

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Kings of Israel and Judah in the 8th century BC

Kings of Israel

Jehoahaz (813-797) 2Kings 10:35 - 13:9

Jehoash (799-784) 2Kings 13:10 - 14:16

Jeroboam II (788-748) 2Kings 14:16-29

Zechariah (748) 2Kings 15:8-11

Shallum (747) 2Kings 15:10-15

Menahem (747-737) 2Kings 15:14-22

Pekahiah (736-735) 2Kings 15:22-26

Pekah (734-730) 2Kings 15:25 - 16:5

Hoshea (730-722) 2Kings 15:30 - 18:10

Kings of Judah

Amaziah¹ (798-770) 2Kings 14:1-18

Azariah² [Uzziah] (785-734) 2Kings 15:1-6

Jotham³ (749-734) 2Kings 15:32-38

Ahaz (734-727) 2Kings 16:1-20

Hezekiah⁴ (727-699) 2Kings 18:1 - 20:21

¹Amaziah was co-regent with his father Joash 798-796

²Azariah was co-regent 785-770 with Amaziah

³Jotham was co-regent 749-734 with Azariah

⁴Hezekiah reigned in his own right 715-699

King Jeroboam II reigned in the northern kingdom (Israel) for forty years (788 to 748BC). King Azariah (also called Uzziah) reigned in Judah (785-734BC). Their long reigns were marked by mutual collaboration. Syria (Aram) had been weakened by Assyria, but, because of troubles on her borders, Assyria had not yet begun in earnest its westward expansion. It was during the reign of Jeroboam II that Israel reached its highest point of military and economic power since the days of the Omride dynasty. Under Azariah Judah reached its highest point of economic and military power since the division of the kingdom at the death of Solomon.

The Northern Kingdom (Israel)

Thriving trade and commerce created a small, wealthy upper class in the capital, Samaria. In the main northern shrines the cult was lavish, but little regard was given to justice. Bribery, extortion, the corruption of the judiciary and exploitation of the poor undermined the moral foundations of the state. This was the period of the ministry of the prophet Amos, the first of the prophets to have his words preserved in a scroll named after him.

The prophet Amos

Those responsible for the Amos scroll introduce it in the following way:

‘The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash [Jehoash] of Israel, two years before the earthquake’(Amos 1:1).

Tekoa is eight kilometres south of Bethlehem on the edge of the ‘wilderness of Tekoa’ (2Chronicles 20:20) in Judah. It is significant that Assyria is not mentioned in Amos’s prophecies. Even if we follow the Septuagint and read ‘Assyria’ instead of ‘Ashdod’ in Amos 3:9, this is only to summon Assyria as a witness, not as a threat to Israel. A reasonable conclusion from this is that Amos exercised his ministry as a prophet prior to the military expansion of Assyria, which began with the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in 745. Amos’s concern was with the small nations surrounding Israel (see Amos 1:3 – 2:3). As regards the ‘earthquake’, Shalom M. Paul writes in his commentary on Amos in the Hermeneia series (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1991, page 35):

Most exegetes relate this earthquake to the one attested at stratum VI of Hazor and dated to around 760 BCE.

The period during which Amos was prophesying (c. 762-750BC) was one of relative peace and considerable prosperity. The problem that confronted and shocked him was that the prosperity favoured a small upper class, who were living in luxury (see Amos 3:15; 5:11; 6:4-6) while the vast bulk of the population was being exploited. This cuts at the very heart of the covenant with YHWH that gives Israel its identity. The administration of justice was corrupted by bribery and extortion, and paid no regard to the rights of the poor. The wealth flowing from commerce and trade enabled the main northern shrines to have lavish cult and elaborate rites (see Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-23), but Amos judged this style of religion to be a travesty. It lacked justice, integrity, honesty, and fidelity to the covenant with YHWH, which made it abhorrent to God. God would have to put an end to their prosperity. There would have to come what Amos calls ‘the Day of YHWH’ (see Amos 5:18-20).

As one would expect from words that were born from a profound communion with God, Amos’s key focus throughout is on YHWH, the God who hears the cry of the poor. Amos is faithful to the traditional faith that gives Israel its identity. YHWH is the God who heard the cry of the slaves in Egypt and sent Moses to rescue them from the tyranny of the Egyptian pharaoh. Amos saw that the tyranny that was enslaving God’s people was now coming from within the political, judicial and religious institutions of Israel. The abhorrence he experienced was, as he interpreted it, a sharing in the abhorrence felt by YHWH, and in YHWH’s name he denounced the injustice he encountered. In the scroll we will find words that challenge the rich and powerful to change their ways in the hope that YHWH would not have to punish them. Amos prays for this. However, the main thrust of his words indicates that his appeal failed. He declares in no uncertain terms that the nation of Israel cannot survive.

However, this cannot be Amos’s final word, for, as a true prophet, he is speaking about YHWH. The scroll ends with words of hope – based not on human behaviour (he found no signs of repentance) but on the fidelity of YHWH (see 9:13-15). The nation of Israel would be destroyed, but Israel was still YHWH’s own people, and YHWH would be faithful to his commitment. A remnant would listen and a true Israel would emerge from the coming catastrophe.

In Chapter Three we reflected on the genesis of prophetic scrolls. The texts as we have them did not always come unedited from their original author. Later scribes felt free to apply to their own circumstances what they inherited, in order to express the meaning of the inspired words to their contemporaries. In the case of Amos scholars are inclined to attribute much of the text as we have it to Amos himself. It makes sense when read as challenging Israel in its period of prosperity in the middle of the eighth century. The text itself has been well preserved. Andersen and Freedman make the following claim in their commentary in the Anchor Bible Series (1989, page 11):

The work done in preparing this commentary has convinced us with ever increasing force that the text is in better shape than has generally been supposed in modern criticism.

Shalom M. Paul in his commentary in the Hermeneia Series (1991) comes independently to much the same conclusions.

It is clear from the scroll that Amos himself came to the realisation that his words were falling on deaf ears. The scroll begins (chapters 1-2), therefore, with words that may well have been spoken late in his career: oracles announcing divine punishment that cannot now be avoided. This is followed by what appears to be earlier oracles, warning the people but holding out hope if only they would change their ways (Amos 3:1 – 5:17). The country was experiencing certain ‘plagues’(see Amos 4:6-11). Amos may well have seen these as warnings from God to those who were acting unjustly and with no concern for their obligations under the covenant. Amos knows, however, that YHWH is always faithful. It is only when the people refuse to change that the results of their behaviour cannot be avoided (see his oracles on the ‘Day of YHWH’, Amos 5:18 – 6:14).

Amos is a ‘seer’, graced to look beyond the horizon of human decision and indecision. The scroll records a number of ‘visions’ that he experienced. It is perhaps these ‘visions’ (Amos 7:1 – 9:6) that gave energy and direction to his speaking. Finally, in an Epilogue, Amos sums up the thrust of his prophecies, concluding, as we should expect, with a statement on the fidelity of YHWH that carries with it an assurance of restoration and renewal.

There are also statements that go to the heart of the religion of ancient Israel and that are as relevant today as they were in Amos’s time. This is especially true of his denunciation of injustice (see 2:6-8; 3:15; 5:10-15, 21-24; 6:4-7; 8:4-6). He insists that a genuine response to God must include working for justice for all. He challenges any smug assurance that we might entertain that all will be well for us, since God is loving and has chosen us as his own. Religious practice is no substitute for true obedience, and true obedience requires justice. These statements we will find inspiring only to the extent that we accept their challenge and find and follow ways of living justly in our world today (see 3:2). We, like Amos’s contemporaries, must ‘seek good and not evil’(5:14).

The prophet Hosea

Hosea's ministry, too, was carried out in the northern kingdom (c. 750-724BC). He began prophesying in the last years of the reign of Jeroboam II and continued during the period of expansion of Assyria, which was propelled by King Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) and continued under his successor, Shalmaneser V (727-722). In 748 Jeroboam was succeeded by his son, Zechariah. The following year Zechariah was assassinated by Shallum, who was then assassinated by Menahem. Menahem decided on a policy of submission to Assyria (see 2Kings 15:19). This involved the paying of a hefty tribute, which was resented by the landowners. When Menahem died in 737 his son, Pekahiah continued his father's policies, but the opposition rallied to Pekah who murdered the young king and cancelled the tribute. Pekah looked for support to Egypt. In 734 Tiglath-pileser III conquered Philistia and annexed the area of Israel that bordered the Mediterranean. The following year he took Gilead on the east of the Jordan, as well as Galilee, including the Valley of Jezreel. Pekah was assassinated in 730 by Hoshea who reverted to paying tribute to Assyria. However, in 724 Hoshea decided to turn to Egypt and stop paying the tribute. Shalmaneser V invaded Ephraim. Hoshea was taken prisoner, and the Assyrian forces besieged the capital, Samaria. Samaria valiantly resisted for three years, but was finally forced to surrender by Shalmaneser's successor, Sargon II in 721. This marked the end of the northern kingdom. Hosea's ministry in the north continued through to the beginning of the siege of Samaria.

It is likely that it was in Israel, and during the period of Hosea's ministry, that we find the beginnings of a spiritual movement that moved to Judah when Israel collapsed, and bore fruit in the writing we know as the Book of Deuteronomy (see Chapter Nine). Hosea seems to have had close connections with this movement (see Hosea 4:3; 8:1, 6; 11:5; 13:2; 14:4).

Hosea's picture of God was, as we should expect, shaped by his own experiences. He married a woman, Gomer, who is called a 'whore' (1:2). She may have been involved in the sexual rituals that were part of the Canaanite cult, encounters that were understood to influence the harvest. The relationship with Gomer appears to have broken down when she committed adultery. However, in spite of her infidelity, Hosea sought her out and paid to have her back as his wife. It was these experiences that led Hosea to picture YHWH as a husband, and Israel as YHWH's unfaithful bride. He speaks of YHWH's hurt and anger, but also of his fidelity and unconditional and passionate love for his people.

In his oracles, Hosea refers to the action of YHWH in redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt (11:1; 12:9). He speaks of the Exodus (2:15; 11:1; 13:4), the journey through the wilderness, and the gift of the Promised Land (9:10; 10:11-12; 11:1-4; 13:5-6). He speaks of the covenant (1:9; 2:19-20; 6:7; 8:1) and the gift of the Torah (8:12; 13:4-5).

He sees the crimes of his contemporaries as repeating the infidelity that was typical of Israel's response to YHWH's covenant of love. He especially blames the political leadership, the failure of those responsible for administering justice, and the priests responsible for the cult.

Hosea's tragic message reached the point where, in YHWH's name, he declared that it was too late for Israel to change. They had rejected YHWH's constant offer of love. Now is the time when YHWH must issue a divorce (1:9; 2:4). Israel must go back to Egypt (8:13; 9:3,6). Hosea saw (and he was proved right – hence the preserving of his oracles) that there was no way of avoiding the annihilation and enslavement of Israel.

However, as a true prophet, his focus is primarily on YHWH. Throughout the scroll, and especially at the end, he declares that Israel's sin, even their obstinate refusal to heed YHWH's warnings, could not stop YHWH's passionate love. Their infidelity could not stop God's fidelity to his choice and to his covenant commitments.

The suffering Hosea witnessed, and in a special way the sufferings he experienced in his own personal life, gave him an insight into the suffering of God at what was happening to his people. He felt the pain of YHWH's heart at the destruction of Israel (see 6:1-6; 11:1-9). It is here, perhaps, that we find Hosea's most inspiring contribution to our knowledge of God. Hosea has a lot to teach those of us who say we believe in God, but for whom God is an abstract figure, scarcely acknowledged in our day to day lives except, perhaps, when life gets hard. To live like this is to fail to know God (see 4:1). For Hosea, YHWH is passionately involved in our lives, determined that we should live, and hurt when we do not respond to his love. Not to know God's love and purpose for us is to court destruction (see 4:6).

Like Amos, he speaks out against religious practice that ignores obedience to God's will (see 2:13; 4:12-13). He is especially critical of priests who live off the cult, but fail in their duty to teach (4:6-11). What God wants from us is that we know him and that we be faithful to the covenant of love he has with us (6:6).

When Hosea looked back over the history of Israel he saw a constant story of infidelity, but he saw also the constant call to authenticity. However faithful or unfaithful we might be, Hosea was convinced that God remains faithful. Punishment is necessary, but it is in view of repentance (2:7, 14). Man of the heart that he is, Hosea knows that real repentance must come from the heart (7:10, 14). Religious cult in no substitute for a genuine seeking of YHWH (see 2:11; 6:6; 8:11; 9:4; 10:1-2, 12; 12:6). God cannot impose love. If we are to receive God's love we must open our hearts to God's inspiration and be faithful to the traditions of obedience that have come down to us from those who listened to God in the past (see 10:12; 12:6).

God cannot allow us to avoid the consequences of our infidelity. Rather, God uses these consequences to bring us to a change of mind and heart and behaviour, so that we might enjoy the communion with God that he desires and without which we cannot live. Knowing YHWH's faithfulness, Hosea was convinced that Israel would, once again, enjoy the intimacy of divine communion (see 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 3:5; 14).

The Southern Kingdom (Judah)

During the reign of Uzziah Judah's army was modernised and the conquering of the Philistine plain established control over the trade route along the Mediterranean coast. There was commercial expansion into Arabia and the construction of the copper and iron mining town of Elath on the gulf of Aqabah. Developments were experienced also in agriculture. King Uzziah was forced to retire in 749 due to a scaly skin disease. His son Jotham was co-regent till his father's death in 734. Jotham died in 734 and was succeeded by his son, Ahaz.

Syria and Israel united forces to defend themselves against Assyria's aggressive expansionist policies, and tried to get Judah to join them. When they experienced resistance from the advisers of the young king, Ahaz, King Rezin of Damascus and King Pekah of Samaria tried to put their own ruler on the throne of Judah. In the Second Book of Chronicles we read:

YHWH his God gave Ahaz into the hand of the king of Aram, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with great slaughter. Pekah son of Remaliah killed one hundred twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all of them valiant warriors, because they had abandoned YHWH, the God of their ancestors. And Zichri, a mighty warrior of Ephraim, killed the king's son Maaseiah, Azrikam the commander of the palace, and Elkanah the next in authority to the king. The people of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their kin, women, sons, and daughters; they also took much booty from them and brought the booty to Samaria.

– 2Chronicles 28:5-8

Ahaz was succeeded by his son, Hezekiah. 2Kings 18 gives three reference points for the beginning of Hezekiah's reign. Verse 1 places it as 'the third year of the reign of King Hoshea of Israel', This is consistent with verse 10 which places the fall of Samaria (721) in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign. Both of these would indicate 727 as the year of his accession to the throne of Judah. However, in verse 13 we are told that Sennacherib's invasion of Judah (701) was 'in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah' – a statement repeated in Isaiah 36:1. If all these pieces of information are correct, it would appear that Hezekiah inherited the throne in 727 as a small child – perhaps 6 years old (Isaiah 9:6 may refer to his birth). He would have been under a guardian till he reached his majority at 18, and would have reigned in his own right from 715. He died in 699.

It was during the reign of King Hezekiah that the Assyrian army put down a revolt by the Philistine city-state of Ashdod (713-711). Sennacherib succeeded Sargon II in 705. The death of Sargon led to revolts in every section of the Assyrian Empire. Hezekiah seems to have played a significant role in organising rebellion in Palestine. Isaiah was active in attempting to deter him from a policy which he saw as a failure to trust in YHWH. Hezekiah went ahead and Judah was devastated by the Assyrian army in 701.

Jerusalem itself survived, probably because when Lachish was conquered Hezekiah surrendered and paid a huge tribute (see 2Kings 18:14-16). The Assyrian army may also have been needed to put down a revolt back in Assyria. The Deuteronomists give the following account (which is consistent with the account in the Assyrian annals):

King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of YHWH and in the treasuries of the king's house. At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of YHWH, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria.

– 2Kings 18:13-16

Hezekiah died in 699. It was during his reign that refugees from the north poured into Jerusalem, which had to expand to the western hill. He strengthened the fortifications and built an underground tunnel to bring water into the city from the Gihon spring located in the Kidron valley outside the city walls. The oracles of Amos and Hosea found their way to Judah, and we should imagine scribes working to preserve their oracles. The members of the Deuteronomic School would have supported Hezekiah's efforts of reform. As we saw in Chapter Nine they were fulsome in their praise of his reign (see 2Kings 18:3-7).

The prophet Isaiah ben Amoz

It is especially imperative in regard to the Isaiah scroll that we remember that later scribes did not limit themselves to the careful preservation of the words of YHWH spoken through the prophet. Because they saw YHWH's word as a living word, through which the living God continued to speak to them, they felt free to clarify, comment on, and update the text. Their aim was to make the prophet's words more accessible and more relevant to their contemporaries. Furthermore, they included additions within the text itself (see Chapter Three on the genesis of the scrolls). There are some signs of this re-application in the Amos and Hosea scrolls. It is far more obvious in the Isaiah scroll. Leaving aside chapters 40-66 which everyone acknowledges were composed generations after the time of Isaiah, even parts of chapters 1-39 did not originate with Isaiah. A stand out example are the oracles against Babylon found in chapters 13-14. Babylon's rise to power happened a century after Isaiah's time.

There are many indications in the Isaiah scroll that help us connect Isaiah's words with contemporary events. Chapter 6 of the Isaiah scroll records a prophetic call received by Isaiah 'in the year that King Uzziah died' (6:1), that is, in the year 734. We have seen that both Amos and Hosea denounced the injustice that prevailed during the years of prosperity that characterized the reigns of Jeroboam II in Israel and Azariah (Uzziah) in Judah. The same theme is evident in the oracles recorded in the opening five chapters of the Isaiah scroll. Like the oracles of Amos and Hosea mentioned above, these chapters speak out against injustice. They were probably spoken by Isaiah in the final years of Uzziah's prosperous reign.

**JUDAH AFTER THE
FALL OF ISRAEL
722-640 B.C.E.**



Israel was going through a tumultuous time after the death of Jeroboam II in 748, with assassination following assassination as rival parties struggled to find the best way to respond to Assyria's westward aggression. By contrast, accession to the throne of Judah passed peacefully from father to son. Uzziah's son, Jotham, ruled with his father during the years of Uzziah's forced retirement (749-734).

While Hosea was carrying out his prophetic ministry in Israel, Isaiah was challenging Judah. At first the situation in Judah was not as dire as in Israel. Assyria saw no advantage in attempting to overrun either the mountainous terrain or the deserts of Judah. To confront Egypt it was enough to conquer and occupy the transverse valley of Jezreel, the Megiddo Pass and the Philistine country bordering the Mediterranean. This was to change in the final years of the eighth century, when Judah suffered the fate of its northern neighbour. However, from the first invasion of Israel by Assyria, Judah was not free to sit on the sidelines.

As already noted, on the death of Jotham in 734 Israel and Syria attacked Judah in an effort to put their own puppet on the throne and force Judah into joining their anti-Assyrian alliance. The Syro-Ephraimite alliance as it is called put pressure on the young king, Ahaz, and his advisers. In Isaiah 7-9 we find the reaction of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah's ministry continued through the years of massive migration of refugees from Israel during and after the siege and fall of Samaria (724-721). The Assyrian army put down a revolt by the Philistine city of Ashdod (713-711). Isaiah warned King Hezekiah, who had just reached his majority and was ruling in his own right, against Judah getting involved. He did so in dramatic style by moving around Jerusalem dressed (undressed) like a prisoner of war (see Isaiah 20:1-6). Isaiah's final oracles (see 37:21-35) were spoken during the reign of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who succeeded Sargon II in 705. The death of Sargon led to revolts in every section of the Assyrian Empire. Hezekiah seems to have played a significant role in organising rebellion against Assyria. Isaiah was active in attempting to deter him from a policy which he saw as a failure to trust in YHWH. Hezekiah went ahead and Judah was devastated by the Assyrian army in 701. This marks the end of Isaiah's prophetic ministry which endured through forty years, from about 740 to the end of the eighth century.

We are not in a position to assess the value of Isaiah's political stance. What we do know, and what we can learn from, is his insistence that the key response of Judah to its situation (indeed the key response of any of us in any situation in which we might find ourselves) is to put their trust in YHWH, their liberating God. Isaiah kept insisting that Judah's identity as a nation is defined by its covenant with God. Before all else, they must honour this covenant and place their trust in God. This is perhaps Isaiah's greatest contribution, then and now (see 7:9; 8:13; 9:13; 10:20; 12; 17:7-8; 25:1-10; 30:16; 31:1-3; 32:17; 33:22; 38:20).

Isaiah has a lot to say about what he understands as divine punishment. Chapters 13-23 ('oracles against the nations') are almost entirely devoted to this theme. God, as Isaiah saw him, has little time for Judah's enemies. Judah's enemies are, by definition, YHWH's enemies (see 10:5-19; 11:14; 25:10-12; yet, see the extraordinary statement in 19:24!).

Isaiah sees what is happening in Judah as God's punishment for the infidelity of its leaders and people. In Chapter Five we examined the assumption that whatever happens is organised by God. Of course, we can learn from this the important lesson that what we do matters, and that we cannot pretend away the consequences of our actions. However, Isaiah has much more to say about punishment than forgiveness (see all of chapters 24 and 34; also 26:21). We listen in vain for the stunning call of Jesus for us to be like God in loving out enemies (Matthew 5:44-45). Faithful to the tradition, Isaiah understands punishment as a way of getting people to change their mind, heart and behaviour (see 35:1-10). He is constantly bemoaning the failure of the people to repent (see 9:13). He is amazed at the folly of human pride (2:5-17; 3:16-17; 10:33-34). He saw the devastation of Judah as proof that his preaching had fallen on deaf ears (see 6:9-12). It is perhaps this that explains his almost unrelenting focus on punishment. His contemporaries continued to reject God's word (see 30:8-14).

Like Amos and Hosea, Isaiah speaks out against injustice, especially injustice that hides behind compliance with law (see 1:15-18; 3:13-15; 4:15; 5:1-23; 10:1-2; 29:17-21). As individuals and as people who are to some extent responsible for the institutions that govern our lives, we need to take Isaiah's criticisms to heart.

Like Amos and Hosea he also castigates religious practice that pays no attention to obedience to the will of God as expressed in the covenant (see 1:10-14; 5:24; 28:7ff; 29:13). It is this love-covenant with YHWH that is the reason for Israel's existence.

Isaiah joins Amos and Hosea in underlining the folly of worshipping 'gods' of our own making (see 2:8).

Isaiah speaks of God's love for his people (see 5:1-2; 30:18). His conviction that YHWH is faithful encouraged him to trust that all would, one day, be restored (see 1:18-19, 26; 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 5:4; 10:24-27; 11:1-13; 28:5-6; 30:18-26; 35).

The prophet Micah

Though scholars are not all of the same mind in regards to the Micah scroll, there are very few verses that we can confidently state could not have come from the prophet himself. In many of the prophetic scrolls we are helped to link the words of a prophet with the events of his day by the fact that those responsible for the scroll included something of the context of the prophet's words, whether it be details from his life, or details of the historical circumstances he was addressing. In the case of the Micah scroll, however, the only help we have is the opening sentence which states:

The word of YHWH came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah.

– Micah 1:1

This tells us that the prophet Micah carried out his ministry in Judah in the second half of the 8th century BC. Since there is no indication in the text that Micah knows of the fall of Samaria in 721, we can probably safely place him somewhere between 740 and 725BC. This makes him a contemporary of Hosea in Israel and Isaiah in Judah during the early part of Isaiah's ministry. These were turbulent times.

Like Isaiah his contemporary, Micah lived through the prosperous years towards the end of Uzziah's reign, and then the years when Judah was forced to defend itself against Israel and Syria who were determined to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian alliance. Micah experienced a call from YHWH to prophesy; that is to say, to communicate to others the insights he received in prayer. His words reveal his concern for public policy and the exercise of justice that is faithful to the covenant Judah has with YHWH.

Like Isaiah, Micah has a lot to say about divine punishment (see 1:2-16; 3:12; 5:10-15; 6:13-16). His picture, however, is not as dark as that of Isaiah, who lived through the fall of Samaria and the devastation of Judah by Sennacherib.

Like the other prophets of the eighth century, Micah speaks out against injustice (see 2:1-2; 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:10-12; 7:3). He is particularly concerned with those whom the people look to as prophets, but who 'lead my people astray' (3:5). They proclaim 'peace', but not the obedience to God's will which alone can produce it. Micah is critical of those who assume that because they are God's chosen people they are guaranteed divine protection and blessing (see 3:11). Religious cult is no substitute for justice (6:6-8).

As a true prophet, his focus is primarily on God and he speaks beautifully of God's faithful love (see 6:3-5; 7:18-20). This gives him hope that ultimately all will be restored (see 2:12; 4:1-8; 7:9). We must trust YHWH (7:7).