

# Micah

## 1

**Summary:** *Micah 1 opens with a superscription identifying the prophet as a Morasthite (from Moresheth-Gath in the Judean lowlands) prophesying during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. The chapter contains a dramatic theophany — God descends from His holy temple and treads upon the high places of the earth, melting mountains and splitting valleys. The prophet then delivers judgment oracles against Samaria (vv. 6-7), whose sins have spread to Judah, and concludes with a lamentation over the towns of the Shephelah (Judean lowlands) using an extraordinary series of wordplays on town names — each town's name becomes a pun on its fate.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The wordplay section (vv. 10-16) is one of the most virtuosic passages in Hebrew prophetic poetry. Nearly every town name is punned upon: Beth-leaphrah ('house of dust') is told to roll in dust; Shaphir ('beautiful') goes forth in shameful nakedness; Zaanah ('going out') does not go out; Beth-ezel ('house of nearness') has its support taken away; Maroth ('bitter') waits bitterly; Lachish (assonance with larekesh, 'to the team/chariot') is told to harness the chariot; Moresheth-Gath sounds like me'oraset ('betrothed'), so she is given as a parting gift; Achzib ('deception') becomes a deception; Mareshah ('possession') receives a possessor; and Adullam inherits Israel's glory. These puns are untranslatable in English and must be documented in translator notes. Micah's grief is personal — these are his own towns, his neighbors.*

**Translation Friction:** *The wordplays in verses 10-16 present the central translation challenge: the Hebrew puns cannot be reproduced in English. We render the meaning clearly and document every wordplay in the translator notes. The theophany language (vv. 3-4) draws on cosmic imagery — mountains melting 'like wax before fire' — that must be rendered as poetry, not flattened into prose. The phrase 'incurable wound' (makkoteha anushah, v. 9) echoes Jeremiah 30:12 and Nahum 3:19, describing judgment so severe that no remedy exists.*

**Connections:** *The theophany echoes Psalm 18:7-15, Judges 5:4-5 (the Song of Deborah), and Habakkuk 3:3-6. Micah's identification of Samaria's sins spreading to Jerusalem anticipates the Babylonian exile. The reference to 'the gate of my people, to Jerusalem' (v. 9) links the fall of the northern kingdom to Judah's vulnerability. Micah is quoted by name in Jeremiah 26:18, making him one of the few prophets cited by another prophet.*

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah — what he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>Hear, all you peoples!  
Pay attention, O earth and everything in it!  
Let the Lord GOD be a witness against you,  
the Lord from his holy temple.

<sup>3</sup>For look — the LORD is coming out from his place!  
He will come down and tread  
upon the high places of the earth.

<sup>4</sup>The mountains will melt beneath him,  
and the valleys will split open —  
like wax before the fire,  
like water poured down a steep slope.

<sup>5</sup>All this is because of Jacob's transgression,  
because of the sins of the house of Israel.  
What is Jacob's transgression?  
Is it not Samaria?  
And what are the high places of Judah?  
Are they not Jerusalem?

<sup>6</sup>"I will make Samaria a heap of rubble in the open field,  
a place for planting vineyards.  
I will pour her stones down into the valley  
and lay bare her foundations."

<sup>7</sup>All her carved images will be smashed to pieces,  
all her temple earnings will be burned with fire,  
and all her idols I will make desolate.  
For she gathered them from a prostitute's wages,  
and to a prostitute's wages they will return.

<sup>8</sup>Because of this I will lament and howl;  
I will go barefoot and stripped.  
I will make a lamentation like the jackals  
and a mourning cry like the ostriches.

<sup>9</sup>For her wound is incurable;  
it has reached Judah.  
It has come to the gate of my people,  
to Jerusalem itself.

<sup>10</sup>Do not tell it in Gath;  
do not weep at all.  
In Beth-leaphrah,  
roll yourself in the dust.

<sup>11</sup>Pass on your way, you inhabitants of Shaphir,  
in shameful nakedness.

The inhabitants of Zaanan  
do not come out.

Beth-ezel is in mourning;  
its support is taken from you.

<sup>12</sup>For the inhabitants of Maroth writhe in pain,  
waiting for relief,  
because disaster has come down from the LORD  
to the gate of Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup>Harness the chariot to the steeds,  
O inhabitants of Lachish!  
She was the beginning of sin  
for the daughter of Zion,  
for in you were found  
the transgressions of Israel.

<sup>14</sup>Therefore you will give parting gifts  
to Moresheth-gath.  
The houses of Achzib will prove  
a deception to the kings of Israel.

<sup>15</sup>I will bring a conqueror against you,  
O inhabitants of Mareshah.  
The glory of Israel will come  
to Adullam.

<sup>16</sup>Shave your head and cut off your hair  
in mourning for your precious children.  
Make yourself as bald as the vulture,  
for they have gone from you into exile.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription places Micah's ministry across three kings (roughly 750-687 BCE), making him a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. 'Morasthite' identifies him as from Moresheth-Gath, a small town in the Shephelah (Judean lowlands) southwest of Jerusalem — significantly, he is not from the capital but from rural Judah. The verb *chazah* ('he saw') indicates visionary experience, not merely hearing — Micah's prophecy is described as something 'seen,' a vision. The scope covers both Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom) and Jerusalem (capital of Judah), though Micah was a Judean prophet.
2. The summons to 'all peoples' (*ammim kullam*) broadens the audience beyond Israel — the entire earth is called as witness to God's lawsuit (*rib*). This opening echoes 1 Kings 22:28, where Micaiah ben Imlah (a prophet whose name is nearly identical to Micah's) uses the same phrase 'Hear, all you peoples.' The phrase *Adonai YHWH* ('the Lord GOD') combines both divine titles, emphasizing God's sovereignty and covenant identity. God comes from His 'holy temple' (*hekhal qodsho*) — whether heavenly or earthly is deliberately ambiguous.
3. The theophany begins with God departing His dwelling (*mimmeqomo*) — whether the heavenly temple or the earthly holy of holies. The verb *darakh* ('to tread, to trample') conveys military conquest — God marches across the mountaintops as a warrior. The *bamotei aretz* ('high places of the earth') may refer both to literal mountain peaks and to the cultic high places where idolatrous worship took place. The image of God treading on heights echoes Deuteronomy 33:29 and Amos 4:13.
4. Two vivid similes describe the earth's response to God's presence: mountains melt like wax before fire (*kaddonag mippnei ha'esh*), and valleys split open like water rushing down a slope (*kemayim muggarim bemorad*). The verb *namassu* ('they will melt') describes a complete loss of structural

integrity — the most permanent features of the landscape dissolve. This imagery echoes Psalm 97:5 ('The mountains melt like wax before the LORD') and Judges 5:5 ('The mountains quaked before the LORD'). The poetry is cosmically scaled — creation itself cannot bear God's direct presence.

5. The theophany is now explained: this cosmic upheaval is caused by Israel's sin. Micah uses rhetorical questions to identify the capitals as the sources of corruption. The word *pesha* ('transgression, rebellion') denotes willful defiance against a covenant lord — not accidental sin but deliberate revolt. The parallelism between Samaria and Jerusalem is accusatory: both capitals have become centers of idolatry. The 'high places' (*bamot*) of Judah refers to the illegitimate worship sites — and Micah identifies Jerusalem itself as the ultimate high place of apostasy.
6. God speaks directly, pronouncing judgment on Samaria. The city will be reduced to an *'i hassadeh* ('a ruin of the field') — her dressed stones will be tumbled into the valley below, and the foundations will be exposed. This was literally fulfilled when Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BCE. The image of 'planting vineyards' suggests that the city site will revert to agricultural land — urban civilization erased and returned to the soil. Archaeological excavations at Samaria confirm the Assyrian destruction described here.
7. The word *etnanneha* ('her earnings, her hire') refers to the wages of cult prostitution — payments made at pagan shrines. The metaphor of prostitution for idolatry is standard prophetic language (Hosea, Ezekiel 16, 23). The phrase 'from a prostitute's wages... to a prostitute's wages' creates a grim circle: the wealth accumulated through idolatrous cult practices will be carried off by conquerors and used for the same purpose in their pagan temples. The verb *yukkattu* ('they will be smashed') indicates violent, irreversible destruction of the carved images (*pesilim*).
8. Micah shifts from delivering God's word to expressing his own grief. The verb *esfedah* ('I will lament') is the standard word for funeral lamentation. Going *sholal ve'arom* ('barefoot and stripped') is a sign of extreme mourning — the same practice Isaiah enacted as a prophetic sign-act (Isaiah 20:2-4). The *tanim* ('jackals') and *benot ya'anah* ('daughters of the ostrich' — ostriches) were associated with desolate ruins and their eerie nocturnal cries. Micah's grief is genuine — the towns about to be listed are his own homeland.
9. The word *anushah* ('incurable') describes a wound beyond healing — the same adjective used in Jeremiah 15:18 and 30:12 for Judah's terminal condition. The 'wound' (*makkoteha*) of Samaria's judgment has metastasized southward to Judah — the corruption that destroyed the northern kingdom has infected Jerusalem. The phrase 'the gate of my people' (*sha'ar ammi*) uses the gate as the symbol of a city's integrity and governance — the enemy is at the gates. Micah's use of 'my people' (*ammi*) signals personal identification with those under threat.
10. The wordplay section begins. 'Do not tell it in Gath' (*begat al taggidu*) echoes David's lament in 2 Samuel 1:20 — Gath (*gat*) puns with *taggidu* ('tell'). Beth-leaphrah means 'house of dust' (*beit le'afrah*), and the command to 'roll in dust' (*afar hitpallashi*) plays directly on the name — the town of dust is told to wallow in dust. These puns are untranslatable in English; the poetry works only in Hebrew. We preserve the place names and document the wordplay in notes.
11. Three more wordplays: Shaphir (*shafir*) means 'beautiful,' but its inhabitants pass by in shameful nakedness — beauty turned to shame. Zaanan (*tsa'anana*) puns with *yatsa* ('to go out') — the town whose name means 'going out' does not go out (*lo yatse'ah*). Beth-azel (*beit ha'etsel*) means 'house of nearness' or 'house of the neighbor,' but its proximity provides no support (*emdato*, 'its standing/support') — the nearby refuge fails. Each wordplay condemns a town through the ironic reversal of its own name.
12. Maroth (*marot*) means 'bitter,' and its inhabitants writhe in bitter pain — the town of bitterness experiences bitterness. The verb *chalah* ('to writhe, to be in anguish') suggests the agony of waiting for good that does not come. The phrase 'disaster has come down from the LORD' (*yarad ra me'et YHWH*) is theologically stark — the calamity is not random but divinely directed. The 'gate of Jerusalem' (*sha'ar Yerushalaim*) echoes verse 9, indicating that the wave of destruction has reached the capital.
13. Lachish (*Lakhish*) puns with *larekesh* ('to the steeds/team') — the chariot city must now harness its horses for flight. Lachish was the second most important city in Judah, heavily fortified with chariot forces. Micah identifies it as 'the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion' — possibly because Lachish served as a conduit through which northern Israelite religious practices (including horse-and-chariot sun worship, 2 Kings 23:11) entered Judah. The Assyrian siege of Lachish (701 BCE) was extensively documented in Sennacherib's palace reliefs at Nineveh.
14. Two more wordplays: Moresbeth (*moresheth*) sounds like *me'oraset* ('betrothed'), so 'parting gifts' (*shilluchim*) evoke the dowry given to a bride leaving her father's house — the town is being 'given away' to the enemy. Achzib (*akhziv*) puns with *akhzav* ('deception, a lying brook') — the town of deception will prove deceptive to Israel's kings. Moresbeth-gath is Micah's own hometown — his personal grief is embedded in this oracle. The reference to 'kings of Israel' may refer to Judah's kings or to a time before the division of the kingdoms.
15. Mareshah (*mareshah*) puns with *yoresh* ('heir, possessor, conqueror') — the town of 'possession' will receive an unwelcome possessor. Adullam was the cave where David hid as a fugitive (1 Samuel 22:1) — the 'glory of Israel' (*kevod Yisra'el*) will retreat to the same hiding places as a hunted outlaw. The irony is devastating: Israel's leaders, who should embody national glory, will be reduced to hiding in caves like David fleeing Saul.
16. The chapter closes with a mourning command. Shaving the head (*qorchi vagozzi*) was a sign of extreme grief, though technically prohibited in Deuteronomy 14:1 — Micah's command reflects the depth of the catastrophe. The 'precious children' (*beni ta'anugayikh*) are the inhabitants of the towns listed in the preceding verses — Micah's own neighbors. The *nesher* is traditionally 'eagle' but more accurately refers to the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), whose bald head provides the metaphor. The final word — *galu mimmekh* ('they have gone into exile from you') — states the ultimate consequence: deportation.

## 2

**Summary:** *Micah 2 is a woe oracle against the wealthy land-grabbers of Judah who lie awake at night scheming to seize other people's fields and houses. God announces a corresponding judgment: since they plotted evil on their beds, He is plotting disaster against them. The chapter includes a sharp exchange with false prophets who tell Micah to stop preaching ('Do not preach!'), and concludes with a brief promise of future restoration — God as a shepherd gathering a remnant.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The opening woe (hoi) launches a classic prophetic indictment of economic injustice — the powerful seize ancestral land, violating the foundational principle that the land belongs to God and was distributed by lot to families in perpetuity. In an agrarian society, losing your family's land meant losing your identity, livelihood, and covenant inheritance. Micah's opponents in verse 6 use the same verb he uses — nataf ('to drip, to preach') — turning his own word against him. The brief restoration promise in verses 12-13 shifts abruptly from judgment to hope, describing God as the 'one who breaks open' (haporets) leading the flock through the gate — imagery later applied to the Messiah.*

**Translation Friction:** *The verb nataf ('to drip') in verses 6 and 11 is used metaphorically for prophetic speech — 'to preach' or 'to prophesy.' The opponents say 'do not drip' (al tattiphu), meaning 'stop prophesying.' The shift from judgment (vv. 1-11) to restoration (vv. 12-13) is abrupt, and some scholars consider verses 12-13 a later addition — we render the text as it stands in the WLC without rearrangement. The phrase 'removes the splendid robe' (eder shalmah, v. 8) is textually difficult — we follow the most defensible reading.*

**Connections:** *The woe oracle connects to Isaiah 5:8 ('Woe to those who join house to house and field to field'). The land-seizure indictment echoes the Naboth's vineyard narrative (1 Kings 21). The false-prophet conflict anticipates Jeremiah's clashes with prophets of peace (Jeremiah 23, 28). The shepherd-and-flock imagery in verses 12-13 connects to Ezekiel 34 and Jesus's self-identification as the Good Shepherd.*

<sup>1</sup>Woe to those who plan wickedness  
and devise evil on their beds!  
At morning's light they carry it out,  
because it is in the power of their hands.

<sup>2</sup>They covet fields and seize them,  
houses, and take them.  
They oppress a man and his household,  
a person and his inheritance.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore this is what the LORD says:  
I am planning disaster against this clan,  
from which you will not be able to remove your necks.  
You will not walk with heads held high,  
for it will be an evil time.

<sup>4</sup>On that day they will raise a taunt against you  
and wail with bitter lamentation:  
'We are utterly ruined!  
He changes the portion of my people.  
How he removes it from me!  
To the rebellious he divides our fields.'

<sup>5</sup>Therefore you will have no one to divide land by lot  
in the assembly of the LORD.

<sup>6</sup>"Do not preach!" they preach.  
"They should not preach about these things!  
Disgrace will not overtake us."

<sup>7</sup>Should it be said, O house of Jacob:  
'Is the spirit of the LORD impatient?  
Are these his deeds?'  
Do not my words do good  
to the one who walks uprightly?

<sup>8</sup>But recently my people have risen up as an enemy.  
You strip the rich robe from those  
who pass by peacefully,  
from those returning from war.

<sup>9</sup>The women of my people you drive out  
from their comfortable homes.  
From their children you take away  
my splendor forever.

<sup>10</sup>Get up and go!  
For this is not your resting place,  
because of the defilement that brings destruction,  
a painful destruction.

<sup>11</sup>If a man walking in wind and lies  
were to deceive and say,  
'I will preach to you about wine and strong drink' —  
he would be the preacher for this people!

<sup>12</sup>"I will surely gather all of you, Jacob;  
I will surely assemble the remnant of Israel.  
I will bring them together like sheep in a pen,  
like a flock in its pasture —  
a noisy throng of people."

<sup>13</sup>The one who breaks open the way goes up before them;  
they break through, pass through the gate,  
and go out by it.  
Their king passes on before them,  
the LORD at their head.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The woe oracle (hoi) is a funeral cry repurposed as a prophetic curse — Micah is pronouncing the death sentence over the land-grabbers. The phrase 'on their beds' (al mishkevotam) indicates premeditation — these are not crimes of passion but calculated schemes hatched during sleepless nights. The phrase 'because it is in the power of their hands' (ki yesh le'el yadam) uses the word el ('power, god') — literally, 'because their hand is a god to them,' suggesting that their own power has become their deity. The dawn (or habboqer) brings execution of their plans — what they schemed in

darkness, they enact in daylight.

2. The verb *chamadu* ('they covet') directly violates the tenth commandment (Exodus 20:17, Deuteronomy 5:21 — 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house... or field'). The progression — covet, seize, oppress — describes the escalation from internal desire to outright theft. The word *nachalato* ('his inheritance') is critical: in Israel's land theology, each family's plot was their God-given inheritance (*nachalah*), distributed by lot at the conquest and meant to remain within the family in perpetuity (Leviticus 25:23-28). To seize someone's *nachalah* was to rob them of their covenant birthright.
3. God's judgment mirrors the crime: they 'planned' (*choshevei*) wickedness in verse 1; now God 'is planning' (*choshev*) disaster against them — the same Hebrew verb. The metaphor of a yoke on the neck (*lo tamishtu... tsavverotekhem*, 'you will not remove your necks') describes an inescapable burden, evoking the yoke of servitude. The contrast between their current arrogant 'walk' and their future inability to 'walk with heads held high' (*romah*) reverses their social status.
4. The *mashal* ('taunt, parable, proverb') is a mocking song — the very people who seized others' land will become the subject of a satirical lament. The phrase *nehayah niyah* ('it has happened, it is done') uses a cognate construction for emphasis. The irony is complete: they divided others' fields (v. 2), and now their own fields are divided (*yechalleg*) among others. The word *chelqi* ('my portion') refers to the covenant allotment of land — its loss is catastrophic in Israel's theological framework.
5. The punishment fits the crime: the land-grabbers will have no representative to cast the measuring line (*chevel*) when land is redistributed 'in the assembly of the LORD' (*biquhal YHWH*). The *chevel* is the surveyor's cord used in land division — the very instrument of allotment is denied to them. The reference to 'the assembly of the LORD' may point to a future restoration when land will be redistributed, but the guilty will be excluded from it.
6. The verb *nataf* ('to drip') is used metaphorically for prophetic speech — to preach, to prophesy (literally, 'to let words drip'). The opponents use Micah's own verb against him: 'do not drip!' (*al tattifu*). The irony is that in telling the prophet not to preach, they are themselves preaching (*yattifun*). The phrase *lo yissag kelimmot* ('disgrace will not overtake us') reveals their self-assured complacency — they believe they are immune to the consequences Micah proclaims.
7. God responds to the opponents. The phrase *haqatsar ruach YHWH* ('Is the spirit of the LORD shortened/impatient?') uses *qatsar* ('to be short') — the opponents imply God would not actually do what Micah threatens. God's counter: His words 'do good' (*yeitivu*) to those who walk uprightly (*hayashar holekh*) — the problem is not with the prophetic message but with the audience's conduct. The implication is clear: if Micah's words sound like judgment, it is because the hearers are not walking uprightly.
8. God accuses His own people of acting like an enemy (*le'oyev*) — they have become hostile to their own. The phrase *eder tafshitun* ('you strip the splendid robe') describes robbing travelers of their outer garments — a violation of both law (Exodus 22:26-27) and basic decency. The victims are described as 'passing by peacefully' (*overim betach*) and 'returning from war' (*shuvei milchamah*) — they are unarmed, trusting, vulnerable. The Hebrew of this verse is textually difficult and has been debated extensively among scholars.
9. The crime now targets the most vulnerable: women and children. The verb *tegareshun* ('you drive out') is the same word used for divorce (Leviticus 21:7) — these women are expelled from their own homes. The phrase *hadari* ('my splendor') — God speaks of 'my splendor' being taken from the children. This may refer to the children's covenant inheritance, their dignity, or their freedom. The word *le'olam* ('forever') intensifies the tragedy — this is not temporary deprivation but permanent dispossession.
10. The command *qumu ulekh* ('get up and go') echoes God's commission to Jonah (Jonah 1:2) but here is a sentence of exile. The *menuchah* ('rest, resting place') alludes to the Deuteronomic promise of rest in the land (Deuteronomy 12:9) — the land was supposed to be Israel's rest, but defilement (*tum'ah*) has corrupted it. The wordplay *chevel nimrats* ('painful destruction') uses *chevel*, which can mean both 'cord' (the surveyor's cord of v. 5) and 'destruction/pain.' The land that was measured out by cord will be destroyed.
11. A devastating indictment of the people's taste in prophets. The word *ruach* ('wind, spirit') here carries the sense of empty wind — hot air. A prophet who spouts nonsense (*sheker*, 'falsehood') and preaches about wine and beer (*yayin veshekar*) would be enthusiastically received. The verb *attif* ('I will preach') returns to the *nataf*/drip verb from verse 6, completing the wordplay: Micah's opponents told him not to 'drip,' but they would eagerly accept a prophet who 'drips' messages about alcohol. The sarcasm is withering.
12. The tone shifts abruptly from judgment to restoration. The double infinitive absolute (*asof e'esof... qabbets aqabbets*) expresses emphatic certainty — 'I will surely, surely gather.' The 'remnant of Israel' (*she'erit Yisra'el*) introduces a key concept in Micah: not all will be lost; a faithful remainder will survive. The imagery of sheep in a pen (*tso'n botsrah*) suggests both protection and abundance — the pen is so full it buzzes with noise (*tehimenah me'adam*, 'they will hum with people'). Some scholars read *botsrah* as a reference to the city Bozrah in Edom, but the context favors the common noun 'pen, enclosure.'
13. The *haporet* ('the one who breaks open') is a messianic title in later Jewish interpretation — the one who breaks open the way of exile and leads the flock home. The image is of a shepherd breaking through a pen's wall or gate so the flock can follow. The final identification — 'their king... the LORD at their head' (*malkam... vaYHWH berosham*) — places God Himself as the king who leads the procession. The term *malkam* ('their king') could also be read as a reference to the Messiah. The verse moves from sheep imagery to royal procession, blending pastoral and monarchic metaphors.

## 3

**Summary:** *Micah 3 is a sustained indictment of Judah's leaders — rulers, prophets, and priests alike. The chapter divides into three oracles: (1) rulers who devour the people like butchers stripping meat from bones (vv. 1-4); (2) false prophets who tailor their messages based on who feeds them (vv. 5-8); and (3) a comprehensive judgment against all three leadership classes, climaxing in the stunning prophecy that Zion will be plowed like a field and Jerusalem's temple mount will become a forested hilltop (vv. 9-12). This final verse is one of the most radical utterances in prophetic literature — the destruction of the temple itself.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The butchery metaphor in verses 2-3 is among the most graphic in prophetic literature: leaders flay the skin from the people, tear flesh from bones, chop them up like meat in a pot. This is not hyperbole but a precise description of economic exploitation rendered in sacrificial language — the leaders treat the people as animals for slaughter. Micah's self-description in verse 8 is one of the clearest prophetic self-authentications in the Hebrew Bible: he is filled with power, with the spirit of the LORD, with justice and courage. The final verse (v. 12) was quoted 100 years later to save Jeremiah's life (Jeremiah 26:18) — the elders remembered Micah's words and argued that a prophet should not be killed for proclaiming judgment.*

**Translation Friction:** *The butchery imagery (vv. 2-3) uses sacrificial terminology, creating a disturbing reversal: the leaders treat the people like sacrificial animals. The verb gashu ('they strip') and pashshetu ('they flay') are precise butchery terms. In verse 8, the phrase 'filled with power' (male'ti koach) is followed by 'the spirit of the LORD' (et ruach YHWH) — some manuscripts and versions read this differently, but the WLC text is followed. The prediction of Zion's destruction (v. 12) is so radical that it was apparently never fulfilled in Micah's own time — Hezekiah's reforms may have delayed it — but was ultimately fulfilled by Babylon in 586 BCE.*

**Connections:** *Verse 12 is directly quoted in Jeremiah 26:18, making it one of the few prophetic texts cited by another prophet. The butchery metaphor connects to Ezekiel 34 (shepherds who feed themselves instead of the flock). The false-prophet indictment parallels Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 13. Micah's claim to be filled with the spirit (v. 8) contrasts with the false prophets who have no vision from God.*

<sup>1</sup>Then I said:

"Listen, you leaders of Jacob,  
you rulers of the house of Israel!  
Is it not your duty to know justice?

<sup>2</sup>You who hate good and love evil,  
who tear the skin from my people  
and the flesh from their bones,

<sup>3</sup>who eat the flesh of my people,  
flay the skin from them,  
break their bones,  
and chop them up like meat for the pot,  
like flesh in a cauldron."

<sup>4</sup>Then they will cry out to the LORD,  
but he will not answer them.  
He will hide his face from them at that time,  
because they have made their deeds evil.

<sup>5</sup>This is what the LORD says concerning the prophets  
 who lead my people astray:  
 When they have something to bite with their teeth,  
 they proclaim, 'Peace!'  
 But against the one who puts nothing in their mouths,  
 they declare war.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore it will be night for you — without vision,  
 and darkness for you — without divination.  
 The sun will set on the prophets,  
 and the day will go dark over them.

<sup>7</sup>The seers will be put to shame  
 and the diviners will be disgraced.  
 They will all cover their mouths,  
 for there is no answer from God.

<sup>8</sup>But as for me, I am filled with power —  
 with the spirit of the LORD —  
 with justice and courage,  
 to declare to Jacob his transgression  
 and to Israel his sin.

<sup>9</sup>Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob,  
 you rulers of the house of Israel,  
 who detest justice  
 and twist everything that is right,

<sup>10</sup>who build Zion with bloodshed  
 and Jerusalem with injustice.

<sup>11</sup>Her leaders judge for a bribe,  
 her priests teach for a price,  
 and her prophets divine for money.  
 Yet they lean on the LORD and say,  
 'Is not the LORD among us?  
 No disaster will come upon us.'

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, because of you,  
 Zion will be plowed like a field,  
 Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins,  
 and the temple mount will become  
 a wooded hilltop.

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Micah addresses the leaders directly using two terms: *rashei* ('heads, chiefs') and *qetsinei* ('commanders, rulers'). The rhetorical question 'Is it not your duty to know justice?' (*halo lakhem lada'at et hamishpat*) implies that knowing justice is the fundamental obligation of leadership. The verb *yada* ('to know') in Hebrew means more than intellectual awareness — it implies intimate familiarity and active practice. Leaders who do not know justice are unfit to lead.

2. The leaders' moral inversion is stated bluntly: they hate good and love evil — a complete reversal of the moral order. The butchery imagery begins: they 'tear' (gozlei) skin from the people and strip flesh from bones. The verb gazal ('to tear away, to rob') carries connotations of both robbery and violent flaying. The language deliberately echoes sacrificial procedures — the leaders treat the populace as animals to be butchered.
3. The butchery sequence continues with escalating violence: eating flesh, flaying skin, breaking bones, chopping into pieces. The vocabulary (pareshu, 'they spread out'; pitssechu, 'they broke open') is precise butchery terminology. The pot (sir) and cauldron (qallachat) imagery turns the leaders into cannibals — they consume the very people they are supposed to protect. This metaphor is not about literal cannibalism but about economic exploitation so predatory it is equivalent to devouring human beings. The same pot imagery appears in Ezekiel 11:3 and 24:3-6.
4. The consequence is devastating: God will not answer their prayers. The phrase veyaster panav mehem ('he will hide his face from them') is one of the most severe judgments in the Hebrew Bible — the hiding of God's face means the withdrawal of divine protection, attention, and relationship. It is the opposite of the priestly blessing ('The LORD make his face shine upon you,' Numbers 6:25). The reason is stated with judicial precision: ka'asher here'u ma'aleiheim ('because they have made their deeds evil') — their actions determined God's response.
5. The false prophets' corruption is economic: their message changes based on who feeds them. When someone provides food (noshshkhim beshinnehem, literally 'biting with their teeth' — i.e., having something to eat), they prophesy shalom ('peace'). When someone fails to feed them (lo yitten al pihem, 'does not put in their mouths'), they 'consecrate war' (qiddeshu milchamah) against that person. The verb qiddesh ('to consecrate, to sanctify') is religious vocabulary applied to warfare — they declare a holy war against those who do not pay them.
6. The judgment on false prophets is the loss of prophetic ability itself — night without vision (chazon), darkness without divination (qesem). Since they sold false visions, God takes away all vision. The sun setting 'on the prophets' (al hanevi'im) and darkness covering them is both literal (they lose their prophetic sight) and figurative (public disgrace). The imagery reverses the prophetic ideal: a true prophet is supposed to bring light and clarity, but these prophets will be plunged into permanent darkness.
7. The covering of the upper lip (ve'atu al safam) is a sign of mourning and shame (Leviticus 13:45, Ezekiel 24:17). The false prophets — called chozim ('seers') and qosemim ('diviners') — will be publicly humiliated when their predictions fail to materialize. The final clause is devastating: ein ma'aneh Elohim ('there is no answer from God'). God's silence is the ultimate judgment on false prophecy — He simply stops speaking to them.
8. Micah's self-authentication stands in sharp contrast to the false prophets. He claims four qualities: koach ('power'), ruach YHWH ('the spirit of the LORD'), mishpat ('justice'), and gevurah ('courage, might'). These are precisely what the false prophets lack. His commission is to 'declare' (lehagid) — the verb of honest testimony — Jacob's peshah ('transgression, rebellion') and Israel's chatta't ('sin'). Where false prophets tell people what they want to hear, Micah tells them what they need to hear. This verse is one of the clearest statements of prophetic self-consciousness in the Hebrew Bible.
9. The third oracle begins with another summons to the leaders, echoing verse 1. The verb meta'avim ('who detest, who abhor') describes an active revulsion toward justice — these leaders do not merely neglect justice but find it repulsive. The verb ye'aqqeshu ('they twist, they make crooked') derives from the root '-q-sh, meaning to bend, to pervert. The word yesharah ('what is right, what is straight') is the opposite of crooked — they take what is straight and bend it.
10. The accusation is specific: the physical construction of the capital is funded by violence (damim, literally 'bloods,' plural, indicating multiple acts of bloodshed) and injustice (avlah, 'crookedness, perversion of right'). The buildings of Jerusalem are built on a foundation of exploitation. This verse may refer to forced labor, land seizure (cf. 2:1-2), or judicial corruption that enables the wealthy to profit from the suffering of the poor.
11. All three leadership classes are indicted: rulers (rasheiha) take bribes to pervert justice; priests (kohaneiha) sell religious instruction (the verb yoru means 'to teach, to give torah/instruction'); prophets (nevi'eiha) sell divination for silver. The devastating irony is in the final clause: despite thoroughgoing corruption, they claim divine protection — 'Is not the LORD among us?' (halo YHWH beqirbbenu). They treat God's presence as an unconditional guarantee rather than a covenantal relationship that demands righteousness. This presumption upon grace while practicing injustice is precisely what Micah condemns.
12. This is one of the most radical prophecies in the Hebrew Bible: the temple mount (har habbayit, literally 'the mountain of the house') will be overgrown with forest like an abandoned high place. Zion, the dwelling of God, will be plowed like farmland. The word bilvalkhem ('because of you') places direct blame on the corrupt leaders. This verse was quoted a century later to save Jeremiah's life: when Jeremiah prophesied the temple's destruction, the elders cited Micah's precedent and argued that Hezekiah had responded to Micah's warning with repentance rather than executing the prophet (Jeremiah 26:18-19). The ultimate fulfillment came when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

## 4

**Summary:** *Micah 4 pivots from the devastating judgment of chapter 3 (Zion plowed like a field) to one of the most magnificent visions of future restoration in prophetic literature. The chapter opens with the famous 'swords into plowshares' oracle — a vision of universal peace centered on Zion, which appears nearly verbatim in Isaiah 2:2-4. Nations stream to God's mountain to learn His ways; God judges between peoples; weapons are forged into farming tools. The chapter then addresses the present reality: Israel is in pain like a woman in labor, destined for exile in Babylon, but will be delivered. Many nations gather against Zion, unaware that God has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The 'swords into plowshares' oracle (vv. 1-5) is shared almost word-for-word with Isaiah 2:2-4, raising the question of which prophet originated it — or whether both drew from a common liturgical tradition. Micah adds a distinctive line not found in Isaiah: 'Each person will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid' (v. 4) — an image of domestic security and agricultural prosperity that became proverbial (1 Kings 4:25, Zechariah 3:10). The labor-and-birth metaphor (vv. 9-10) is both terrifying and hopeful: the pain is real (exile to Babylon), but deliverance comes through the pain, not by avoiding it. The mention of Babylon is striking since in Micah's time (8th century BCE), Assyria, not Babylon, was the dominant threat — this is either prophetic foresight or later editorial updating.*

**Translation Friction:** *The relationship between Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4 is one of the great textual puzzles of the Hebrew Bible. We render both as they appear in their respective books without speculating on priority. The verb *yikketu* ('they will beat') in verse 3 describes the physical reforging of metal — swords hammered into plowshares. The phrase 'each under their vine and fig tree' (v. 4) uses the Hebrew *tachat* ('under, beneath'), creating an image of the shade and shelter these plants provide. The threshing-floor metaphor in verses 12-13 is violent: Zion is given horns of iron and hooves of bronze to thresh the nations — a jarring shift from the peace vision.*

**Connections:** *Isaiah 2:2-4 is the parallel to verses 1-3. 'Under their vine and fig tree' echoes 1 Kings 4:25 (Solomon's golden age) and Zechariah 3:10. The exile-to-Babylon prediction connects to 2 Kings 24-25 and Jeremiah 29. The threshing-floor imagery connects to Joel 3:13 and Revelation 14:14-20. The labor metaphor anticipates Isaiah 66:7-9 and Romans 8:22.*

<sup>1</sup>In the last days,  
the mountain of the LORD's house will be established  
as the highest of the mountains,  
raised above the hills,  
and peoples will stream to it.

<sup>2</sup>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,  
that he may teach us his ways  
and we may walk in his paths.'  
For instruction will go out from Zion,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>He will judge between many peoples  
and settle disputes for mighty nations far away.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,

and they will no longer learn war.

<sup>4</sup>Each person will sit under their own vine  
and under their own fig tree,  
and no one will make them afraid,  
for the mouth of the LORD of Hosts has spoken.

<sup>5</sup>For all the peoples walk,  
each in the name of their god,  
but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God  
forever and ever.

<sup>6</sup>"On that day," declares the LORD,  
"I will gather the lame  
and assemble the outcast —  
even those I have afflicted.

<sup>7</sup>I will make the lame into a remnant  
and the far-removed into a mighty nation.  
The LORD will reign over them on Mount Zion  
from now and forever."

<sup>8</sup>And you, O watchtower of the flock,  
O hill of the daughter of Zion —  
to you the former dominion will return,  
the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

<sup>9</sup>Now, why do you cry out so loudly?  
Is there no king among you?  
Has your counselor perished?  
For pain has gripped you like a woman in labor.

<sup>10</sup>Writhe and push, O daughter of Zion,  
like a woman in labor!  
For now you will go out from the city  
and live in the open field.  
You will go all the way to Babylon —  
there you will be rescued.  
There the LORD will redeem you  
from the hand of your enemies.

<sup>11</sup>Now many nations have gathered against you,  
saying, 'Let her be defiled,  
and let our eyes gloat over Zion!'

<sup>12</sup>But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD;  
they do not understand his plan.  
For he has gathered them  
like sheaves to the threshing floor.

13 "Get up and thresh, O daughter of Zion!  
 For I will make your horns iron  
 and your hooves bronze.  
 You will crush many peoples,  
 and you will devote their unjust gain to the LORD  
 and their wealth to the Lord of all the earth."

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TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *be'acharit hayyamim* ('in the last days, in the latter days') signals eschatological hope — a future reversal of the present devastation. Coming immediately after 3:12 (the temple mount becoming a wooded hilltop), the contrast is astonishing: the same mount will be exalted above all mountains. The verb *naharu* ('they will stream, they will flow') describes the movement of rivers — the nations will flow upward to Zion like water flowing uphill, a physical impossibility that underscores the supernatural nature of this vision. This passage appears almost identically in Isaiah 2:2.
2. The nations voluntarily seek God's instruction — there is no compulsion. The verb *yorenu* ('he will teach us') derives from the same root as *torah* ('instruction, law') — *yarah*, 'to direct, to instruct.' *Torah* here is rendered 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture its broader meaning: God's guidance for living, not merely legal code. The parallelism 'instruction from Zion / the word of the LORD from Jerusalem' establishes Zion-Jerusalem as the center from which divine teaching radiates outward to all nations. The universalistic vision — many nations coming to learn from Israel's God — is remarkable for an 8th-century Judean prophet.
3. The verb *shafat* ('he will judge') here means arbitrate, settle disputes — God serves as the supreme judge between nations, making war unnecessary. The verb *hokhiach* ('and he will decide, settle disputes for') carries the sense of rendering a binding verdict. The iconic image — swords beaten into plowshares (*ittim*, iron plow points) and spears into pruning hooks (*mazmerot*) — describes the literal reforging of weapons into agricultural tools. The verb *kittu* ('they will beat') refers to metalwork — hammering and shaping iron. The final clause is the most radical: they will not even 'learn' war (*lo yilmedun od milchamah*) — not just ceasing to fight but forgetting how to fight.
4. This verse is unique to Micah — it does not appear in the Isaiah parallel. The image of sitting under one's own vine and fig tree became the quintessential vision of peace and prosperity in Israelite thought (1 Kings 4:25, 2 Kings 18:31, Zechariah 3:10). It describes domestic security, agricultural sufficiency, and the absence of fear. The phrase *ve'ein macharid* ('and no one will make them afraid') is the opposite of the covenant curses (Leviticus 26:6, Deuteronomy 28:26), where wild beasts and enemies terrify the disobedient. The authentication formula — 'the mouth of the LORD of Hosts has spoken' — stamps this vision with divine certainty.
5. This verse, also unique to Micah's version, adds a confessional response to the peace vision. The contrast between 'all the peoples' walking in the name of their gods and Israel's commitment to walk in the name of YHWH 'forever and ever' (*le'olam va'ed*) creates a tension with the universalism of verses 1-4. Rather than claiming other nations' gods are real, the verse acknowledges the present reality (nations follow their gods) while affirming Israel's permanent commitment to YHWH. The phrase *le'olam va'ed* intensifies *olam* — not merely 'to the age' but 'to the age and beyond.'
6. God pledges to gather the most vulnerable: the 'lame' (*tsolah*, those who limp) and the 'outcast' (*niddachah*, those driven away). The final phrase — *va'asher hare'oti* ('even those I have afflicted') — is remarkably honest: God acknowledges that He Himself caused the affliction. This is not divine indifference but divine responsibility — the same God who sent the judgment will reverse it. The 'lame' and 'outcast' may be literal or metaphorical for a defeated, scattered people.
7. The reversal is complete: the lame become the remnant (*she'erit*), and those driven far away (*hannah'ah*) become a mighty nation (*goy atsum*). The 'remnant' concept is central to Micah's theology — a faithful core survives judgment to become the seed of restoration. The declaration 'the LORD will reign' (*malakh YHWH*) is a coronation formula — God Himself will be king on Zion, replacing the corrupt human rulers condemned in chapter 3. The phrase *me'attah ve'ad olam* ('from now and forever') asserts the permanence of this divine kingship.
8. *Migdal-eder* ('tower of the flock') refers to a watchtower used by shepherds to guard their flocks — here it is a title for Zion. The same name appears in Genesis 35:21 near Bethlehem, where Jacob camped after Rachel's death, creating an intertextual link to the Bethlehem prophecy in 5:2. The *ophel* ('hill, fortified mound') is the original citadel of Jerusalem. The 'former dominion' (*hamemshalah hari'shonah*) is the Davidic kingdom — the promise that the Davidic dynasty will be restored. This looks backward to David and forward to the messianic king of chapter 5.
9. The tone shifts sharply from future glory to present agony. The rhetorical questions ('Is there no king? Has your counselor perished?') suggest that Jerusalem's leaders have failed — the king and royal advisors are either absent or useless. The labor metaphor (*chil kayyoledah*, 'pain like a woman giving birth') introduces an image that dominates the rest of the chapter. In prophetic literature, birth pangs represent suffering that is both agonizing and purposeful — the pain leads to new life.
10. The mention of Babylon (*Bavel*) is remarkable — in Micah's time, Assyria was the dominant power, and Babylon was centuries away from conquering Judah. This is either a case of prophetic foresight or reflects later editorial updating. The verb *tinnatseli* ('you will be rescued') promises deliverance through the exile, not from it — the pain of exile is necessary. The verb *yig'alekh* ('he will redeem you') is from the root *g-'l* (*go'el*), the kinsman-redeemer — God will act as Israel's closest kin, buying them back from captivity.

11. The scene shifts to an attack on Zion by a coalition of nations. Their desire to see Zion 'defiled' (techenaf) and to gloat over her (vetachaz betsiyon einenu, literally 'let our eye look upon Zion' with pleasure at her humiliation) reveals malicious intent beyond mere military conquest. The nations want to see Zion desecrated, her holiness violated.
12. The dramatic irony: the nations think they have gathered against Zion by their own strategy, but God has gathered them (qibbetsam) — the same verb used of gathering Israel in verse 6. The nations are not besiegers but sheaves (amir) collected for threshing. The threshing floor (goren) is where grain is separated from chaff by crushing — the nations, thinking they are destroyers, are about to be destroyed. God's 'thoughts' (machshevot) and 'plan' (atsato) stand hidden behind the visible events.
13. The threshing imagery continues with violent specificity: Zion is given iron horns and bronze hooves — the equipment of a threshing ox that tramples grain on the threshing floor. The verb hadiqot ('you will crush') describes the grinding action of threshing. The verb hacharamti ('I will devote, I will consecrate to destruction') is the herem vocabulary — dedicating the spoils exclusively to God. The title 'the Lord of all the earth' (Adon kol ha'aretz) asserts God's universal sovereignty, connecting to the universal vision of verses 1-4. The plundered wealth (betsa'am, 'their unjust gain') and resources (cheilam, 'their wealth') belong to God, not to Zion.

## 5

**Summary:** *Micah 5 contains the famous Bethlehem prophecy — one of the most significant messianic texts in the Hebrew Bible, quoted in Matthew 2:6 to explain Jesus's birthplace. The chapter opens with the humiliation of Israel's current ruler (struck on the cheek), then pivots to the announcement that from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the smallest of Judah's clans, will come a ruler whose origins are 'from of old, from ancient days.' This ruler will shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD. The chapter continues with promises about the remnant of Jacob among the nations and concludes with God's purging of Israel's military power, idolatry, and sorcery.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The Bethlehem prophecy (v. 2 in Hebrew, v. 1 in English Bibles following the Septuagint verse division) is one of the most precisely fulfilled messianic prophecies. Bethlehem was David's hometown (1 Samuel 16:1), and by specifying it as the birthplace of the future ruler, Micah connects the Messiah directly to the Davidic line. The phrase 'whose origins are from of old, from ancient days' (motsa'otav miqqedem mimei olam) has been interpreted as referring either to the antiquity of the Davidic dynasty or to the pre-existence of the Messiah. The shift from Bethlehem's insignificance ('too small to be among the clans of Judah') to its cosmic importance is a characteristic Micah theme: God works through the small, the overlooked, the marginal.*

**Translation Friction:** *The verse numbering differs between the Hebrew text (where this chapter begins at 4:14 in some reckonings) and English translations. We follow the WLC versification. The phrase motsa'otav miqqedem mimei olam ('his origins are from of old, from ancient days') is debated: miqqedem can mean 'from the east' or 'from ancient times,' and olam ('eternity, ancient time') ranges from 'a long time ago' to 'eternity.' The ambiguity between the Davidic dynasty's antiquity and genuine pre-existence is preserved. The identity of 'the Assyrian' in verses 5-6 is debated — is it literal Assyria or a typological reference to any future enemy?*

**Connections:** *Matthew 2:5-6 and John 7:42 cite this passage in reference to Jesus's birth in Bethlehem. The connection to David via Bethlehem links to Ruth 4:17-22 (David's ancestry from Bethlehem), 1 Samuel 16 (David's anointing), and 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic covenant). The shepherd imagery connects to Ezekiel 34 and John 10. The remnant theology (vv. 7-8) runs throughout Micah (2:12, 4:7) and Isaiah (10:20-22). The purging of military power and idolatry (vv. 10-15) echoes Deuteronomy 18:10-12.*

<sup>1</sup>Now marshal your troops, O daughter of troops!

A siege is laid against us.

With a rod they strike the ruler of Israel  
on the cheek.

<sup>2</sup>But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come forth for me

one who will be ruler over Israel,  
 whose origins are from of old,  
 from ancient days.

<sup>3</sup>Therefore he will give them up  
 until the time when she who is in labor gives birth.  
 Then the rest of his brothers  
 will return to the people of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>He will stand and shepherd his flock  
 in the strength of the LORD,  
 in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.  
 They will live securely,  
 for then he will be great  
 to the ends of the earth.

<sup>5</sup>And this one will be our peace.  
 When Assyria comes into our land  
 and treads on our fortresses,  
 we will raise against him seven shepherds  
 and eight leaders of men.

<sup>6</sup>They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,  
 the land of Nimrod at its gates.  
 He will deliver us from Assyria  
 when it comes into our land  
 and when it treads within our borders.

<sup>7</sup>The remnant of Jacob will be  
 among many peoples  
 like dew from the LORD,  
 like showers on the grass,  
 which do not wait for anyone  
 and do not depend on human beings.

<sup>8</sup>The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations,  
 among many peoples,  
 like a lion among the beasts of the forest,  
 like a young lion among flocks of sheep —  
 when it passes through, it tramples and tears,  
 and no one can rescue.

<sup>9</sup>Your hand will be raised over your adversaries,  
 and all your enemies will be cut off.

<sup>10</sup>"On that day," declares the LORD,  
 "I will cut off your horses from among you  
 and destroy your chariots.

- 11**I will cut off the cities of your land  
and tear down all your fortresses.
- 12**I will cut off sorcery from your hand,  
and you will have no more fortune-tellers.
- 13**I will cut off your carved images  
and your sacred pillars from among you,  
and you will no longer bow down  
to the work of your hands.
- 14**I will uproot your Asherah poles from among you  
and demolish your cities.
- 15**I will execute vengeance in anger and wrath  
upon the nations that have not obeyed."

## TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew verse numbering differs from English Bibles — this is 4:14 in some Hebrew traditions. The opening *titgodedi* ('marshal, gather in troops') plays on the word *gedud* ('troop, raiding band'). The image of striking the ruler (*shofet*, 'judge, ruler') on the cheek is a deliberate humiliation — the most powerful person in Israel is publicly shamed. This degradation of the current ruler sets up the contrast with the coming ruler from Bethlehem. The identity of the 'ruler of Israel' may be the reigning king of Judah facing Assyrian or Babylonian siege.
2. This is the verse quoted in Matthew 2:6 by the chief priests and scribes when Herod asks where the Messiah is to be born. Bethlehem Ephrathah (the full designation distinguishes it from Bethlehem in Zebulun, Joshua 19:15) is David's city (1 Samuel 16:1, 17:12). The word *alfei* ('clans, thousands') refers to the administrative divisions of the tribes. The phrase *motsa'otav miqqedem mimei olam* ('his origins are from of old, from ancient days') is profoundly ambiguous: it could refer to the ancient Davidic dynasty (going back centuries) or to genuine pre-existence (existing before time). The word *olam* ranges from 'a long time' to 'eternity.' The ambiguity is preserved rather than resolved. The preposition *li* ('for me') indicates this ruler comes at God's initiative and for God's purposes.
3. The 'she who is in labor' (*yoledah*) connects to the birth-pain imagery of 4:9-10 and may also evoke Isaiah 7:14 (the virgin/young woman who will bear a son). God will 'give them up' (*yittenem*) — abandon Israel to suffering — only until the birth occurs. 'The rest of his brothers' (*yeter echav*) refers either to the scattered Israelites who will be reunited or to the ruler's kinsmen who will join him. The return (*yeshuvun*) echoes the *teshuvah* theme — a homecoming both physical and spiritual.
4. The ruler from Bethlehem is described as a shepherd (*ra'ah*, 'to shepherd, to feed') who leads with divine strength and majesty — not his own. The verb *ve'amad* ('he will stand') suggests stability, authority, and permanence. His flock (Israel) 'will live securely' (*veyashevu*, from *yashav*, 'to sit, to dwell' — implying settled peace). His greatness extends 'to the ends of the earth' (*ad afsei aretz*), making this a universal ruler, not merely a local king. The shepherd-king imagery connects directly to David, the shepherd boy from Bethlehem who became king, and forward to Jesus's self-identification as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).
5. The phrase *vehayah zeh shalom* ('this one will be peace') identifies the Bethlehem ruler not merely as a bringer of peace but as peace itself — an unusually strong identification (cf. Ephesians 2:14, 'He himself is our peace'). 'Assyria' (Ashur) may be the literal Assyrian Empire (the dominant threat in Micah's time) or a typological name for any future threatening empire. The phrase 'seven shepherds and eight leaders' (*shiv'ah ro'im ushmonah nessikhei adam*) uses the Hebrew poetic convention of  $x / x+1$  (cf. Amos 1:3, Proverbs 30:15, 18) to indicate a full, sufficient number — more than enough leaders to meet the threat.
6. The verb *ra'u* ('they will shepherd') is used ironically — they will 'shepherd' Assyria with the sword, turning the pastoral image into a military one. The 'land of Nimrod' (*erets Nimrod*) is another name for Mesopotamia/Assyria (Genesis 10:8-12, where Nimrod builds Nineveh). The phrase *bifetacheiha* ('at its gates, at its entrances') suggests the counterattack will reach Assyria's own fortified cities. The deliverer (*vehitsil*, 'he will deliver') is the Bethlehem ruler from verse 2.
7. The remnant (*she'erit Ya'aqov*) is compared to dew (*tal*) and rain showers (*revivim*) — life-giving, divinely sent, independent of human effort. The phrase 'which do not wait for anyone' (*asher lo yeqavveh le'ish*) emphasizes that dew falls by God's appointment, not by human scheduling. This imagery portrays the remnant as a blessing to the nations — not through military might but through quiet, God-given refreshment. The parallel to verse 8 creates a duality: the remnant is both dew (blessing) and lion (power).
8. The second remnant image contrasts sharply with verse 7: where the remnant was dew (gentle, life-giving), here it is a lion (*aryeh*) and a young lion (*kefir*) — powerful, irresistible, predatory. The verbs *ramas* ('tramples') and *taraf* ('tears apart') describe a lion's violent attack on prey. Together, verses 7-8 present the remnant in a dual role: blessing to those who receive them peacefully, devastating to those who oppose them. This reflects the

biblical pattern of God's people as both a source of universal blessing (Genesis 12:3) and an instrument of divine judgment.

9. The raised hand (tarom yadekha) is a gesture of victory and power. The verb yikkaretu ('they will be cut off') is covenant-curse vocabulary — enemies will be eliminated. This verse serves as a transition to the purging oracle in verses 10-15, where God removes from Israel everything she has relied on instead of Him.
10. God begins dismantling Israel's military apparatus. Horses (susekha) and chariots (markevotekha) were the advanced military technology of the ancient world — and Israel was specifically forbidden from accumulating them (Deuteronomy 17:16). By removing them, God is forcing Israel back to dependence on Him rather than on weaponry. The same word hikratti ('I will cut off') is used throughout verses 10-14, creating a liturgy of divine purging.
11. Fortified cities (arei artsekha) and strongholds (mivtsarekha) represent military defense infrastructure. God will tear them down (harasthi, from haras, 'to demolish, to pull down') — the same verb used for the demolition of pagan altars (Judges 6:25). The implication is that Israel's fortresses have become idols — objects of trust that rival God.
12. The purging extends to magical practices: keshafim ('sorcery, witchcraft') and me'onenim ('fortune-tellers, those who practice divination by clouds or times'). These practices were strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10-12. God removes them not merely as sins but as rivals — any system that claims to predict or control the future apart from God must be eliminated.
13. Carved images (pesilekha) and sacred pillars (matstsevatokha) represent idolatrous worship. The matstsevah ('standing stone, pillar') was originally legitimate in Israelite worship (Genesis 28:18, Jacob's pillar at Bethel) but was later condemned when associated with Canaanite religion (Deuteronomy 16:22). The phrase 'the work of your hands' (ma'aseh yadekha) is a standard prophetic way of describing the absurdity of idol worship — worshipping what you yourself made.
14. The Asherah poles (asherekha) were wooden poles or carved images associated with the goddess Asherah, consort of Baal in Canaanite religion. The verb natashti ('I will uproot') uses agricultural imagery — these cult objects will be torn out like weeds. The destruction of 'your cities' (arekha) at the end may refer to cities where idolatrous practices were concentrated, or it may echo verse 11's fortress demolition.
15. The chapter closes with divine vengeance (naqam) against the nations 'that have not obeyed' (asher lo shame'u, literally 'that have not heard/listened'). The verb shama ('to hear') carries the full weight of its Hebrew meaning: to hear and to obey. The nations that have not listened to God will face His anger (af) and wrath (chemah) — two distinct Hebrew words for divine displeasure, with af suggesting hot anger (literally 'nostril, flaring nostrils') and chemah suggesting burning fury.

## 6

**Summary:** *Micah 6 contains one of the most quoted verses in the Old Testament: 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good — and what does the LORD require of you? To act justly, to love faithful love, and to walk humbly with your God' (6:8). The chapter is structured as a covenant lawsuit (rib) in which God summons the mountains as witnesses, recounts His saving acts (the Exodus, the wilderness journey, Balaam and Balak), and then asks what Israel has done in return. The people respond with escalating ritual offers — thousands of rams, rivers of oil, even a firstborn child — but God rejects all of these in favor of three simple requirements: justice, chesed, and humility. The chapter closes with an indictment of commercial fraud and the specific sins of the house of Omri.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *Verse 8 distills the entire prophetic message into three requirements, creating perhaps the most concise summary of ethical monotheism in the Hebrew Bible. The three requirements — mishpat (justice), chesed (faithful love), and hatsnea lekhet (humble walking) — correspond to the three prophets often associated together: Amos (justice), Hosea (chesed), and Isaiah (humble walking with God). The covenant lawsuit (rib) format is a legal proceeding in which God is simultaneously plaintiff, prosecutor, and judge — yet He begins not with accusations but with bewildered questions: 'What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?' The escalating offers in verses 6-7 (calves, rams, oil, firstborn) move from the ordinary to the horrific, with child sacrifice representing the ultimate corruption of worship.*

**Translation Friction:** *The verb hatsnea ('to walk humbly, to walk carefully') in verse 8 is debated — it may mean 'humbly,' 'carefully,' 'wisely,' or 'circumspectly.' The root ts-n-' carries the sense of modesty or reserve. We render 'humbly' as the most widely recognized translation while noting the fuller range. The phrase 'rivers of oil' (nacharei shamen, v. 7) is hyperbolic — no one could literally offer rivers of oil — escalating the absurdity. The reference to 'the firstborn' (bekhori, v. 7) as a potential sacrifice is the most shocking escalation, evoking the Canaanite practice of child sacrifice that Israel was strictly forbidden from imitating (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10). The 'statutes of Omri' (v. 16) refer to the religious policies of the northern dynasty of Omri/Ahab, who promoted Baal worship.*

*Connections: The covenant lawsuit form connects to Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses), Isaiah 1:2-4, Hosea 4:1-3, and Psalm 50. The triad of justice-chesed-humility echoes Amos 5:24 (justice rolling like water), Hosea 6:6 ('I desire chesed, not sacrifice'), and Isaiah 66:2 ('the one who is humble and contrite'). Jesus cites Micah 6:8's priorities in Matthew 23:23 ('the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness'). The rejection of ritual in favor of ethics connects to 1 Samuel 15:22 ('To obey is better than sacrifice').*

- <sup>1</sup>Hear now what the LORD says:  
 "Get up! Bring your case before the mountains,  
 and let the hills hear your voice."
- <sup>2</sup>Hear, O mountains, the LORD's case,  
 and you enduring foundations of the earth!  
 For the LORD has a case against his people;  
 he will contend with Israel.
- <sup>3</sup>"My people, what have I done to you?  
 How have I burdened you?  
 Answer me!
- <sup>4</sup>For I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
 and redeemed you from the house of slavery.  
 I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam before you.
- <sup>5</sup>My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted  
 and what Balaam son of Beor answered him.  
 Remember the journey from Shittim to Gilgal,  
 so that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."
- <sup>6</sup>"With what shall I come before the LORD  
 and bow before the God on high?  
 Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
 with year-old calves?
- <sup>7</sup>Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
 with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
 Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
- <sup>8</sup>He has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
 and what the LORD requires of you:  
 Only to act justly,  
 to love faithful love,  
 and to walk humbly with your God.
- <sup>9</sup>The voice of the LORD calls to the city —  
 and it is wisdom to fear your name:  
 "Hear the rod and the one who appointed it!
- <sup>10</sup>Can I forget the treasures of wickedness  
 in the house of the wicked,

and the accursed short measure?

<sup>11</sup>Can I acquit someone with dishonest scales  
and a bag of fraudulent weights?

<sup>12</sup>Her wealthy people are full of violence,  
her inhabitants speak lies,  
and their tongues are deceitful in their mouths.

<sup>13</sup>Therefore I have begun to strike you,  
to devastate you because of your sins.

<sup>14</sup>You will eat but not be satisfied;  
emptiness will gnaw inside you.  
You will store up but not save anything,  
and what you do save I will give to the sword.

<sup>15</sup>You will sow but not reap.  
You will tread olives but not anoint yourself with oil,  
and tread grapes but not drink wine.

<sup>16</sup>You have kept the statutes of Omri  
and all the practices of the house of Ahab;  
you have followed their counsel.  
Therefore I will make you a desolation  
and your inhabitants an object of scorn.  
You will bear the reproach of my people."

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#### TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens with a covenant lawsuit (*rib*). The verb *riv* ('to contend, to bring a legal case') is courtroom language — God is initiating a formal proceeding. The mountains and hills are summoned as witnesses, echoing Deuteronomy 32:1 ('Give ear, O heavens... listen, O earth'). Mountains endure across generations and thus serve as witnesses to covenants made long ago. The imperative *qum* ('get up') directed at Micah or Israel urges immediate attention to the divine legal summons.
2. The 'enduring foundations of the earth' (*ha'etanim mosdei aretz*) personifies the geological bedrock as witnesses — they have 'seen' everything since creation. The word *etanim* means 'enduring, permanent, ever-flowing' and is used of perennial streams. The double use of *rib* ('case, lawsuit') establishes the legal framework. The verb *yitvakkach* ('he will contend, he will argue') is from the root *y-k-ch*, meaning to reason, to arbitrate — God does not simply pronounce judgment but enters into argument with Israel, treating them as rational agents capable of response.
3. God's opening statement in the lawsuit is not an accusation but a question — He asks what He has done wrong. The phrase *mah asiti lekha* ('what have I done to you?') is heartbreaking in its directness. The verb *hel'etikha* ('have I burdened you, have I wearied you') comes from *la'ah* ('to be weary, to be tired') — God asks if He has exhausted Israel's patience. The imperative *aneh vi* ('answer me, testify against me') invites Israel to bring counter-charges. God submits Himself to cross-examination — an extraordinary condescension.
4. God's case rests on His saving acts, beginning with the foundational event: the Exodus. The verb *he'elitikha* ('I brought you up') emphasizes the upward movement from Egypt's lowland to the promised land. The verb *peditikha* ('I redeemed you') uses *padah* ('to ransom, to redeem'), indicating that God paid a price for Israel's freedom. The mention of Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron is significant — she is one of the few women identified as a leader of the Exodus (see Exodus 15:20-21, Numbers 12). God sent all three 'before you' (*lefanekha*) — as guides leading the way.
5. God cites two specific episodes: (1) Balak's attempt to curse Israel through Balaam, which God turned into blessing (Numbers 22-24), and (2) the journey from Shittim (the last camp east of the Jordan, Numbers 25:1, Joshua 2:1) to Gilgal (the first camp west of the Jordan, Joshua 4:19-5:12) — the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land. The phrase *tsidqot YHWH* ('the righteous acts of the LORD') uses the plural of *tsedaqah* to describe God's saving interventions — His righteousness is not abstract but concrete, demonstrated through historical deliverance.
6. Israel responds to God's case with a question that escalates through the next two verses. The verb *aqaddem* ('shall I come before, shall I approach') carries the sense of meeting someone with a gift — an audience with a king. The phrase *Elohei marom* ('the God on high, the exalted God') acknowledges divine transcendence. The first offer — year-old calves as burnt offerings (*olot*) — is a standard, appropriate sacrifice. But the question

format ('shall I?') reveals uncertainty about what God actually wants, setting up the escalation to come.

7. The escalation becomes absurd and then horrifying. 'Thousands of rams' and 'ten thousand rivers of oil' are wildly extravagant — the quantities are impossible, exposing the mentality that assumes God can be bought with enough stuff. Then the ultimate horror: 'Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?' (ha'etten bekhori pish'i). The parallelism — 'firstborn / fruit of my body' with 'transgression / sin of my soul' — frames child sacrifice as a transaction: my child's life for my guilt. This was practiced in the ancient Near East (2 Kings 3:27, Jeremiah 7:31, 32:35) and was absolutely forbidden in Israel (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5). The escalation from calves to rams to oil to children reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of what God wants.
8. This is arguably the most famous verse in the Minor Prophets and one of the most quoted in the entire Old Testament. The address adam ('O mortal, O human being') universalizes the message — this is not addressed to Israel alone but to every human being. The three requirements are: (1) asot mishpat ('to do/act justice') — ethical conduct, fair dealing; (2) ahavat chesed ('to love chesed') — not merely to practice chesed but to love it, to desire it, to be drawn to it; (3) hatsnea lekhet im Elohekha ('to walk humbly with your God') — the verb hatsnea is from the root ts-n- meaning modesty, circumspection, careful attentiveness. It appears only here in the Hebrew Bible as an infinitive. Jesus references these priorities in Matthew 23:23: 'the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness.'
9. The text shifts from the universal ethical summary to a specific indictment of the city (probably Jerusalem or Samaria). The phrase tushiyyah yir'eh shemekha ('wisdom sees/fears your name') is textually difficult — we follow the reading that connects wisdom (tushiyyah) with the fear of God's name. The 'rod' (matteh) is the instrument of divine punishment, and the city is commanded to hear both the rod and its Appointer (mi ye'adah, 'who appointed it'). The Hebrew is compressed and several words are debated among scholars.
10. God turns to specific economic crimes. The 'treasures of wickedness' (otsrot resha) are wealth accumulated through fraud. The 'short measure' (eifat razon) refers to using a smaller-than-standard ephah when selling grain — a cheating measure that gives the buyer less than they paid for. The word ze'umah ('accursed, abominated') expresses God's revulsion at commercial dishonesty. The question format ('Can I forget?') implies that God cannot overlook these injustices.
11. The verb ha'ezkeh ('can I acquit, can I declare pure/innocent') is a legal term — God asks whether He can pronounce a verdict of innocence on those who use rigged scales (mo'aznei resha, 'scales of wickedness') and carry bags of false weights (avnei mirmah, 'stones of deception'). Merchants used stone weights on balance scales; carrying lighter stones in a bag allowed them to cheat customers. This practice is condemned in Leviticus 19:35-36, Deuteronomy 25:13-16, and Proverbs 11:1, 20:23.
12. Three charges: the rich are full of chamas ('violence' — the same word used of the pre-flood world in Genesis 6:11 and of Nineveh in Jonah 3:8); the inhabitants speak sheqer ('lies, falsehood'); their tongues are remiyyah ('deceit, treachery'). The progression from economic fraud (vv. 10-11) to violence and lies (v. 12) shows how commercial dishonesty corrupts the entire social fabric.
13. The verb hecheleti ('I have begun') indicates that judgment has already started — it is not merely threatened but underway. The verb hakkotekha ('striking you') and hashhmem ('devastating, making desolate') describe progressive destruction. The phrase al chatto'otekha ('because of your sins') makes the causal connection explicit: the devastation is not arbitrary but a direct response to the sins documented in verses 10-12.
14. The covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 are invoked: eating without satisfaction echoes Leviticus 26:26 and Deuteronomy 28:38-40. The phrase veyeshchakha beqirbekha ('emptiness will be within you') is debated — it may refer to internal hunger, dysentery, or a gnawing emptiness that no amount of food can fill. The futility curse pattern (you will do X but not achieve Y) is characteristic of covenant curses: effort without result, labor without reward.
15. More futility curses: sowing without reaping, pressing olives without using the oil, treading grapes without drinking the wine. These curses echo Deuteronomy 28:38-40 almost verbatim. The three staples of Israelite agriculture — grain, oil, and wine — are systematically denied. The agricultural cycle (sow, harvest, enjoy) is broken at the final stage — the labor produces nothing usable. This is the covenant operating in reverse: the land that was supposed to flow with milk and honey now consumes effort without return.
16. The chapter closes by identifying the source of corruption: the 'statutes of Omri' and the 'practices of the house of Ahab.' Omri founded the dynasty that included Ahab and Jezebel — architects of Baal worship in the northern kingdom (1 Kings 16:25-26, 16:30-33). The accusation is that Judah has adopted the northern kingdom's religious policies. The consequences are shamah ('desolation'), shereqah ('hissing, scorn' — the sound passersby make at a destroyed city), and cherpat ammi ('the reproach of my people') — public disgrace before the nations.

## 7

**Summary:** *Micah 7 moves from lament to triumphant hope. The chapter opens with the prophet's personal grief over the moral collapse of his society — no upright person can be found, rulers and judges conspire together, family members betray each other. But at verse 7, Micah declares his resolve: 'As for me, I will watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation.' The chapter then shifts to a dialogue between Zion and her enemies, a vision of national restoration, and concludes with one of the most powerful doxologies in the Hebrew Bible: 'Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression?' — a wordplay on Micah's own name (Mi-khah, 'Who is like [God]?'). The final verses celebrate God's chesed and emunah, bringing the book to a close with covenant faithfulness.*

**What Makes This Remarkable:** *The closing doxology (vv. 18-20) is a masterpiece of Hebrew theology. The opening question — *mi el kamokha* ('Who is a God like you?') — puns on the prophet's own name (Mikhah/Micah, a shortened form of Mikhayahu, 'Who is like YHWH?'). The entire book has been building to this question: after all the sin, all the judgment, all the suffering — who is a God like this one, who pardons iniquity, who does not retain His anger forever, who delights in chesed? The final verse invokes God's promises to Abraham and Jacob — the patriarchal promises that anchor the entire biblical narrative. Micah's last words are chesed and emunah — faithful love and faithfulness — the twin pillars of covenant relationship.*

**Translation Friction:** *The lament section (vv. 1-6) presents a society in total moral collapse — 'the best of them is like a brier, the most upright worse than a thorn hedge.' The imagery is agricultural: Micah is like a gleaner who arrives after the harvest and finds nothing left. The dialogue format in verses 8-13 requires careful handling of speaker identification — Zion speaks, then God responds, then the prophet narrates. The verb *yikbbosh* ('he will subdue, he will trample') in verse 19, applied to Israel's iniquities, uses military conquest language for God's victory over sin — He will conquer our sins like an enemy army.*

**Connections:** *The 'Who is a God like you?' doxology connects to Exodus 15:11 (the Song of the Sea: 'Who is like you among the gods, O LORD?') and Psalm 35:10, 71:19, 77:13, 89:6. The chesed-and-emunah pairing in verse 20 echoes Exodus 34:6, Psalm 85:10, 89:14. The Abraham-and-Jacob reference (v. 20) connects to Genesis 12:1-3, 22:16-18, 28:13-15. The family betrayal theme (v. 6) is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 10:35-36 and Luke 12:53 to describe the divisions His message will cause.*

<sup>1</sup>How miserable I am!

I am like one gathering summer fruit,  
like one gleaning after the grape harvest —  
there is no cluster to eat,  
no early fig that I crave.

<sup>2</sup>The faithful have vanished from the land;  
there is no one upright among the people.  
They all lie in ambush to shed blood;  
each hunts the other with a net.

<sup>3</sup>Both hands are skilled at doing evil.  
The official demands payment,  
the judge takes a bribe,  
and the powerful dictate what they desire —  
so they weave their schemes together.

<sup>4</sup>The best of them is like a brier;  
the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge.

The day of your watchmen — your punishment — has come;  
now their confusion will follow.

<sup>5</sup>Do not trust a neighbor;  
do not rely on a friend.  
Guard the words of your mouth  
even from the one who lies in your arms.

<sup>6</sup>For a son dishonors his father,  
a daughter rises against her mother,  
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law —  
a person's enemies are the members of their own household.

<sup>7</sup>But as for me, I will watch for the LORD;  
I will wait for the God of my salvation.  
My God will hear me.

<sup>8</sup>Do not gloat over me, my enemy!  
Though I have fallen, I will rise.  
Though I sit in darkness,  
the LORD is my light.

<sup>9</sup>I will bear the LORD's indignation —  
for I have sinned against him —  
until he takes up my case  
and establishes justice for me.  
He will bring me out to the light,  
and I will see his righteousness.

<sup>10</sup>Then my enemy will see it,  
and shame will cover her —  
she who said to me,  
'Where is the LORD your God?'  
My eyes will see her downfall;  
now she will be trampled  
like mud in the streets.

<sup>11</sup>A day for rebuilding your walls!  
On that day the boundary will be extended far.

<sup>12</sup>On that day people will come to you  
from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,  
from Egypt to the Euphrates,  
from sea to sea and mountain to mountain.

<sup>13</sup>But the earth will become a desolation  
because of its inhabitants,  
as the fruit of their deeds.

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>"As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt,  
 I will show them wonders."

<sup>16</sup>The nations will see and be ashamed  
 of all their might.  
 They will put their hands over their mouths;  
 their ears will become deaf.

<sup>17</sup>They will lick the dust like a snake,  
 like creatures that crawl on the ground.  
 They will come trembling out of their strongholds;  
 they will turn in dread to the LORD our God  
 and will fear because of you.

<sup>18</sup>Who is a God like you,  
 who pardons iniquity  
 and passes over the transgression  
 of the remnant of his inheritance?  
 He does not retain his anger forever,  
 for he delights in faithful love.

<sup>19</sup>He will again have compassion on us;  
 he will subdue our iniquities.  
 You will cast all their sins  
 into the depths of the sea.

<sup>20</sup>You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
 and faithful love to Abraham,  
 as you swore to our ancestors  
 from the days of old.

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**TRANSLATOR NOTES**

1. Micah uses an agricultural metaphor for his moral search: he is like a gleaner arriving after the harvest to find nothing left. The 'summer fruit' (asefei qayits) and 'grape gleaning' (olelot batsir) refer to the meager leavings after the main harvest. The bikkurah ('early fig') was a prized delicacy (Hosea 9:10, Isaiah 28:4) — the first fruit of the season, eagerly anticipated. Micah craves righteousness the way a hungry person craves the first fig, but none can be found. The interjectory allalai li ('woe is me!') expresses personal distress, not prophetic judgment.
2. The word chasid ('faithful one, loyal one, pious one') — from the same root as chesed — describes someone who practices covenant faithfulness. Such people have 'perished' (avad) from the land. The word yashar ('upright, straight') is the ethical ideal — and no one embodies it. The violence imagery is predatory: they 'lie in ambush' (ye'erovu) for blood and 'hunt' (yatsudu) each other with a cherem ('net, devoted thing'). The word cherem can also mean 'the ban' — the total destruction devoted to God in holy war — adding a sacrilegious overtone to their predation.
3. The Hebrew of this verse is difficult. The phrase al hara kappayim leheitiv ('both hands on evil to do well') may mean they are 'good at doing evil' — their hands are expert at wickedness. The three corrupt leadership classes appear again: the sar ('official, prince'), the shofet ('judge'), and the gadol ('the great one, the powerful person'). The verb ye'abbetuha ('they weave it, they twist it together') suggests a conspiracy — the three classes

collaborate to distort justice, weaving their individual corruptions into a unified system.

4. The comparison of the 'best' (tovam) to a brier (chedeq) and the 'most upright' (yashar) to a thorn hedge (mesukah) is devastatingly dismissive — even the best people in society are painful to deal with. The 'watchmen' (metsappekha) are the true prophets who have been warning of this day. The word pequddah ('visitation, punishment, reckoning') can mean both a divine visit and the judgment that accompanies it. The word mevukhatam ('their confusion, their bewilderment') describes the panic that overtakes the wicked when the reckoning arrives.
5. The moral collapse extends to the most intimate relationships. The progression from re'a ('neighbor, companion') to aluf ('close friend, trusted companion') to shokevet cheiqekha ('the one who lies in your bosom' — a spouse) shows that no human relationship is safe. The phrase shemor pitchei fikha ('guard the openings of your mouth') advises secrecy even in the marriage bed. This total breakdown of social trust is the consequence of the systemic corruption described in verses 2-4.
6. The family unit, the foundation of Israelite society, has disintegrated. The verb menabbel ('dishonors, treats as a fool') applied to the son-father relationship violates the fifth commandment. Each relationship listed — son/father, daughter/mother, daughter-in-law/mother-in-law — represents a generational bond that has become adversarial. Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 10:35-36 and Luke 12:53, applying it to the divisions His message will cause within households. The final phrase — oyvei ish anshei veito ('a person's enemies are the members of their own household') — became proverbial.
7. The dramatic turning point. After six verses of unrelieved despair, Micah declares his personal resolve with the emphatic va'ani ('but as for me'). The verb atsappeh ('I will watch, I will look out') is the same root as the 'watchmen' (metsappim) of verse 4 — Micah positions himself as a true watchman, looking not for judgment but for God. The verb ochilah ('I will wait, I will hope') expresses patient expectation. The phrase Elohei yish'i ('the God of my salvation') mirrors the name Yeshua/Jesus. The final declaration — yishma'eni Elohai ('my God will hear me') — is quiet confidence amid chaos.
8. Zion (or the faithful community) now speaks to her enemy. The verbs are deliberately contrasted: nafalti ('I have fallen') / qamti ('I will rise'); eshev bachoshekh ('I sit in darkness') / YHWH or li ('the LORD is my light'). The statement 'the LORD is my light' (YHWH or li) echoes Psalm 27:1 ('The LORD is my light and my salvation'). The perfect-tense verbs (nafalti, qamti) express certainty — the fall is real, but the rising is equally certain. This verse is a miniature creed of hope in the midst of judgment.
9. This verse combines confession and hope in a single breath. The speaker acknowledges sin (chatati lo, 'I have sinned against him') and accepts the resulting divine indignation (za'af, 'wrath, fury') as deserved — but only as temporary. The verb yariv rivi ('he will take up my case, he will plead my cause') uses the rib vocabulary from chapter 6, but now God has switched roles: instead of prosecuting Israel, He becomes Israel's advocate. The phrase 'he will bring me out to the light' (yotsi'eni la'or) reverses the darkness of verse 8. The final phrase — 'I will see his righteousness' (er'eh betsidqato) — promises that God's tsedaqah will become visible through His saving action.
10. The enemy's taunt — 'Where is the LORD your God?' (ayyo YHWH Elohayikh) — is the same taunt hurled at Israel throughout the exile (Psalm 42:3, 10; 79:10; 115:2; Joel 2:17). The reversal is vivid: the taunter will be covered in shame (bushah) and trampled like mud (tit chutsot, 'the mire of the streets'). The word mirmass ('trampling') describes being trodden underfoot — the most degrading form of defeat.
11. The vision shifts to restoration. The 'walls' (gederayikh) are the defensive walls of Jerusalem. The phrase yirchaq choq ('the boundary will be far') is debated — choq may mean 'decree' (the decree of exile will be reversed), 'boundary' (Israel's borders will be expanded), or 'statute' (the oppressive laws of foreign rulers will be removed). We follow the 'boundary' reading as most consonant with the rebuilding imagery. The emphasis is on expansion and restoration.
12. The gathering of the diaspora — people will return from the farthest reaches: Assyria (northeast), Egypt (southwest), the Euphrates River (the eastern boundary of the promised land), and from 'sea to sea and mountain to mountain' — a merism indicating every direction, every corner of the earth. The phrase mimatsur ('from Egypt' or 'from the fortress') is debated — mitsur/matsur can mean either Egypt (an alternate form of Mitsrayim) or 'fortress.' The geographic scope — Assyria to Egypt, sea to sea — describes a universal ingathering.
13. A brief interruption of the restoration vision: the present reality is desolation (shemamah) as the consequence of human behavior. The phrase mipperi ma'aleihem ('as the fruit of their deeds') uses agricultural imagery — the 'harvest' of wickedness is desolation. This verse serves as a bridge between the present judgment and the future hope, acknowledging that the land must endure destruction before restoration comes.
14. Micah now prays to God, asking Him to resume His role as shepherd (re'eh, 'shepherd,' imperative). The 'staff' (shevet) is the shepherd's rod — an instrument of guidance and protection. The phrase tso'n nachalatekha ('the flock of your inheritance') calls Israel God's personal flock, His covenant possession. Carmel (karmel) can mean either the specific mountain (Mount Carmel) or 'garden land, fertile field.' Bashan and Gilead were the lush grazing regions of Transjordan, proverbial for their fertility (Psalm 22:12, Amos 4:1). The prayer asks for a return to the abundance of 'the days of old' (kimei olam).
15. God responds to Micah's prayer with a promise: the future restoration will be as miraculous as the Exodus. The verb ar'ennu ('I will show him/them') is God's direct speech — He Himself will display nifla'ot ('wonders, marvels'), the same word used for the Exodus miracles (Exodus 3:20, 15:11, Psalm 78:4). The comparison to the Exodus sets the bar: the coming salvation will be a new Exodus, a second great deliverance equal in wonder to the first.
16. The nations' response to God's wonders is shame (yevoshu) at their own power — their military strength is exposed as pathetic compared to God's. The gesture of putting hands over mouths (yasimu yad al peh) indicates stunned silence — they are speechless (cf. Job 21:5, 29:9, 40:4). Their ears 'becoming deaf' (ozneihem techerashna) may mean they are overwhelmed beyond comprehension or that they stop listening to their own counselors' arrogant plans.

- 17.** The nations' humiliation is described in terms echoing Genesis 3:14 (the serpent condemned to eat dust). The phrase *yelachakhu afar kannachash* ('they will lick dust like a snake') is the ultimate image of prostration and defeat. The 'creatures that crawl' (*zochalei erets*) are the lowest forms of animal life — the nations are reduced to ground level. The verb *yirghezu* ('they will tremble') indicates involuntary shaking, and *yifchadu* ('they will dread') indicates terrified awe. The final phrase switches to address God directly (*mimmekka*, 'because of you'), turning the description into worship.
- 18.** This is the theological climax of the book. The question *mi el kamokha* ('Who is a God like you?') echoes Exodus 15:11 (the Song of the Sea) and puns on Micah's own name (*Mikhah* = *Mi-kha-yahu*, 'Who is like YHWH?'). God's character is defined by what He does with sin: He 'pardons' (nose) iniquity (literally 'lifts, carries away' — the same verb used of the scapegoat carrying away sins in Leviticus 16:22) and 'passes over' (over all) transgression. The remnant concept returns (*she'erit nachalato*, 'the remnant of his inheritance') — God's mercy is directed toward the faithful core. The reason for His forgiveness: *ki chafets chesed hu* ('for he delights in chesed') — God's nature is oriented toward covenantal faithful love. He does not forgive grudgingly but joyfully.
- 19.** God's treatment of sin is described with three verbs: (1) *yerachamenu* ('he will have compassion on us') — from the root *r-ch-m* (*rechem*, 'womb'), visceral maternal compassion; (2) *yikhbosh* ('he will subdue') — a military conquest verb, as if God will trample our sins like a conquered enemy (the same verb used in Numbers 32:22, 29 for subduing the land); (3) *tashlikh* ('you will cast') — hurling sins into the sea depths (*bimtsulot yam*, literally 'in the depths of the sea'). The shift from third person ('he') to second person ('you') is characteristic of Hebrew prayer. The image of sins cast into the sea connects to Jonah's experience — the chaos waters that swallowed the prophet now swallow sin itself. Jewish tradition casts bread into water on Rosh Hashanah (the Tashlich ceremony) based on this verse.
- 20.** The final verse anchors everything in the patriarchal promises. *Emet* ('faithfulness, truth') is given to Jacob, and *chesed* ('faithful love') to Abraham — pairing the two foundational patriarchs with two foundational divine attributes. The verb *titten* ('you will give, you will show') promises active fulfillment, not merely theoretical commitment. The phrase *asher nishba'ta la'avotenu* ('which you swore to our ancestors') invokes the oaths of Genesis 12:1-3 (to Abraham), 22:16-18 (the oath after the Aqedah), and 28:13-15 (to Jacob at Bethel). The phrase *mimei qedem* ('from the days of old') reaches back to the most ancient foundation of the covenant relationship. The book ends not with threat but with promise — the same God who exposed sin and pronounced judgment is the God who keeps His oldest promises.