**Micah Commentary**

**Micah Chapter 1**

Mic 1:1

**“in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.”** Micah prophesied between 750 and 686 BC, as recorded here in Micah 1:1 (cf. Jer. 26:18). He was a contemporary with Isaiah (cf. Isa. 1:1) and Hosea (cf. Hos. 1:1).

Mic 1:5

**“Samaria...Jerusalem.”** The capital cities of Israel and Judah; they were both full of idols and idolatrous practices.

**“shrines.”** The Hebrew word “shrines” is *bamot*, which referred to a place that was leveled and built up and on which were placed various idols and objects of worship. Many of the towns had such shrines (see commentary on Num. 33:52).

Mic 1:6

**“I will pour down its stones into the valley.”** The huge stone wall that fortified Samaria would be pushed over and the stones rolled down the hill into the valley below.

Mic 1:7

**“prostitute’s wages will be burned with fire.”** This would not refer to money, but to gifts that were received for both spiritual and physical prostitution. People would bring gifts to honor the pagan gods, the idols, and temple prostitutes would receive gifts as well.

Mic 1:8

**“For this I will lament and wail.”** The prophets were not unaffected by what Yahweh showed them. They loved their country and the people, and tried to convince the people to turn from their sin, and tried to get Yahweh to hold back the coming disaster. Micah aggressively interceded for Israel and Judah, but their sin continued and consequences came.

Mic 1:13

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

Mic 1:15

**“nobles.”** The Hebrew is singular; “honor,” or “glory” but it refers to the honorable ones in Judah.

Mic 1:16

**“Shave your heads.”** The people in the East had many customs when it came to mourning the dead, and Micah 1:16 mentions shaving the head. Other verses that mention shaving the head in mourning for the dead include Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 16:6, 47:5; 48:37; Ezekiel 7:18, and Micah 1:16. Other signs of mourning include cutting off the beard (cf. Jer. 41:5), putting on sackcloth (cf. Jer. 48:37), having a time of silence (Jer. 47:5), and cutting oneself (see commentaries on Jer. 41:5 and 1 Kings 18:28). It was also customary for people to bring food and have a mourning feast (Jer. 16:5-8).

**“they have been taken from you into captivity!”** The destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its people is mentioned here in Micah 1:15-16; 3:12 and 4:10 (see commentary on Micah 4:10).

**Micah Chapter 2**

Mic 2:1

**“plan iniquity.”** The evil people plan iniquity, evil, and sin, on their beds, which cause God to “plan” their ruin (Mic. 2:3). The evil people do often returns upon their own heads (see commentary on Prov. 1:18).

Mic 2:3

**“Behold, I am planning.”** The people planned evil (Mic. 2:1) but were unaware that God was planning their disaster because of it.

**“from which you will not remove your necks.”** The text imports the image of an ox who is forced to wear a yoke and labor through the day. These evil leaders have put the poor and disadvantaged under their yoke, so now foreign invaders will capture them and put those evil leaders under a burdensome yoke. ​

Mic 2:4

**“and wail a wail with *much* wailing.”** The English translation is somewhat difficult, but it brings out the emphasis of the Hebrew text, which repeats wailing three times. This will be a time of terrible emotional pain for the people, especially the rich and powerful who lose everything, but they brought it on themselves by their evil thoughts and deeds.

**“ruined, yes, ruined.”** This is the figure of speech polyptoton for emphasis (see commentary on Gen. 2:16).

**“he takes it from me.”** The rich and powerful stole the land from the poor; now in poetic justice, their land is taken from them by invaders. Their evil has come upon them.

**“assigns our fields.”** The Hebrew uses the same verb as is used when God divided up the land to the tribes of Israel in the time of Joshua (e.g., Josh. 13:7; 19:51). It is as if God originally assigned the land to the tribes of Israel, but when they abandoned Yahweh to serve other gods, Yahweh divided up the land and gave it to someone else.

**“to the rebellious.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “to the one turning back,” but it is unclear exactly who Micah is referring to, and the English versions differ widely: “the rebellious” (ASV, DBY); “traitors” (CSB, NIV); “apostate” (ESV, NASB); “conqueror” (NET); “turncoat” (NKJV); “those who betrayed us” (NLT); “captors” (RSV). Some English versions do not understand the Hebrew as referring to people at all (cf. CJB, JPS, KJV, NAB). However, it seems from Micah 2:5, and the history of Israel preserved in Kings, that it must refer to the Assyrian conquerors who got the land. The Assyrians conquered the land and carried the people captive back to Assyria, and replaced them with pagans from other countries (2 Kings 17:6-33). Thus, “rebellious,” “captors,” “apostates” and “conquerors” all fit the Assyrians.

Mic 2:6

**“‘Do not prophesy,’ they prophesy.”** Here we see the “battle of the prophets.” Micah is prophesying that disaster is coming, and the false prophets are prophesying that it is wrong for him to say that because no disaster will come. Evil people do not want to know God, and harden their hearts against Him (cf. Job. 21:14; 22:17; Isa. 30:11; Mic. 2:6. See commentary on Matt. 13:13).

Mic 2:8

**“You strip the rich cloak off.”** The wealthy and powerful sinners even took the outer garments from people, not caring about how that would affect them and how they would sleep or be protected in the weather. That was strictly forbidden by Yahweh (Exod. 22:26-27).

**“*like those* returning from battle.”** This seems to be a reference to the fact that people returning from battle were carefree in the sense that the battle was over and they were alive and well and able to return home. It could be possible, but is less likely, that it refers to men who were actually returning from a battle, but that is possible. The rich and powerful took the clothing (the protection) from the men, the houses from the women, and the land inheritance from the children. Thus, we see that the leaders were heartless sinners, but Yahweh will repay them and their destruction is coming, now and/or in the future Judgment.

Mic 2:9

**“you take away my splendor forever.”** The poor were driven from the homes that they had, and the children were displaced from land ownership, the land being the splendor of God and His gift to people.

Mic 2:10

**“Arise and depart.”** The prophet brings God’s word to the wealthy and powerful sinners. They caused the poor to depart from their houses and land, and now God will repay them in the same way: their country will be conquered by the enemy, the Assyrians, and they will be deported from the Promised Land into the land of the enemy. The Promised Land will not be their resting place. Their sin will bring destruction upon them.

Mic 2:11

**“walking with a lying spirit.”** The Hebrew translated as “lying spirit” is more literally, “a spirit of falsehood,” and it refers to a type of demon. The NAB gets the idea correct: “If one possessed with a lying spirit speaks deceitfully….” People get possessed by a demon for various reasons. Sometimes they want and focus on what the demon has to offer, which in this case would be knowledge that is not generally available in the flesh, and which elevates the person in the eyes of others and usually financially and/or politically as well. There are prophets in the Bible who are said to have lying spirits (e.g. Mic. 2:11; 1 Kings 22:22; Acts 16:16).

Mic 2:12

**“I will assemble, yes, assemble Jacob, all of you. I will gather, yes, gather the remnant of Israel.”** Israel and Judah are currently scattered, but God promises to reassemble them and gather them to the historical land of Israel, a promise that will be fulfilled in the future after Jesus conquers the earth. God emphasizes His promise to regather Israel by using the figure of speech polyptoton, doubling the verb but in different tenses. This prophecy of the regathering of Israel and Judah presupposes that they will be scattered, a prophecy that had been given before and would be given many times again, and sure enough, Israel did not repent and they were scattered, and Judah was eventually taken captive and removed from their land also.

[For more on polyptoton and the way it is translated in the REV, see commentary on Gen. 2:16. For more on Israel and Judah being gathered and placed in the land of Israel, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on Jesus ruling the world from Jerusalem in the future, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mic 2:13

**“breaks open *the way*.”** The idea could also be “The one who breaks through” the barrier (cf. NET). The one who breaks open the way refers to the Messiah, who is the one who opened the way to an abundant life here on earth as well as everlasting life. He broke through the gate of death and made available everlasting life. His followers also break through the gate and “go out;” they go out of the places where they have been held captive, and they “go out” (escape) death and receive everlasting life. The king who passes on before them is the Messiah, representing Yahweh their God. He is the one who will bring both Israel and Judah back from any and all captivities to the land of Israel.

**“They break through the gate.”** The reference to “the gate” is not explained in this verse, but it likely refers to any kind of enclosure that keeps people from being free, and it also likely more specifically refers to the “gates” of Sheol, the gate of death. Sheol, the state of being dead, was said to have gates that kept people from escaping death and going back to the land of the living (see commentary on Matt. 16:18).

**Micah Chapter 3**

Mic 3:2

**“who tear the skin off of my people.”** The Hebrew is more literally, “from off them,” the “them” being God’s people, who are not in a position to defend themselves against the unscrupulous rich and powerful people.

Mic 3:3

**“who eat the flesh of my people.”** The leaders and powerful people were supposed to help the common people live good lives and prosper, but instead they were only interested in living off the people and enriching themselves from the labor of others. The people were just a source of wealth and food for them. But there is a time coming when the leaders will need help and cry out to God, but He will not hear them (Mic. 3:4).

**“flay their skin from off them and break their bones.”** When animals were eaten they were first skinned, and then, with some animals (like goats) when the meat was cooked the bones were broken and put in the pot along with the meat to add flavor. So what is being said here is that the rich and powerful people were heartlessly treating the people as if they were animals to be eaten. The people were shown no human mercy or consideration. Because of this, when trouble comes to the leaders, God will close His ears to their cries for help (Mic. 3:4).

Mic 3:4

**“they.”** The ones who hate good and love evil and oppress the poor (Mic. 3:2-3).

**“he will not answer them.”** God does not hear prayers simply because people pray. Everyone sins, but some people are prideful and unrepentant about their sin, and God will not listen to the prayers of wicked and unrepentant people; those prayers are an abomination to Him (Prov. 28:9). It is the prayer of a righteous person that accomplishes much (James 5:16). There are a number of verses that say God does not answer the prayers of the wicked (cf. Job 35:12-13; Prov. 15:29; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-2; Ezek. 8:17-18; Mic. 3:4; Zech. 7:12-13; and James 4:3).

[For more on God not hearing the prayers of the wicked or honoring their sacrifices, see commentary on Amos 5:22.]

Mic 3:5

**“who cry out ‘Peace’ when their teeth have something to bite.”** Micah speaks out against the false prophets who would prophesy good things for people who gave them food (or money, or other things), but prophesied evil against people who would not support them and give them things.

Mic 3:6

**“it will be night for you—with no vision.”** The false prophets will find that what has worked for them, even if it was a combination of God’s power and demonic power, will fail. There will be no more prophetic visions and their divination will no longer work.

**“the sun will go down on the prophets.”** Not only will the prophetic abilities of the false prophets fail, their reputations will be ruined and their personal lives will fall apart.

Mic 3:8

**“to declare to Jacob his disobedience and to Israel his sin.”** Micah prophesies to both the country of Israel in the north and also the country of Judah in the south (as we see from Mic. 3:10).

Mic 3:9

**“who abhor justice.”** The evil, unscrupulous, greedy leaders abhorred justice because justice would mean quitting the way they immorally gained power, money, land, and even slaves. Sadly, this immoral behavior has been the behavior of many leaders throughout the centuries and up to this very day. Sometimes, such as in Micah’s time, the majority of the leaders were evil. This behavior is immoral and ungodly, but often it is not “illegal” because the powerful people make the law of the land in a way that favors them. That “lawful” behavior is “lawless” (see commentary on Matt. 24:12).

Mic 3:10

**“who build up Zion with blood.”** Archaeological discoveries reveal the truth of the fact that Jerusalem was indeed being “built up” and expanded during Micah’s days. Also, although during much of it, godliness was on the decline, religion was booming, as is evidenced by the false prophets, divination, and the keeping of religious feasts and festivals (Isaiah, a contemporary to Micah, also spoke out against the false and shallow religion, cf. Isa. 1:2-23). There are many ways that blood could have been shed in the building of Jerusalem. There were likely “kangaroo courts” like the one that resulted in the execution of Naboth and his family but added land to the royal estate (1 Kings 21). Also, King Ahaz sacrificed some of his children to pagan gods to win their favor (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3). There were altars to pagan gods all over Jerusalem (2 Chron. 28:24).

Mic 3:11

**“her priests teach for a price.”** The priests were supposed to teach the Law and promote godliness. However, by this time the priests were so corrupt that if people paid enough, the priests would teach whatever the people wanted to hear (cf. 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

**“yet they lean on Yahweh and say, ‘Isn’t Yahweh in the midst of us.’”** The leaders, prophets, and people were deceived into thinking that they were “spiritual” and that God would approve of what they were doing. They had the Law but did not read it, or take it literally, or they applied it in inaccurate ways. The same is true for many confessing Christians today. The Bible says to pray but they don’t for various reasons; the Bible says to fellowship with other Christians (which would normally be in a church-type setting) but they ignore that and think nothing of it. The Bible says to be modest and sexually pure, but many Christians think that God ignores those “old laws” and loves them for who they are no matter what they do. So in both ancient and modern times, people did not take God at His word and did not realize that God meant it when He said, “Be holy for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

Mic 3:12

**“Therefore because of you.”** That is, because of the sin of the people Jerusalem will be destroyed, which it was. This prophecy was given in the days of Hezekiah (cp Jer. 26:18), more than 100 years before it was fulfilled in 586 BC by Nebuchadnezzar, and people in Jerusalem knew about it and quoted it before Jerusalem was destroyed. However, this prophecy was not set in stone and it could change if the people repented and changed their evil ways (cf. Jer. 18:8; 26:13).

The destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its people is mentioned here in Micah 3:12 and is also mentioned in Micah 1:15-16 and 4:10 (see commentary on Mic. 4:10).

**Micah Chapter 4**

Mic 4:1

**“It will come to pass in the last days.”** In this context, the “last days” are the Millennial Kingdom. Having a vivid and living Hope is so important that verses about it spring up seemingly without warning throughout the prophetic books. Micah 4:1 is very similar to Isaiah 2:2 (see commentary on Isa. 2:2).

**“the house of Yahweh.”** That refers to the Temple, and since this is the last days, it is the Temple in the Millennial Kingdom, which is described in Ezekiel 40-43.

**“lifted up above the hills.”** The Hebrew word “lifted up” can also mean “exalted.” In this case, both meanings are true because in the Millennial Kingdom, the mountain on which God’s Temple and the city of Jerusalem are located will be the highest mountain in the world, and also will be “exalted” in both a physical sense and spiritual sense. Other verses that say that Mount Zion will be the highest mountain include Isaiah 2:2 and Ezekiel 20:40 (see commentary on Isa. 2:2).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

Mic 4:2

**“many nations.”** Micah 4:2 is almost identical to Isaiah 2:3. The Old Testament foretold that the Messiah would be a blessing both to the Jews and to the Gentiles, the “nations.” The first prophecy of the Messiah is the one God made to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:15, and that was thousands of years before the Jews existed. About 2,000 years after that first prophecy of the Messiah, God promised Abraham that all the people of earth, not just the Jews, would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3). Then God repeated that promise to Isaac (Gen. 26:4); and to Jacob (Gen. 28:14). Besides those promises, the Old Testament had a number of verses that spoke of Gentiles being included in the Messianic Kingdom, which meant they were granted everlasting life (Ps. 102:15; Isa. 2:2-4; 19:23-25; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:3-7; 60:3; 66:18-21; Ezek. 39:21, 27; Mic. 4:2; Hag. 2:7; Zech. 8:22).

**“to the house of the God of Jacob.”** The “house” of God is the Temple, and there will be a Temple in Jerusalem when Jesus rules the earth (see commentary on Ezek. 40:5, “of the house of God”).

**“so that he can teach us about his ways.”** Although Micah 4:2 and Isaiah 2:3 are about Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, there will be natural people in it who will marry, have children, and die, and those natural people will need to learn the laws of God. Jesus will be reigning as king in Jerusalem, which is why the law and knowledge of God will go forth from there. Those natural people will need to learn about God and His ways and laws.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom of Christ on Earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mic 4:3

**“and will decide concerning strong nations that are far away.”** When Jesus Christ rules the earth from his capital city, Jerusalem, there will still be nations, or people groups that have leaders, all over the world. These groups will answer to the king, Jesus, as we see here in Micah 4:3, but they will be run by leaders who have been appointed by Jesus Christ.

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”

Mic 4:4

**“But they will sit, each person, under his vine and under his fig tree.”** That everyone would sit under their own vine and fig tree is an idiomatic saying that expresses peace and abundance. The phrase does not mean that each and every person will have a grapevine and fig tree, but each person will have peace and joy. Grapevines and fig trees were two things that took years to grow and develop, so to say that individuals would have their own vines and figs indicated times of lasting peace. Also implied in the idiom are leisure and abundance. To have time to sit in the shade under a vine or fig tree and rest, eat, or chat with friends, portrayed time for leisure rather than having to work hard all day long under the hot sun. Micah 4:4 is a prophecy of the future Kingdom of Christ on earth, and it shows that God’s original intention of having the earth be a wonderful place—an Eden-like Paradise—will be fulfilled in the future.

The figurative meaning of the phrase about each person sitting under their own vine and fig tree can be seen from its other uses in the Word of God. For example, the reign of Solomon was portrayed as a time when “Judah and Israel lived safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:25). In general, the reign of Solomon was a time of unprecedented peace and abundance, but even in Solomon’s days, there were slaves and other people without property or much leisure. Also, when Assyria attacked Jerusalem, the king of Assyria stated that if Jerusalem would surrender, then each person would eat of his own vine and fig tree (2 Kings 18:31; Isa. 36:16), but of course, everyone knew that many of the people in Jerusalem did not even have a vine or fig tree. The Assyrians were simply making a statement that the people would live peaceful lives without fear of war if they surrendered.

Zechariah 3:10, which like Micah 4:4 is about Christ’s kingdom on earth, says that people will invite their neighbors to come and sit down under their vine and fig tree, which was simply a way of saying that people would invite others to their house for a time of relaxation, conversation, and eating together.

[For more on Christ reigning as king on the future earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mic 4:5

**“but we will walk in the name of Yahweh.”** Here in Micah 4:5, the writer shifts from his description of the future (Micah 4:1-4, 6-7) to his present situation. The verb “walk” is used idiomatically for living life in general. The verse, when more paraphrased, is saying, “Indeed, all the nations may live their lives in the name of their gods, but we will live our life in the name of Yahweh.”

Mic 4:6

**“I will assemble...I will gather.”** When Christ comes and conquers the earth and sets up his Millennial Kingdom on earth, he will gather Israel and Judah to the land of Israel. Here in Micah 4:6, God uses both the word “gather” and the word “assemble” to emphasize and reinforce that this will be a great move of God, not something people do. In this context, the words “gather” and “assemble” are used synonymously, and there are other texts where they are used together (cf. Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 11:17; Mic. 2:12; 4:6).

[For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on Israel being gathered together in the future after Christ conquers the earth, see commentary on Jer. 32:37. For more on the chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on people being dead when they die and not alive anywhere in any form, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

Mic 4:7

**“and Yahweh, on Mount Zion, will reign over them.”** Yahweh will reign over the earth through his vice-regent, the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Ps. 2:6). The palace of Jesus Christ will be on the south side of Mount Zion (Ezek. 40:2).

[For more on Christ’s ruling over the whole earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Mic 4:8

**“Migdal-eder.”** The Hebrew means “tower of the flock,” and it was a fairly common name for places that had built a sturdy watchtower from which to guard the flocks of sheep and goats. In Micah 4:8, Jerusalem is compared to a tower that could watch over and protect the sheep, and the lame and scattered sheep were coming to it. The picture is appropriate because in the End Times, the Lord will gather his flock to the Promised Land. The term “Migdal-eder” also occurs in Genesis 35:21.

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“Daughter Jerusalem.”** The Hebrew is similar to that of Daughter Zion (see commentary on Isa. 1:8). In typical poetic fashion, Jerusalem is referred to twice in the verse by two different names, “Daughter Jerusalem” and “Daughter Zion.”

Mic 4:10

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“you will go out of the city and will live in the field, and will go to Babylon.”** In this context, the “city” is Jerusalem and this is one of the earliest references to the Babylonian Captivity of Judah. It is around the time of the Assyrian Captivity of Israel in 722 BC, but before it (cf. Mic. 1:5-7). The Babylonian Captivity was also mentioned to Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:12-19; Isa. 39:1-7). The destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its people is mentioned in Micah 1:15-16; 3:12 and 4:10.

Mic 4:13

**“Daughter Zion.”** The Hebrew is idiomatic for Zion itself, i.e., Jerusalem (see commentary on Isa. 1:8).

**“I will make your hoofs bronze.”** This is a zoomorphism, using the figure hypocatastasis and comparing Israel to a cow or ox treading grain.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“devote.”** That is, devote them to Yahweh as an offering.

[For more on things “devoted” to Yahweh, see commentary on Josh. 6:17.]

**Micah Chapter 5**

Mic 5:1

**“He has laid siege against us.”** If this was occurring in the present tense, then it is speaking of the Assyrian assault on Judah. Assyria was defeated by God and never accomplished their purpose of destroying Judah like they destroyed Israel.

**“strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.”** To strike someone on the cheek was not deadly, but was an insult and may produce a wound. Striking or slapping someone on the cheek was often done as an insult. The phrase, “the judge of Israel” is purposely unclear and therefore expansive. The word “judge” can refer to the king, because the king was the ultimate judge in his kingdom. In this context, Hezekiah was certainly a judge of Israel. With Israel taken captive, Hezekiah of Judah would take over the old position of the Judges of Israel or King David, being a judge and king over all the tribes of Israel. Also, there may be a passing allusion to the fact that behind the king of Israel is God the king, and the enemies of God insult Him and strike Him (and His Messiah) on the cheek.

Mic 5:2

**“Bethlehem Ephrathah.”** Micah 5:2 is quoted in Matthew 2:6. In Hebrew, “Bethlehem” means “House of Bread,” and the name was literally true because Bethlehem had good weather for growing grain, which was then ground into bread (cf. Ruth 2:2ff). However, the name “Bethlehem” is also typological, because Bethlehem was the birthplace of the Messiah and thus the place where Jesus Christ, “the Bread of Life,” came into the world (John 6:35, 48).

**“Ephrathah.”** “Ephrathah” means “fruitful,” but exactly what it refers to is debated. It could be another name for Bethlehem (and was likely used that way), or the area around Bethlehem, or a small village very close to Bethlehem, or perhaps the name of a clan that lived in that general area.

**“being small among the clans of Judah.”** Bethlehem was a small town, but just how small no one really knows. Since Bethlehem was only a couple of hours’ walk from Jerusalem, its population would have fluctuated with the calendar because more people would go there during the Jewish feasts. The small size of Bethlehem would not have been unusual for an Israelite town on the edge of the Judean Wilderness where water was limited. But the small size of Bethlehem was not a problem with God, who announced through the prophet Micah that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.

**“out of you will come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.”** The Jews of Jesus’ day correctly understood Micah’s prophecy to be saying that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and come from the line of Judah. Although there is a town called Bethlehem in northern Israel, the fact that Micah specified “Bethlehem Ephrathah,” combined with the many prophecies that the Messiah would be of the line of David who was from Bethlehem in Judah, made it clear that Micah’s prophecy was that the Messiah would be born in the Bethlehem in the tribal area of Judah. So when King Herod asked the religious leaders where the Messiah was going to be born, they said “in Bethlehem of Judea” and quoted from Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:5-6).

That this ruler was to come forth from Bethlehem “for me,” i.e., for Yahweh, shows that the ruler would support and promote Yahweh and His laws and ways, which Jesus Christ, did. In fact, both the Old Testament and New Testament show that this ruler became God’s vice-ruler, His second-in-command over God’s creation. The fact that this ruler is “for Yahweh” shows that Jesus is not Yahweh or God. Also, only two verses later, in Micah 5:4, the Bible says that this promised shepherd-ruler will shepherd his flock “in the strength ***of*** Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh ***his God***.” Like Moses and David, the coming shepherd-ruler is not God, but has a God, and is empowered by God.

**“whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.”** The phrase “whose origin is from old, from ancient times” ties this coming ruler to the ancient promises of the Messiah, including the prophecies that he would come from the tribe of Judah and specifically from the line of David. The phrase “whose comings forth” can refer to his origin or his activities, as noted in the NET text note: “The term may refer to the ruler’s origins (cf. NAB, NIV, NRSV, NLT) or to his activities.” Actually, the phrase likely refers to both his origin being from the tribe of Judah and also to things that the Messiah was foretold to do, such as reign as king in Jerusalem. Jacob foretold that the Messiah was to come out of Judah some 900 years before Micah prophesied (Gen. 49:10). Then Nathan the prophet foretold that the Messiah would come from the line of David over 300 years before Micah prophesied (2 Sam. 7:16; cf. Isa. 9:7; Jer. 33:15), and both those times would be considered to be “of old, from ancient times” by the time Micah prophesied.

Some English translations of Micah 5:2 use phrasing like “whose origins are from of old, from everlasting,” and some Christian teachers then use that to teach that Jesus is God and that he has existed forever. But that is not what Micah is saying. For one thing, Micah was a prophet to the Jews, and there is no record that Jews ever thought that Micah’s prophecy meant the Messiah had existed from eternity and was going to be “God incarnate.” In fact, we saw above that this ruler would rule “in the strength of Yahweh” and in “the name of Yahweh his God.” As we will see, the Hebrew should not be translated “from everlasting,” but beyond that, if the Hebrew text is understood to read “origins” (cf. CJB, CSB, NAB, NET, NIV, NLT) then it is understood that this ruler had an “origin,” which of course God did not. God is unoriginated; He never had an origin, He has always been. But God’s designated ruler, the Messiah, did have an origin—he had an origin in the mind and plan of God that goes back to Genesis 3:15, and he had a physical origin when God impregnated Mary.

The Hebrew vocabulary used in Micah 5:2 is not saying that Jesus physically existed forever. Bill Schlegel writes about the Hebrew word sometimes translated “origins,” and says, “The word translated as “origins” or “goings forth” (*motsa’ot,* מוצאות) [Strong’s #04163] occurs only here in the Bible in the feminine form (and only in plural), with one additional possible textual variant in 2 Kings 10:27. The masculine form (*motsa* מוצא) has various meanings including “a place or act of going forth, a word, an exit, an issue, a source, a spring of water, east” (e.g., Deut. 8:3, Hos. 6:3, Isa. 58:11, Ezek. 43:11). The meanings are all related to the root word *yatsa* יצא, “to go or come out.” From the same root is “descendant” צאצא (e.g. Job 5:25, Isa. 44:3) and later Hebrew “ancestry” ממוצא. In association with *miqedem*, *mimei olam* “from before, from days of long ago” which relate to Israel’s historical past...the feminine plural form in Micah 5:1 (5:2 in the English versions) most likely relates to physical ancestry, especially David’s and/or Abraham’s.”

As Schlegel has suggested, the word *motsa’ot*, translated “goings forth” or “origins” can simply relate to the prophecies of the physical ancestry of Jesus Christ and does not force the meaning of the Messiah having a literal existence before his birth, in fact, the context and scope of Scripture show that cannot be the case.

Moreover, the word “everlasting” is actually two Hebrew words *yōm ōlam* (#03117 יוֹם, #05769 עוֹלָם), meaning “days of antiquity.” It is this description of the Messiah’s “going forth” that is often claimed to suggest his eternal preexistence before being born on earth. Looking at other occurrences of the phrase *yōm ōlam* reveals that it simply refers to the past, and each occurrence is dependent upon the context in order to figure out what about the past is being referred to. In some of its occurrences, it is used in reference to times and events before Israel’s exile (Amos 9:11; Mic. 7:14; Mal. 3:4), a couple other places it is used in reference to the times and events surrounding Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Isa. 51:9; 63:9, 11), and also it is used to refer generically to days in the past (Deut. 32:7). Furthermore, *ōlam* is used as an adjective in conjunction with other nouns to refer to such things as the “ancient foundations” or “ancient ruins” of Israel before being conquered (Isa. 58:12; 61:4), prophets from “ancient times” (Jer. 28:8), Babylon as an “ancient nation” (Jer. 5:15), and “ancient ways” or “ancient paths” (Job 22:15; Jer. 6:16; 18:15).

In Micah 5:2, the use of *mōtsa’ah* along with *yōm ōlam* conveys the idea that “the ancestry of the expected ruler traces back to David’s time as well as David’s city.”[[1]](#footnote-11004) Furthermore, J. M. P. Smith also sees this as a reference to the Messiah belonging to one of the oldest families, that is, the Davidic family,[[2]](#footnote-17400) and so does Ralph L. Smith, describing how Micah has in mind the idea of a “new David” by making use of colloquial language where the days of David were spoken of as “the ancient days” like in Amos 9:11.[[3]](#footnote-12467) In addition, there are strong linguistic parallels between the Lord’s calling of David to shepherd Israel and the language used in Micah’s Messianic prophecy of the new Davidic king who would also shepherd God’s people (cf. 2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7-14).

Throughout Micah 4-5, one of the major themes is the rescue and restoration of the people of Israel and the rise of a conquering king who would bring together and provide security and peace for God’s people. Micah 5:2 declares that the Lord will establish a descendant of Judah to rule His people. And then, after the rest of the king’s kindred have returned, it says that “he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God” (Mic. 5:4 NRSV).

The context suggests that this ruler of Israel will come from Bethlehem Ephrathah and will rule with the strength of Yahweh his God and his greatness will extend to the ends of the earth (v. 4). A distinction is made in the context between this Messianic ruler and the Lord God. The Lord God would enable this ruler to govern over His people, and therefore, the ruler would rule in the name of Yahweh, but the ruler would not be Yahweh. And by the strengthening of Yahweh, it would be the Lord’s righteous ruler who would bring wholeness (“peace”) and safety to God’s people and ultimately establish a kingdom where His people will live like “a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep” (v. 8).

Therefore, this prophecy is proclaiming the divine appointment for where and from what family the Messiah would come. The promise for the coming Messianic ruler was made long ago (“from ancient times”) and would be the fulfillment of God’s covenant with the Messiah’s ancestor David. In order to better convey the meaning of the text, many modern English versions offer more accurate translations that attempt to communicate the meaning of the idiomatic expression (see CEB, ESV, NAB, NIV, NLT, NRSV).

[For more information on the Millennial Kingdom that Jesus will set up when he rules the earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more information on Jesus being the fully human Son of God and not being “God the Son,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” For more on “the Holy Spirit” being one of the designations for God the Father and “the holy spirit” being the gift of God’s nature, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

Mic 5:3

**“he will abandon them until the time.”** We today know that between the Babylonian Captivity and Jesus Christ, no legitimate descendant of David ruled on the throne of Judah or Israel. The Babylonian Captivity brought an end to the Davidic dynasty that had lasted for over 400 years, but when the Messiah came there was once again a Davidic king in Israel, even though he did not claim his throne in the way people expected him to. That is waiting until his Second Coming, at which time Jesus will rule over the earth from Jerusalem.

There was no indication that between the life of Christ (Mic. 5:2) and the time Israel will be restored (Mic. 5:3), would be over 2,000 years, but that is the case: Israel has still not been restored and united as the Twelve Tribes. That will not occur until Christ sets up his kingdom on earth and the First Resurrection, the resurrection of the righteous dead, occurs (Rev. 20:4-6).

[For more on Jesus’ Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the two future resurrections, the Resurrection of the Righteous and the Resurrection of the Unrighteous, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment and the “big picture” chronology of the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

Mic 5:6

**“shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword.”** The statement is an irony, written for effect. The shepherds were supposed to shepherd the people for their own good, but because of the way Assyria treated Israel, Assyria would in turn be “shepherded” with the sword.

Mic 5:10

**“in that day.”** The “day” being referred to is the Day of Yahweh. The Day of Yahweh (“the Day of the LORD”) is the period of great tribulation that will come on the earth as a consequence for all the sins that have been committed. It is a time of great tribulation. See commentary on Isaiah 13:9.

Mic 5:13

**“standing-stones.”** Most standing-stones were set up as part of the worship of pagan gods, and that is the context here. God has no tolerance for idols. They are harmful in many different ways, and God commanded that they be destroyed.

[For more on standing-stones, see commentary on Gen. 28:18. For more on idols being harmful, see commentary on Deut. 7:5.]

**“worship.”** Or “bow down to.” The same Hebrew verb, *shachah* (#07812 שָׁחָה), is translated as both “bow down” and “worship;” traditionally “worship” if God is involved and “bow down” if people are involved, but the verb and action are the same, the act of bowing down is the worship. The common biblical way of bowing down before people or God was to fall to one’s knees and bow the upper body to the earth.

[For more on bowing down, see Word Study: “Worship.”]

**Micah Chapter 6**

Mic 6:2

**“Hear, you mountains.”** The idea that inanimate things that were around for a long time could be witnesses to what had happened on earth was common in the culture. The mountains and the foundation of the earth had been around for uncounted generations and had seen the disobedience of the people and how they ignored and/or defied God, and therefore were good witnesses when God brought the people to trial.

Mic 6:5

**“righteous acts.”** The “righteous acts” of God are all the “right,” godly, and just things God did. (“Righteous,” in this context, refers to what is right and godly. See commentary on Matt. 5:6).

Mic 6:6

**“burnt offerings.”** The point that Micah is making in Micah 6:6-8 is that what God really wants is for people to be humble and obey Him, as we see in verse 8. For more on God’s perspective on offerings and sacrifices, see commentary on Matthew 5:24.

Mic 6:8

**“What does Yahweh require of you.”** What God requires of people is to recognize Him as the one true God and be loving, giving, and kind. This is stated a few different ways in the Bible (e.g., Deut. 6:4-5; 10:12-13; Ps. 15:2-5; Isa. 1:16-17; 58:1-11; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 18:5-9; Mic. 6:8; cf. Isa. 66:2). It is not difficult to be loving and kind, which is why Jesus said his yoke was kind and his burden light (Matt. 11:30). In sharp contrast, the religious leaders were “religious.” They thought they were very obedient to God, but they were not merciful or kind, and the “godly rules” they heaped upon people were actually ungodly “burdens” that people had to carry (Matt. 23:4; Luke 11:46). No wonder Christ had to tell the leaders, “go and learn what *this* means, **I want mercy, and not sacrifice”** (Matt. 9:13; Hos. 6:6).

Mic 6:11

**“dishonest balances.”** It is not that there was more than one balance, but the noun “balance” is a dual noun because there were two pans or pouches, one on each end of the balance beam. Unscrupulous merchants often kept stones of different weight in their bag that only they could easily tell apart. That allowed them to buy more of something but sell less of something, and thus they cheated in their business dealings (Lev. 19:35; Deut. 25:13-16).

[For more on the biblical balance, see commentary on Prov. 11:1.]

**Micah Chapter 7**

Mic 7:1

**“Woe is me!”** Micah feels like a person who is hungry but the fruits have been harvested and even gleaned; there is nothing to eat.

**“the first-ripe figs.”** A fig that ripened earlier than the rest of the figs and was usually large and sweet. See commentary on Isaiah 28:4.

Mic 7:4

**“then is the time of their confusion.”** The Hebrew reads, “now is the time,” but it is written from the perspective of the previous phrase, that the time of their punishment (or “visitation,” when God will visit and punish them) is coming.

Mic 7:5

**“from the woman.”** The text is “from her.” The message of the verse is, do not trust anyone, because your enemies may well be the ones in your own house (Mic. 7:6). Amos 5:13 says it is wise to keep silent in evil times.

Mic 7:6

**“For the son dishonors the father.”** Micah 7:6 is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 10:35-36.

1. Harris, Archer, and Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-11004)
2. John Merlin Powis Smith, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Joel [ICC], 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-17400)
3. Ralph L. Smith, Micah-Malachi [WBC], 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-12467)