

12. Micah 4-7



Gustave Doré 1870

Micah 4:1-3 = Isaiah 2:2-4

Micah 4:1 (= Isaiah 2:2)

It will come about in the end of the days,
the mountain of YHWH's house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills.

This is in the form of an apocalypse: a vision of the consummation of history – not the end of time, but rather how things will be when the intention of the Creator is fulfilled: when history reaches its destined goal. The 'mountain of YHWH's house' recalls the Sinai tradition and the instructions given to Moses on the mountain in regard to the Tabernacle.

Micah 4:2 (= Isaiah 2:3)

Peoples will stream to it,

and many nations will come and say:

“Come, let us go up to the mountain of YHWH,

to the house of the God of Jacob;

that he may teach us his ways

and that we may walk in his paths.”

For out of Zion will go forth instruction,

and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.

When history reaches its destined goal (so this utopian vision imagines) peoples from all over the world will come to Jerusalem to ‘go up to the mountain of YHWH’. All the world will want to know the Torah, and will follow its instruction.

Psalm 24:3-6

Who shall ascend the hill of YHWH?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.

They will receive blessing from YHWH,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.

Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.

Zechariah 8:22-23

Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek YHWH of hosts in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of YHWH. Thus says YHWH of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Micah 4:3 (= Isaiah 2:4)

He will judge between many peoples,
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword
against nation, and they will not train for war any more.

Micah dreams of a paradise when every nation will submit to the will of YHWH, where no one will 'train for war any more', and where everyone will live in domestic and social peace.

Micah 3:4-5

They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one will disturb them; for the mouth of YHWH of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples will walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of YHWH our God for ever and ever.

Those responsible for the 'history' of the kings drew on this 'dream' when painting a picture of the 'golden years' of Solomon's reign: 'During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees' (1Kings 4:25).

In the meantime, peoples will follow their own 'god'. Israel 'will walk in the name of YHWH our God', who lives for ever and ever. Through the ups and downs of history, they will hold on to this dream.

Micah 4:6-8

In that day, says YHWH, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted.

The lame I will make into a remnant, and those who were cast off, a populous nation; and YHWH will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore.

And you, Tower of the Flock, Ophel of Daughter Zion, to you will come the former dominion, the kingship of Daughter Jerusalem.

YHWH will create out of the remnant ‘a populous nation’, and establish his reign ‘in Mount Zion’ – a reign that will never end. ‘Tower of the Flock’ appears to be a way of speaking of David’s city (compare Song of Songs 4;4), as is ‘Ophel’ (2Chronicles 27:3; 33:14; Nehemiah 3:26-27; 11:21).

Micah 4:9-10

Now why do you scream aloud? Is there no king in you?

Has your counsellor perished,

that pangs have seized you like a woman in labour?

Writhe and groan, O Daughter Zion, like a woman in labour.

For now you will go forth from the city and camp in the open country;

you will go to Babylon. There you will be rescued,

there YHWH will redeem you from the hands of your enemies.

The most likely context for this insert is 597 when king Jechoniah was taken into Babylonia as a hostage at the conclusion of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's army. By likening their pain to that of a woman in labour, a note of hope is introduced – the hope of birth (new life). YHWH will bring an end to the exile.

Micah 4:11-13

Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, “Let her be profaned, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion.”

But they do not know the thoughts of YHWH;
they do not understand his plan,
that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor.

Arise and thresh, O Daughter Zion,
for I will make your horn iron and your hooves bronze;
you shall beat into pieces many peoples,
and shall devote the spoil to YHWH,
their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

The nations assemble, not to know and obey the Torah as in verses 1-4, but to do harm to Zion. Little do they know that they are being enticed to the city by YHWH to be slaughtered. These verses do not reflect any historical event. They cover all history and call for a holy war.

Micah 4:14

Now you shall gather your troops, O Daughter of Troops.

He set up a siege against us.

With a rod they strike the jaw of the ruler of Israel.

This fragment speaks of the humiliation of the king

Micah 5:1-3

And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, a little clan of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel;
and his origins are from antiquity, from olden days.
Therefore he shall give them over,
until the time when she who is in labour has given birth;
then the rest of his kindred will return to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and shepherd them in the strength of YHWH,
in the majestic name of YHWH his God. And they shall live secure, for
he will be great to the ends of the earth. He will be: “The One of Peace.”

David (‘the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah’, 1Samuel 17:2) was promised that his dynasty would endure (see 2Samuel 7:13). This promise ‘from antiquity, from olden days’ encouraged hope that YHWH would achieve his purpose for Zion by raising up a ruler from the House of David. The disciples of Jesus, who saw Jesus as the new David, supported their claim by pointing to this text (see Matthew 2:6).

Micah 5:4-5 : the New David

When Assyria invades our land and overruns our citadels,
we will raise against him seven shepherds, eight military commanders.
They will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword,
and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword.
They will save us from Assyria when he invades our land,
and when they tread within our border.

The new David whom YHWH will raise up will be “The One of Peace”. This peace will be achieved through military might. In Micah’s day the Assyrians had not yet invaded Judah, but such an invasion was surely to be expected (see 4:11, 14). It happened in 701BC.

Micah 5:6-8 : the New David

Then the remnant of Jacob, surrounded by many peoples,
will be like dew from YHWH, like showers on the grass,
which do not depend upon people or wait for any mortal.
And the remnant of Jacob, among the nations,
surrounded by many peoples,
will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,
like a young lion among the flocks of sheep,
which, when it comes along, treads down and tears in pieces its prey,
with no one to deliver. Your hand shall be lifted up
over your adversaries, and all your enemies shall be cut off.

Micah 5:9-14 : Israel must be purified

An oracle of YHWH:

On that day I will cut off your horses from among you
and destroy your chariots.

I will cut off the cities of your land
and throw down all your strongholds.

I will cut off the incantations from your hand,
and you will have no more sorcerers.

I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you,
and you will bow down no more to the work of your hands.

I will uproot your sacred poles from among you
and destroy your idols.

In anger and wrath

I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

(Compare Isaiah 17:7-8)

Micah 6:1-5

Hear what YHWH says. Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, YHWH's dispute, and you enduring foundations of the earth! For YHWH has a dispute with his people, and he will contend with Israel.

“O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, and how Balaam son of Beor answered him (Number 22-24), and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of YHWH.”

The Israelites set out from Shittim, their last camp in Moab, to cross the Jordan, and enter the Promised Land where their first camp was at Gilgal.

Micah 6:6-8

“With what shall I come before YHWH,
and bow down before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings of year old calves?

Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the wrong I have done?”

He has told you, man [אָדָם] what is good,
what YHWH is seeking from you:

to do justice, [עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט]

to love (be committed to) the covenant [אֲהַבְתָּ הַבְּרִית הַזֶּה],

and to walk mindfully with your God [הַצַּנְנֵה לְכֶת עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ]

A parallel can be drawn with Jesus response to the scribe (see Mark 12:29-30), and with Paul’s injunction to ‘do the truth with love’(Eph 4:15)

Micah 6:9-12

The voice of YHWH! He is calling to the city ...

Are there the treasuries of wickedness in the house of the wicked?

And the fraudulent ephah in the detested city?

Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights?

Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies,
and their tongue is deceitful in their mouths.

We have here a summary of the accusations that we have been expecting since the opening verse of this chapter. The focus is on injustice. The details can be filled out from chapters 2-3. The city merchants are among those being castigated.

Micah 6:13-16

Therefore I have begun to strike you down, making you desolate because of your sins. You will eat, but not be satisfied, and there will be a gnawing hunger within you; you will put away, but not save, and what you save I will hand over to the sword. You will sow, but not reap; you will tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you will tread grapes, but not drink wine. For you have kept the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab, and you have followed their policies. Therefore I will make you a desolation, and your inhabitants an object of hissing; so you will bear the reproach of my people.

Micah 7:1-4

Woe is me! For I have become like one who,
after the summer fruit has been gathered,
after the vintage has been gleaned, finds no cluster to eat.

There is no early fig, for which I hunger.

The faithful have disappeared from the land,
and there is no one left who is upright.

They all lie in wait for blood, and they hunt each other with nets.

Their hands are skilled to do evil; the official and the judge ask for a bribe,
and the powerful dictate what they desire; thus they pervert justice.

The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge.

The day of their sentinels, of their punishment, has come;
now their confusion is at hand.

Micah 7:5-6

Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a lover.

Guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace.

For the son treats the father with contempt,

the daughter rises up against her mother, see Luke 12:52

the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

your enemies are members of your own household.

Nothing is said about hostility from a son-in-law to his parents-in-law, because a wife's parents did not live in the same household as their married daughter.

Micah 7:7-9

And as for me [Zion], I will watch for YHWH,
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
my God will hear me.

Do not rejoice over me, my enemy;
although I fall, I get up again.

When I sit in darkness, YHWH will be a light to me.

I must bear the indignation of YHWH,
because I have sinned against him,

until he concludes his case against me and completes my punishment.

He will bring me out to the light; I will see his justice.

Micah 7:10-12

Then my enemy will see, and shame will cover those who said to me, “Where is YHWH your God?” My eyes will see their downfall.

They will be trodden down like mud in the streets.

That day will be a day for rebuilding your walls!

On that day the boundary will be extended.

On that day they will come to you from Assyria and Egypt,
and from Egypt as far as the Euphrates,

from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

Micah 7:13-17

The land will be desolate because of its inhabitants, the fruit of their evil deeds. Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in woodland in the midst of Carmel. Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old, as in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt.

Show us your wonders. Let the nations see, and let them despair of their might. They will put their hand over their mouth; their ears will not hear. They will lick dust like a snake, like the crawling things of the earth. They will come trembling out of their fortresses to El YHWH our God. They will be terrified of you.

Micah prays that the nations will see YHWH's marvellous deeds. Micah is confident that if they did witness YHWH's power they would be overwhelmed with 'the fear of YHWH'.

Micah 7:18-20

What god is like you? – pardoning iniquity
and passing over the treachery of the remnant of your possession,
who does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in showing clemency.
He will again have compassion [hesed] upon us;
he will tread our iniquities under foot.
He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.
You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and unswerving loyalty [hesed] to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

It is significant that YHWH's covenant love (hesed) occurs twice in the final two verses of Micah. Micah has had much to criticise, but as a true prophet he never takes his eyes off YHWH, Israel's faithful and loving God.