

# Micah 7: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Micah chapter 7. Woe is me, for I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned. There is no cluster to eat, no first ripe fig that my soul desires. The godly has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind.

They all lie in wait for blood, and each hunts the other with a net. Their hands are on what is evil, to do it well. The prince and the judge ask for a bribe, and the great man utters the evil desire of his soul. Thus they weave it together. The best of them is like a briar, the most upright of them a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, of your punishment has come. Now their confusion is at hand. Put no trust in the neighbour, have no confidence in a friend. Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your arms, for the son treats the father with contempt. The daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the men of his own house.

But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light. I shall look upon his vindication. Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover her who said to me, Where is the Lord your God? My eyes will look upon her. Now she will be trampled down like the mire of the streets. A day for the building of your walls. In that day the boundaries shall be far extended. In that day they will come to you, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt to the river, from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their deeds. Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance, who dwell alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land. Let them graze in Bashan, and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt. I will show them marvellous things. The nation shall see and be ashamed of all their might. They shall lay their hands on their mouths. Their ears shall be deaf.

[ 2 : 2 1 ] They shall lick the dust like a serpent, like the crawling things of the earth. They shall come trembling out of their strongholds. They shall turn in dread to the Lord our God, and they shall be in fear of you. Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob, and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. The final chapter of the book of Micah laments the state of a corrupt society. The righteous are few, treachery and deceit are pervasive, and there is no one left to trust. It concludes, however, with a confident expression of the prophet's hope in the Lord. The prophet compares the situation to a man coming to a vine or fig tree after everything has been harvested, hoping to find something tasty to eat and finding that there is nothing left. We might think of the episode in Mark chapter 11 verses 13 to 14 here, as Jesus might have been alluding to this passage in his judgment upon the fruitless fig tree.

And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. And he said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. As the prophet Micah scours the land, he cannot find godly and upright persons. They seem to have vanished from the land.

Everywhere he finds wickedness, violence, oppression, and injustice. Corruption is found at the very heart of the people, and at the very top of their social hierarchy, in the prince, the judge, and the elite. Even those who are upstanding by comparison with others, and would be held in higher

honour, are still like thorn hedges, hurting rather than helping their neighbours. Judah had been given ample warnings of coming punishment by the prophets. The prophets were like the watchmen of the nation, and now the day that they had warned of, the day of the Lord's judgment, was near at hand. It was upon the people. As Leslie Allen notes, the prophet here plays upon the similarity of the sounds of the words for hedge and confusion.

The way that the corruption that's going to be judged rhymes with the punishment, underlines the poetic justice that the Lord will bring upon them. How do you live in a treacherous and deceitful society? Micah's description of Judah's society might remind us of descriptions of life under communism in Eastern Europe, for instance, where children would deliver their parents over to the authorities, where lies and deceit became society's way of life, and where no one could trust their neighbours. Those nearest and dearest are ready to betray, deceive, or disown you. Relations between neighbours, husbands and wives, parents and children, between siblings and members of the same household, are all riddled with distrust.

Jesus refers to this passage in Matthew chapter 10 verses 34 to 36, as he describes the resistance and persecution that his disciples will experience within their households, communities and closest relationships. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a person's enemies will be those of his own household. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a similar situation, highlighting the danger of trusting in man, rather than trusting in the Lord. In Jeremiah chapter 17 verses 5 to 8 he writes, Thus says the Lord, Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come.

[ 6 : 14 ] He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. The placing of verse 7 is debated among commentators. Mark Ginolet, for instance, sees the section that follows as beginning with verse 7, rather than verse 7 belonging with verses 1 to 6. Where we situate verse 7 will colour our reading of the relevant sections, as Joanna Hoyt notes. Does the woe oracle end on a note of hope or not? Bruce Waltke argues that what we have here is a Janus verse, a verse that looks both forward and back, connecting to both sections, closing one and opening the other. Hoyt, however, argues that the verse should be placed with the latter section, although she de-emphasises the sharpness of the divisions that some people imagine between these sections. Micah, or the editors of his prophecy, clearly wanted hearers to move from the message of woe to one of confident hope. These should not be viewed as hermetically sealed off from each other. In a situation where there is no one to trust,

Micah's response is to look to the Lord in faith. He is confident the Lord will both hear and deliver him in his time of distress. Alan observes that the concluding half of the chapter can be divided into four parts, which he suggests should be understood as a liturgy, as there are various voices and forms of speech represented within the section. There is, he argues, a psalm of confidence spoken by Zion in verses 8 to 10, followed by an oracle of salvation in verses 11 to 13. In verses 14 to 17, there is a prayer of supplication, and the final verses are another psalm of confidence.

Reading the section as a prophetic liturgy has been popular among commentators following Herman Gunkel, who argued that the section was inserted into the book later in the post-exilic period.

However, there are those who dispute this understanding. John Goldengave, for instance, argues that rather than being a liturgy, it is a prophetic message expressed in a quasi-liturgy. Hoyt questions the late dating, maintaining that we shouldn't be surprised if the Lord were to reveal aspects of the longer-term future to his prophet, in order that the people might have hope as judgment approached them. She also mentions the possibility raised by some commentators that this was an adaptation of existing liturgical material, possibly from the northern kingdom.

The opening section leading up to verse 10, whether it begins with verse 7 or verse 8, presents us with the words of a personified Zion. When the enemies of Zion might think they have triumphed over her, they should not be so proud.

[ 9 : 02 ] When the Lord has finished judging his people, he will lift them up and restore them once more. They will also be avenged upon their adversaries, who will be brought down and humbled.

Even while the great powers who rise up as enemies against Jerusalem might think that they are in charge of the situation, the personified Zion recognizes that it is really the Lord that is using these powers as instruments for his work, that he is the one that they need to relate to.

The oracle of salvation that follows in verses 11 to 13 describes the restoration of Zion and the extension of the borders of the land. While some might see in verse 12 the nations coming to Jerusalem, as in Micah chapter 4 verse 2, it seems more likely that this is a reference to the return of the scattered children of the nation. They are going to come back from the various lands of their exile. The word used twice for Egypt in this verse is not the usual one used for Egypt, and some commentators like Hoyt express uncertainty that Egypt is being referenced here at all.

As Zion and Israel are restored, there will be a corresponding judgment upon the nations that have risen against her. The unfaithful nations will be rendered desolate for their sins. In verses 14 to 17 we have a prayer of supplication.

The Lord is addressed as the shepherd of his people, pastoring his flock in good land. Bashan and Gilead are lands in the Transjordan, lands which were good for grazing, but belonged to the fallen northern kingdom and had been lost to Assyria.

There is a response of the Lord to the supplication in verse 15. The Lord speaks of a new Exodus-like deliverance that he will accomplish for his people. This will demonstrate his glory in the sight of the nations, who will be put to shame. The nations would suffer the judgment apportioned to the serpent. The chapter, and the book more generally, ends with a psalm of confidence.

[ 10 : 49 ] The confidence of the prophet is found in the character and the faithfulness of the Lord. The Lord is a God who pardons iniquity and passes over transgression. Micah is most likely here alluding to Exodus chapter 34 verses 6 to 7, where the Lord declares himself to Moses after Israel's sin with the golden calf.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, Micah expresses his assurance in the promises of the Lord, the fact that the Lord will deal with the iniquities of his people and that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant promises, promises that go all the way back to Abraham and the forefathers.

A question to consider, how does the conclusion of the book of Micah relate to some of the themes of Micah's prophecy more generally?