

Before starting this lesson, read the book of **Micah**. You may find it helpful to read the book, go thru the lesson and then read the book once again. Since it is a short book, it will not be difficult to do.

The name Israel is used thruout the Bible. It is easy to think it always means the same thing.

But in reality it has **7** different meanings, depending on the time of history you are talking about.

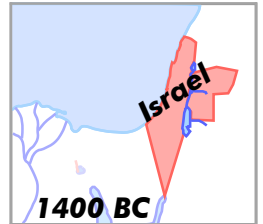
In the **1800's BC**, it was used for the first time as the name of a **person**. It was God's new name for Jacob.

In the **1400's BC**,

it became the name of the **land and nation** of the 12 Jewish tribes in the days of Joshua.

This was the meaning for five hundred years.

In **930 BC**, the Jewish civil war began and **Israel** became the name of only the **northern nation**.



Two hundred years later the people were exiled and the northern nation of Israel was taken off the map (722 BC).

Later on, the Jews of **Judah** were defeated and exiled to Babylon in 586 BC.

After 70 years, they returned and restarted their nation. They saw the northern nation had never returned and the name Israel had not been used for 200 years.



So in **536 BC**, besides calling it Judah, they also called it **Israel**, the original name of the **nation**.

It was called by that name for the next 500 years. When the Romans destroyed the nation in 70 AD, the name was not used again for almost 2000 years.



But since **1948 to the present**, it once again refers to the **land** and **nation** of the Jews.



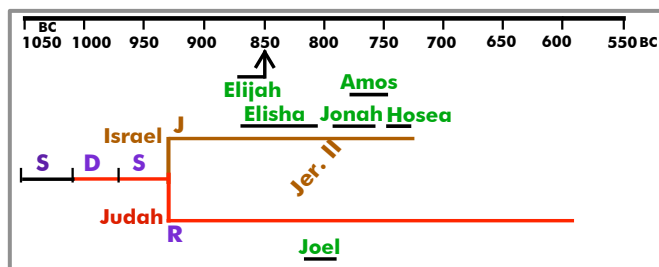
In the **future**, when Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom, both the believing Jewish **people** of that time and their **land** will be called Israel. This explains why after the northern nation ended and would never return, the prophets still talked about a restored Israel. They were not thinking about the northern nation. They were talking about the time of God's kingdom when there would be a restored land of Israel and Jewish people from all 12 tribes.

Thruout history

In addition to referring to the nation, the name **Israel** can also mean the Jewish **people** anytime in history. Both God in the Old Testament and Paul in the New, use the word **Israel**, in place of the word, **Israelite**.

The last few lessons have been about the prophets to **Israel**, meaning the *northern* nation, during the time of the Jewish civil war.

In chronological order these prophets were **Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos** and **Hosea**.



In the rest of these lessons, we will be looking at the prophets to the southern nation of **Judah**.

We have already studied the life of **Joel**. He was a contemporary of Elisha.

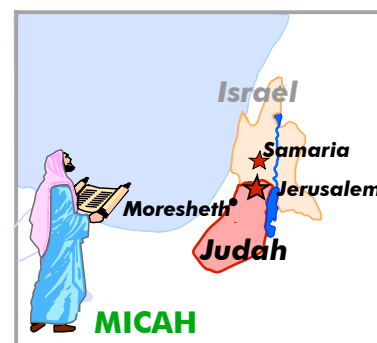
Now we come to the prophet **Micah**.

His **place of birth** according to 1:1 is **Moreseth**. This was a farming community some 25 to 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, near the Philistine border. Like Amos, Micah was a farmer or villager from the southern nation of Judah.

His **place of ministry** is confusing because he talks about Jerusalem and Samaria, the capitals of both nations. However we know his ministry is only to his *own* people in the southern nation of **Judah**.

There are **4 reasons**.

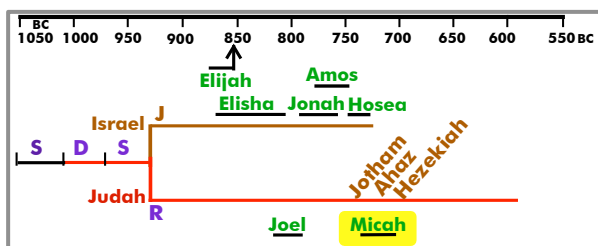
1. God never sent any prophet to both nations. Because it was the time of civil war, they were either sent to one nation or the other.
2. While he mentions Samaria 3 times in this book, he mentions Jerusalem and Zion 17 times. Zion is the name of the mountain on which Jerusalem is built and is used as another name for Jerusalem. Seventeen times compared to 3, shows his focus is on **Judah**.
3. In verse one, he only mentions the kings of **Judah**.
4. Micah's ministry continues some 25 years after the northern people of Israel goes into exile and the nation is taken off the map. So Micah is **from** the south and a prophet **to** the south – to the nation of **Judah**.



The reason he talks about **Israel** and describes her destruction is based on the message for his own people. He has been telling them, *God is going to judge our nation of Judah*. They immediately ask, *But what about Israel*. *Look at what they are doing. They worship golden calves. Nothing has not happened to them, so why should we worry? They are worse than we are.*

Israel's sin **is** worse and God **is** fair. So Micah explains God's judgment will **start** with **Israel**. Nothing can change it. But later, God's judgment will also come on **Judah** and her capital of Jerusalem.

The **time** of Micah's ministry is given in 1:1 - during the reign of 3 kings, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.



These are the same kings Hosea mentioned in his book. This tells us Hosea and Micah are contemporaries. Hosea comes first and is a prophet only in **Israel**. Micah starts some 5 years later as a prophet only in **Judah**. His ministry lasts for some 40 years from 738 to 697 BC.

The **historical background** comes from reading about these kings in the books of Kings or Chronicles.

Jotham is the first king mentioned. His biography is in 2 Chronicles 27.

According to verse 6, he followed God. The result, according to verses 4 and 5 is that God gives him a good economy and military victories. However, while Jotham himself followed God, he did nothing to lead the people in obedience. So we have a godly king and ungodly people.

The **historical background** continued

The next king is **Ahaz**. He rules 6 years along with his father and then 10 years on his own.

Ahaz walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, in the north, and also made cast idols for worshipping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hill tops and under every spreading tree. 2 Chronicles 28:2.

Because these phrases are emphasized by the prophets in the next 7 lessons, it is important to understand what they mean. **High places, hill tops, spreading trees** are places of worship where religious prostitution was practiced.

This was part of the Canaanite religion. They worshipped idols named **Baal** and **Ashera** - the god and goddess of fertility. When they wanted fertility for themselves, for their animals or for a good harvest, they would ask the fertility gods. They would go to the place where they were worshipped - high places or hills with groves of trees, called Asheras.

They believed fertility was given when the god and goddess had sex with each other. So to encourage the gods, the people had sex with priests and priestesses who were at the high places. It was called religious prostitution because it was done in the name of religion with prostitutes who had dedicated themselves to these gods. They were called “holy ones”.

Over the years, the Jews had lived among the Canaanites and began to think of this as *normal*. They still worshipped Yahweh God, but it seemed logical to go directly to the fertility gods if they wanted fertility. So starting from the days of the judges, the Jews think of this as just another part of Yahweh worship.

In these verses, we are told that **Ahaz**, **God’s** king over **God’s** people makes idols, worships them, burns some of his children alive as human sacrifices and practices religious prostitution.

The result, according to verse 5, is military defeats.

Over the years Ahaz is defeated by Syria, Israel, the Philistines, the Edomites and then by Assyria.

So in the days of Ahaz, in Judah, there is an ungodly king and ungodly people. (736-726 BC)



After ten years, **Hezekiah** becomes king. 726-697 BC

This is what Hezekiah did thruout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God’s temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered. 2 Chronicles 31:20

In his first fourteen years as king, Hezekiah obeyed God and led the people to obey. The result was prosperity – a good economy and military victories. 2 Chron. 32:22 Finally, a **godly** king and **godly** people.

From this historical background, we can put together the basics.

Because Micah is a farmer from a small village, his concern is for the common people. His ministry is from 738 - 697 BC.

What he **says** is describing the national conditions in the days of Ahaz, at the beginning of his ministry.

There is an ungodly king and ungodly people.

Then near the end of his ministry, he writes this **book** as a summary of what he told the people over the years.

OUTLINE	Chapters 1-3 - Judah’s disobedience and judgment Chapters 4-5 - the Jews’ future blessings Chapters 6-7 - their present and future response
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While the outline is simple, the book is hard to follow; everything seems scattered and disjointed. But once you see the style, it is a work of art and is absolutely logical.

Each chapter is like a one-man drama where Micah speaks the role of different people.

He speaks a few verses as himself, the prophet.

Then he speaks a few verses as the nation

And adds a few more verses speaking as God.

The words of each person either adds to or contrasts with what the other person said.

So for example, chapter 1 is about God's judgment, divided into 5 parts.

Micah declares God's judgment

God declares His judgment

Micah **responds** to God's judgment

The small towns **react** to God's judgment

God **confirms** His judgment

Notice that Micah is speaking:

- for himself,
- for God,
- for himself,
- for the small towns
- and once again for God.

This is Micah's style. In each chapter, with every few verses he speaks for a different person, but all are focusing on the same topic.

Micah also uses the meaning of a name to say what is going to happen.

Chapter 1:10-14 is the response of the small towns regarding God's judgment. All are within 15 miles of Micah's hometown. Each name is a Hebrew word that has a meaning.

To understand what he does, let's start with examples in English.

As we know, the name Portland means - *land with a port*;

Beaverton - *town of beavers.*

Los Angeles - *The Angels*.

To use the name as a description of what will happen, we would say,

Portland will be a land without a port.

Do not look for beavers in Beaverton.

The angels will not help you in Los Angeles.

This is what Micah does with the towns in his area. However, in some of our translations, the name of the town has been left out. I am going to read the verses not with their actual names, but with the meanings, so we can see his play on words.

Chapter 1:10.

*Tell it not in **Tell-town** - that was Gath*

*Weep not at **Weep-town**.*

*In the **House of Dust**, roll in the dust.*

Pass on in nakedness and shame, you who live in Beauty-Place.

Those who live in **Outlet**, will not go out.

Neighbor-town is in mourning; its protection and neighborliness is taken from you.

*The inhabitants of **Bitterness** writhe in pain, ... because disaster and bitterness has come from the Lord...*

*You who live in **Horse-town** (Lachish), harness the horses to the chariot –*

meaning get out of town as fast as possible.

*The town of **Deception** will prove deceptive to the kings of Judah.* ¹ (see note at end of lesson)

Micah tells the people that because of their disobedience, God is going to bring judgment. He uses the names of the towns to describe the results of this judgment.

But the common people are not the only ones who are guilty. Their leaders have also disobeyed

Chapter 2:1. *Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them and houses and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.*

Verse 9 *You drive the women - the widows of my people from their pleasant homes. You take away my blessing* (the land) *from their children forever.*

The land of Canaan was God's gift to His people the Jews. He divided it up by tribe and then by family clan. Each clan was to keep their land forever. If they were in great need, they could sell part of it, but only to a relative - a kinsman redeemer. When the relative farmed the land, he had to give the original owners a percentage for their food and income.

Then every 50th year, the year of jubilee, all property or homes that had been sold to family members were to be returned to the original family, free of charge. A person could start over, free from debt. This was God's way of taking care of the poor, the widows and orphans.

But in the days of Micah, town leaders are spending their nights scheming. They are finding ways to take possession of family farms and still make it legal within the law of Moses.

The people and town leaders are disobeying God. So are the false prophets. Chapter 2:11

If a liar and deceiver comes and says, I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer, he would be just the prophet for this people!

In the Old Testament, wine in moderation, is a picture of God's blessing, prosperity and happiness.

Micah is showing that false prophets and the people have partnered together. The **people** want their prophets to make them happy and promise them only blessing.

The **prophets** want to please the people, so they teach prosperity without obedience. They tell the people, *God will give you anything you want - all you have to do is claim it. As far as God's rules, if you do not like some of them, you do not have to obey. God will understand. He wants you to be happy.* They are teaching prosperity without a responsibility to obey.

Chapter 3:11 is a summary of Jewish leadership and their disobedience. *Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price and her prophets tell fortunes for money.*

From the beginning, God had provided His people with 3 sources of help.

There were elders or **leaders** who sat at the city gates to decide on **legal** matters.

Then there were **priests**. They were at the Temple and told people the **laws** of God.

Prophets were scattered thruout the country. They explained how to put God's laws into **practice**.

God had provided leaders, priests and prophet to meet the needs of His people. He always wanted it to be free of charge. But in Micah's day, people can only get help if they pay for it. Greed, injustice, bribery and murder are common.

Leadership feels no remorse, guilt or even any fear of punishment. The reason is in the last part of verse 11.

Yet they, leaders, lean upon the Lord and say, Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us.

The Temple was called *God's house*. Jerusalem was called the *city of God*. The leaders are sure God would never let His city or His Temple be destroyed. So as long as they live in Judah, no judgment will ever come. They can do as they want - disobedience does not matter. This is what they think and Micah is telling them that is not true.

Chapters 1-3 are about Judah's disobedience and judgment.

Chapters 4 and 5 are about Judah's future blessings that will come thru Jesus their Messiah.

According to chapter 4, when Jesus sets up His kingdom and rules from Jerusalem, it will be a time of peace and prosperity. The Jews will be permanently free from their enemies.

Chapter 5 says just before the kingdom begins, God will remove things from the lives of the Jews who are living at that time. The *things* are described as **fortified cities and chariots**.

Fortified cities and chariots is picture language for all the **political** things thruout history that the Jews have depended on in **place** of God.

Witchcraft and idols is picture language for all the **spiritual** things thruout history that the Jews have depended on in **place** of Yahweh God.

In the future, God will not only remove all these **things** but also remove their **desire** to trust in them. As a result, they will want to trust only in Him. That will be a blessing.

Micah has told the Jews in the southern nation of Judah about

Their disobedience and judgment in the present

Their blessings in the future.

Chapters 6 and 7 are the Jews' response - in the days of Micah and also in the future.

In Micah's day, the Jews in Jerusalem go to services at the Temple every week. In the service they repeat Jewish prayers. They listen to readings from the books of Moses and from the Psalms. They bring animal offerings. With all of this, the people are sure God is pleased with their religious activity. Micah says God is not pleased and is going to punish them.

But the people are confused. How could they be more religious? They have been doing everything required by the law of Moses. Why has God **not** forgiven them? Is it a problem of not enough animal offerings? What more does God want them to do?

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 6: 6

The people are saying the problem must be with their sacrifices – maybe the wrong kind, or not enough. *Does God want us to go a step further and offer our children as sacrifices, like the pagan gods demand? He needs to let us know.*

Micah reminds them they do not need further answers from God; He has already told them. Every week in their services they have the reading from the books of Moses. If they listened to the words, they would know what He requires.

He has showed you, O people, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. 6:8.

God required 3 things from His people:

Honesty in their business life

To show why, he reminds them of the dishonest scales and false weights they are using in their business.

Kindness and compassion in their social life;

He then reminds them of their actions in society

Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully. 6:12

Relationship and obedience in their spiritual life.

He reminds them it is obedience that God wants in their spiritual lives.

To walk humbly with God means to accept His rules and boundaries; to believe and obey what **He** says.

To walk humbly with God means to recognize God is God and they are not God. Therefore **He** has a right to tell **them** what to do.

This is what God requires - *To **act justly** and to **love mercy** and to **walk humbly with your God**.*

Micah warns his people for 16 years. Then Assyria takes the people in the northern nation of Israel into exile.

With this, the people in Judah get scared. They have disobeyed. Are **they** next? Is God about to destroy their nation and send **them** into exile? If they respond, would God forgive them and spare their nation? Micah answers their doubts by telling them

God's grace is always greater than His judgment.

Once again he makes a play on words - this time on his own name. The name *Micah* means *Who is like Yahweh?*

Micah shows that no one can compare to God in His forgiveness, His mercy, compassion, grace and faithfulness. Micah is talking about God

...who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance. You send punishment for disobedience, but You also delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us. You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. You will be true to Jacob and show mercy to Abraham, as You pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago. 7:18ff

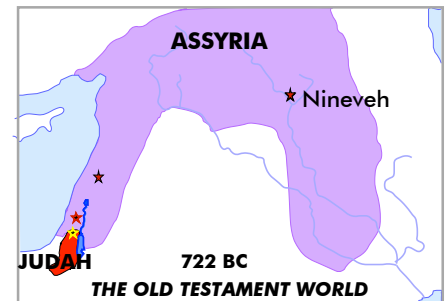
In plain English, Micah says, *God keeps His promises. Even if **their nation of Judah**, is destroyed and taken off the map, God will preserve the Jews as a **people**.*

Micah, as God's prophet, **encouraged obedience** and **rebuked disobedience**.

Then scattered thruout his ministry, he also **revealed things that God would do in the future**.

Chapter 1:6 is about **Samaria's destruction** in 722 BC.

Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and lay bare her foundations.

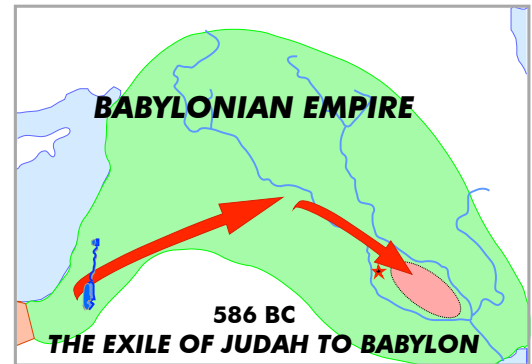


Micah predicted the destruction of the northern nation of Israel near the beginning of his ministry. Sixteen years later it happened. Samaria, the capital was destroyed, the people taken into exile and the nation of Israel was taken off the map in 722 BC.

Chapter 3:12 is about **Jerusalem's destruction** in 586 BC.

Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.

Micah says Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed. Because King Hezekiah led his nation back to God, God withholds His judgment for some 100 years. However it does happen in 586 BC, during the days of Jeremiah.



Chapter 4:10 is about **Judah's exile** in 586 BC.

Writhe in agony, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the Lord will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

Babylon will take them into exile; but it will not be permanent. Eventually the people of Judah will return to their land. In Micah's day, Assyria was the powerful empire sending nations into exile. Babylon was only a city totally under Assyrian control. God, however, is the One who causes nations to rise and fall, so He knew all about Babylon and revealed it to Micah.

Jerusalem and the nation of Judah would be destroyed because of their disobedience. But it would not be the end. The nation would begin again in 536 BC. From within that restored nation of Judah, a Ruler would be born who, one day, will bring them lasting peace.

Chapter 5:2 tells the **place of Jesus' birth**

But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, tho you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me, One who will be ruler of Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times, meaning from eternity

Micah says the birthplace of this Ruler will be in Bethlehem, Ephrathah. Ephrathah is the old, original name. The Jews had 2 places named Bethlehem. One was in the north, in the land given to the tribe of Zebulun. It was located southeast of Mt. Carmel. The other Bethlehem was located south of Jerusalem and part of Judah's inheritance.

Micah clarifies which Bethlehem by using the original name Ephrathah and then adding, *it is the Bethlehem belonging to the clan of Judah*. This prediction was made in the 700's BC.

In 6 BC, 700 years later, the magi are in Jerusalem, talking with king Herod, asking, *Where is the king of the Jews who has been born?* Herod asks the Jewish scribes - the ones responsible for their sacred writings. They get the Old Testament scroll of Micah and say, *He has been born in Bethlehem of Judea*.



Only God could have told Micah about Jesus' birth, 700 years before it happened. Micah predicts Jesus' birth.

Chapter 4:3 tells about **Jesus' kingdom in the future**

He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

The last part of this verse is very well known because the United Nations (U.N.) chose it as their motto. When the U.N. was formed, their goal was to bring world peace. It is commendable they took their motto from the Bible, but unfortunately they started in the middle of verse 3. Let's go back to verse 2 to get the context.

4:2-3 *Many nations will come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He, Jesus, will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares...*

Getting nations to meet and talk with each other is never going to bring world peace. Arms negotiations and peace treaties, as good as they are, are not going to bring world peace. The last part of verse 3 can never happen until we first have the beginning of verse 3 - until Jesus is the One who is ruling and people are living according to *His* standards.

The U.N. cannot bring world peace; the Church cannot bring world peace. If Israel were to give away all her land, there would not be world peace. There can never be world peace until the Prince of Peace is here. Only when Jesus is King in His Kingdom, ruling from Jerusalem, will there be true, lasting peace.

Micah gave God's message to the nation of **Judah** and he saw results.

During his first 12 years of ministry, 738-726, there was a teenager from the royal family who listened and responded. When the young man was 25, he became king in Judah. His name was Hezekiah. Because of Micah's words over the years, Hezekiah followed God and led the **nation** to follow God for a period of fourteen years. Micah had the joy of seeing his ministry change his nation. We know this by comparing Jeremiah 26:17-19 with 2 Kings 18:3-7.

Micah had a message for the people of his day. He also has a message for us.

- 1.** He reminds us that when we trust in **things** more than God, God will remove them and give us a desire for Him. Once our trust is in **God** alone, then He is free to fill our lives with the blessings He knows are best for us.
- 2.** Micah reminds us God wants obedience in our lives far more than religious activity. If we are not obeying God's commands during the week, He cannot accept our worship on the weekend.
- 3.** He also gives us a beautiful promise from God.

Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Tho I have fallen, I will rise. Tho I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. 7:8

There are so many things that bring darkness to our lives – failure or tragedy, illness or death, broken relationships, uncertainty. When we go thru that spiritual anguish of the soul, we have no idea where to go or what to do. Our mind has only questions without any answers. Our emotions go numb; we are unable to feel God's presence.

Micah wants us to know that in times of greatest darkness, the Lord is there to give us strength and ability for the day. He will lead us to others who can help, encourage and show us what to do. As we allow Him to lead us, **His** light will gradually turn **our** darkness into light.

**Tho I sit in darkness
the **LORD** will be my light**

Micah 7:8

ENDNOTES

¹ Chapter 1:10 on page 4

The Hebrew text says kings of *Israel*, meaning the true line of David, which was the real Israel. However, in the days of Micah and the divided kingdoms, only kings of Judah were from line of David, so the clarification is needed.