

A Study of the Minor Prophets
The Book Micah – Lesson 1 – Chapter 1

- I. The prophet Micah envisioned a time when the nations would “beat their swords into plows” and “never again train for war.” Jerusalem would become the center of Yahweh’s earthly kingdom, and the nations would stream to Zion to learn the ways of the Lord (Mic 4:1–6). This idyllic picture did not describe the world of Micah’s day. The Assyrians ruled over the Fertile Crescent with an iron fist, and the prophet warned of how the Lord would use the Assyrians to bring judgment against his sinful people in both Israel and Judah. Jerusalem would ultimately be reduced to nothing more than a heap of rubble (Mic 3:12), and the people would be carried away to Babylon as exiles (Mic 4:10). But, judgment would ultimately lead to salvation, and the Lord would restore his people and bring his kingdom of peace to earth. The world today is just as brutal as the one in which Micah lived, but Micah’s message continues to offer hope to Christians as they wait for the coming of God’s kingdom of peace, earnestly anticipating the city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb 11:10).

- II. Micah ministered in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah from approximately 740–690 BC. Micah was a younger contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Amos in Israel and Isaiah in Judah.

- III. The structure of Micah is hard to understand. It is easy to get lost in the mix of judgment and salvation speeches. Despite these difficulties, the simplest and most straightforward understanding of Micah’s structure is to divide the book into three major sections (chaps. 1–2; 3–5; 6–7) that are each introduced by the imperative of the verb “to hear” (shama`) (1:2; 3:1; 6:1–2). Each of these sections exhibits a pattern in which a warning of judgment is followed by a promise of salvation. Lament is a prominent motif in each of the judgment sections. Micah delivers a mournful eulogy over the doomed towns of Judah in 1:8–16 and announces a woe oracle against Judah’s leaders in 2:1–11. The city of Jerusalem writhes in grief like a woman in labor in 4:9–10. Micah mourns over the disappearance of the godly from the land. Announcing national disaster brings great sorrow to Micah as he carries out his mission from God. The promises of salvation in each section overturn the immediately preceding warnings of judgment.

- IV. Chapter 1:1-7: This opening passage portrays a theophany where God as a warrior comes down from his heavenly temple to mete out judgment on his enemies. As the Lord marches into battle, the mountains and valleys melt before his fiery presence. The target of judgment narrows from the whole earth, to Israel/Samaria, and then to Judah/Jerusalem. Samaria would be judged for its religious apostasy and idolatry, but God’s judgment would extend to even the gates of Jerusalem but Judah was guilty.