **Christ in Micah**

Not only does the Book of Micah contain a clear messianic prophecy (5:2) but also the coming millennial reign of Christ is prominently featured throughout the book (2:12-13; 4:1-8; 5:4-5). Other Christological references include messiah's role as breaker (2:13), teacher (4:2), judge (4:3), ruler (5:2), shepherd (5:4; 7:14), peace-maker (5:5a), redeemer (5:6b), and avenger (5:10-15).

### **Outline**

#### **I. Introductory superscription (Micah 1:1)**

- (1) Who: Micah of Moresheth (1:1a)
- (2) When: Days of kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1b)
- (3) What: Samaria and Jerusalem (1:1c)

#### **II. God's judgment coming (Micah 1:2—2:13)**

- (1) Introduction to God's court case against His nation (1:2)
- (2) Coming judgment (1:3-7)
  - (A) Lord's coming (1:3)
  - (B) Nature's reaction (1:4)

- (C) Cause of the judgment: sins of Samaria and Jerusalem (1:5)
    - (D) Condemnation of Samaria (1:6-7)
      - (a) Condemnation described (1:6-7a)
      - (b) Cause of condemnation: harlotry (1:7b)
  - (3) Prophet laments coming judgment (1:8-16)
    - (A) Mourning for Samaria (1:8)
    - (B) Mourning for Jerusalem (1:9-16)
      - (a) Jerusalem's fall (1:9)
      - (b) Disaster to come upon Jerusalem and her surrounding cities (1:10-15)
      - (c) Lamentation (1:16)
  - (4) Cause of judgment: corruption (2:1-11)
    - (A) Oppressive greed (2:1-2)
    - (B) Judgment (2:3-5)
    - (C) Rejection of the truth because of greed (2:6-11)
  - (5) Hope: Lord will regather and restore the remnant (2:12-13)
- III. Condemnation of Israel's corrupt leadership in comparison to future kingdom glory and messianic deliverance (Micah 3:1—5:15)
- (1) God's court case against Judah's leaders on account of their sin (3:1-12)
    - (A) Rulers (3:1-4)
      - (a) Sin of injustice (3:1-3)
      - (b) Their judgment (3:4)
    - (B) Prophets (3:5-8)
      - (a) Sin of falsely proclaiming peace (3:5)
      - (b) Their judgment (3:6-7)
      - (c) Micah contrasted as a true prophet (3:8)
        - (i) Spiritual power (3:8a)
        - (ii) Justice (3:8b)
        - (iii) Covenant enforcement (3:8c)
    - (C) Jerusalem hierarchy (3:9-12)
      - (a) Sins (3:9-11)
        - (i) Injustice (3:9)
        - (ii) Violence (3:10)
        - (iii) Materialism (3:11a)
        - (iv) False optimism (3:11b)
      - (b) Judgment: Zion to be plowed as a field (3:12)
  - (2) Eventual future blessing (Micah 4:1—5:15)
    - (A) Coming kingdom (4:1-13)
      - (a) Preeminence of Jerusalem (4:1-5)

- (b) Regathering and restoration of the nation (4:6-8)
  - (c) Regathering from Babylon (4:9-10)
  - (d) Victory over gloating enemies (4:11-13)
- (B) Coming King (5:1-5a)
  - (a) Present subjugation of Israel's ruler (5:1)
  - (b) Messiah's first coming (5:2)
  - (c) Messiah's second coming (5:3-5a)
- (C) Destruction upon enemies of God's people (5:5b-9)
  - (a) Israel saved from the Assyrian (5:5b-6)
  - (b) Regathered remnant to be delivered from her enemies (5:7-9)
- (D) Cleansing of Israel (5:10-15)
  - (a) Weaponry removed (5:10-11)
  - (b) Occultism removed (5:12)
  - (c) Idolatry removed (5:13-14)
  - (d) Enemies removed (5:15)

#### IV. God's conviction and judgment upon His people for their failure to practice true religion and the ultimate restoration of Israel (Micah 6:1—7:20)

- (1) God's court case against Israel (6:1-16)
  - (A) Opening appeal to mountains and hills to form the jury (6:1-2)
  - (B) God responds to charges of oppression (6:3)
  - (C) Specific charge (6:4-8)
    - (a) Review of God's past faithfulness (6:4-5)
      - (i) Deliverance from Egypt (6:4a)
      - (ii) Moses, Miriam, Aaron given as leaders (6:4b)
      - (iii) Reversal of Balaam's curses (6:5a)
      - (iv) Deliverance into Canaan (6:5b)
    - (b) Specific charge: lack of heartfelt covenant obedience (6:6-8)
  - (D) Determination of Israel's guilt (6:9-12)
  - (E) Sentenced: coming judgment (6:13-16)
- (2) Micah's lament concerning Israel's corruption (Micah 7:1-6)
  - (A) Societal sins (7:1-4a)
  - (B) Coming judgment (7:4b)
  - (C) Relational sins (7:5-6)
- (3) Promises of restoration (7:7-20)
  - (A) Micah's hope in God (7:7)
  - (B) Micah's ultimate triumph over his enemies (7:8-10)
  - (C) Millennial restoration (7:11-20)
    - (a) Regathering (7:11-13)

- (i) Expansion of national borders (7:11)
  - (ii) People's journey from the nations to Israel (7:12)
  - (iii) Demise of enemies (7:13)
- (b) Blessing (7:14-15)
  - (i) Future shepherd (7:14)
  - (ii) Miracles (7:15)
- (c) Exaltation over the nations (7:16-17)
  - (i) Gentile shame (7:16)
  - (ii) Gentile fear of Israel (7:17)
- (d) Forgiveness (7:18-19)
  - (i) Divine forgiving nature (7:18)
  - (ii) Future compassion (7:19a)
  - (iii) Future forgiveness (7:19b)
- (e) Abrahamic covenant as the basis of these promises (7:20)