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Micah: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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CONTENTS

00:00:00 - Chapter 1: Disaster Approaching

00:09:52 - Chapter 2: Woe to Those Who Devise Wickedness

00:21:34 - Chapter 3: The Unfaithful Rulers and Prophets

00:29:14 - Chapter 4: The Mountain of the Lord Raised Up

00:43:08 - Chapter 5: The Ruler Coming Forth from Bethlehem

00:51:41 - Chapter 6: What Does the Lord Require?

01:00:32 - Chapter 7: Who Is a God Like You, Pardoning Iniquity and Passing Over Transgression?

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Transcript

The Book of Micah, the sixth of the Book of the Twelve, is written by a late 8th century BC prophet of Judah during a period of rising Assyrian power. Uzziah's successor Jotham came to the throne around 740 BC, while Tiglath-Pileser III was on the throne of Assyria.

He would be followed by Shalmaneser V, who would bring about the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which finally fell to his successor Sargon II in 722 BC.

Hezekiah, the final of the three kings during whose reign Micah ministered, ruled until about 687 BC. During Micah's ministry, the Syrians and the Northern Kingdom of Israel, both of them tributary nations to Assyria, sought to rebel against Assyria and attack Judah. They sought to depose King Ahaz, who had not joined their coalition.

The Syro-Ephraimite War was fought between the combined forces of Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel against the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Judah was devastated by them and brought to its knees. Jerusalem itself was besieged, but after appealing to the Assyrians for aid, the Assyrians subdued the Arameans in Israel and Judah was given a reprieve.

About ten years after the end of the Syro-Ephraimite War, the Northern Kingdom would be finally removed. However, Judah was now a tributary of Assyria. Chafing under the yoke of Assyria later on, Hezekiah, influenced by Babylon and Egypt, sought to lead his own rebellion against Assyria.

In 701 BC, under Sennacherib, the Assyrians all but completely overwhelmed Judah. The Lord saved Jerusalem, but Sennacherib took 200,000 people of Judah captive. In the end, to pay the tribute required of him by the Assyrians, Hezekiah had to strip many of the riches of the temple, his own palace and the national treasuries.

Although the Lord struck the Assyrians and delivered Jerusalem from their hands, the outcome of the war was certainly not a victory for Hezekiah, who remained a vassal of Sennacherib. Unusually among the minor prophets, the prophet Micah is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, in the book of Jeremiah, well over 100 years later. In Jeremiah chapter 26, verses 17 to 19 we read, And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and entreat the favor of the Lord, and did not the Lord relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves. This external reference to Micah allows us to date the prophecy of chapter 3 verse 12 to some time during the reign of Hezekiah. However the more precise dating of many prophecies within the book is unclear, although various parts can be placed within certain temporal bounds.

More generally we should recognize that Micah's ministry was contemporary with that of Isaiah and Hosea. In addition to being a eventful period on the international stage, the

time of Micah's ministry was also one of social upheaval in Judah, with the rise of larger estates and of a landless unemployed class as smaller ancestral land holdings were taken over by those larger estates, something described in Isaiah chapter 5 verses 8 to 10. Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing, surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. Micah came from a town to the west of Jerusalem and a few miles north east of Lachish, Marashath, which was in the Sheffala, the Judean lowlands.

However his ministry seems to have been focused in and around Jerusalem. He also spoke concerning the northern kingdom. In verse 2 the Lord assembles the people for a great trial.

He is the God of the whole earth and he is summoning all to his act of judgment. He is arriving on the scene and all must be ready. Coming forth from his holy temple or palace, he arrives with a shaking of the earth.

The imagery of verses 3 and 4 is of a theophany, with the natural order being thrown into commotion as the Lord comes on the scene. We find very similar descriptions in places like Psalm 18. To this point we don't know who is being judged.

All of the nations have been assembled but we haven't yet seen who is standing in the dark. In verse 5 we finally discover that the judgment is against Israel and Judah. At first we might think that the judgment is really focused upon Israel, the northern kingdom.

Jacob is a term that is often used for the northern kingdom and while Israel can be used for the people more generally, it's usually focused upon the northern kingdom at this time. However by the end of the verse it's very clear that Judah is included in the judgment. The rot of the nations starts in the very centre.

The transgression of Jacob of the northern kingdom is Samaria, the capital, the place from which everything is spreading. The high place of Judah is Jerusalem. Zion is the place where the sin of Judah is most pronounced.

The Lord is going to devastate Samaria for its sin. It's going to be made into a heap in the open country. Its hill reduced to a place for vine terraces.

Its stones cast down into the valley beneath. Its laid bare, stripped naked, its sin exposed. Drawing upon the same sort of realm of imagery that we find in the book of Hosea, the Lord describes Israel as like a prostitute.

All of the paraphernalia of her infidelities will be destroyed. Her carved images broken to

pieces, her idols laid waste. She had gained these riches from her infidelities and now the riches would return to her lovers as they stripped her bare.

All of this probably refers most especially to the destruction of Bethel and its site of worship. When he overthrew it, it does not seem that Sargon II devastated Samaria in quite the physical way described here. Rather, the language here should be taken more symbolically.

It describes the decapitation of the great head of the whole nation of Israel and with it the whole nation being cut off. The prophet's response to this message is to mourn, to mourn loudly in the greatest expression of anguish. He strips himself of all of his glory.

Going around naked, he makes lamentation like the jackals, howling and screeching in his pain like the ostriches. There is no hope for the northern kingdom and the shadow of the judgement that has fallen on the northern kingdom hangs heavily over Judah itself. Micah recognises that a similar destiny threatens his own nation.

Verses 10-15 contain a litany of place names and instructions given to the inhabitants of them. We find a similar list in Isaiah 10-28 where it is a line of invasion. Here, however, the names are more random.

The names seem to be of places within the Sheffala, the region from which Micah himself came. Although we don't know the precise location or identity of some of these places, the logic of their inclusion is not hard to discover. The names are mostly selected for the purpose of wordplay.

As Leslie Allen observes, they come to serve as omens of the coming destruction. A destruction that probably refers to the time of Sargon's campaigns against Philistia in 720 BC or 714-711 BC. The opening words are taken from David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1-20.

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. This coming destruction upon the nation is being compared with that dark day of Israel's history, with the death of the king and the crown prince. We should also recognise that Gath was the nearest foreign city.

It would be the first place where Israel was shamed among the nations by news of this devastating defeat. Bethleheaphra plays upon the word for dust. Shaphir is similar to a word for beautiful.

Zianon plays upon the sound of the verb go out. John Goldengate provides a loose rendition of this particular part of the prophecy. Dirt house, cover yourself in dirt.

Beautiful people in shameful nakedness. Exit people, don't exit. Withdrawal house,

adopts its stance.

Bitter people, writhe for something good. Harness the chariots, chariot town. You will give a marriage gift for betrothal town.

The houses of disappointment will disappoint. I will bring a dispossessor to the possession people. All of these familiar place names for people in the region would now bear an ominous sense of foreboding, each testifying to their coming devastation.

Perhaps even the name of Jerusalem is being used in this way. Disaster is coming to the place that has peace as part of its name. The glory of Israel finally comes up to a dhulm.

A dhulm was a fortified location, the place where people would retreat when they were under attack. It's also a place that reminds us of the story of David. David and his men hid in the cave of a dhulm when he was fleeing from King Saul.

As at the beginning of this section of the passage, there is a reminder of David, the one who founded the dynasty. His heirs would soon find themselves lamenting with him and retreating to a dhulm as he had once done. Jerusalem and Judah would be stripped of its glory, its children taken from it.

The reference to the exile here is probably not to the exile in Babylon, but probably to the captivity of many Judahites under Sennacherib. Those remaining in Judah and Jerusalem would be in the situation of mourners. Having lost such a great population of the land, they would shave their heads and mourn their devastation.

A question to consider, where else in scripture can you find examples like the Theophany of verses 2-4? The prophet Micah lived during a period of socio-economic change and spoke directly to the oppressive and exploitative realities of his day. In Micah chapter 2 he condemns oppressive landowners. His message in this chapter begins with a statement of woe, an alas as it were, declaring the doomed status of the people.

Their injustice, Micah declares, is deep rooted within them and is not just an accidental or unintended feature of their society. It springs up from and reveals the hidden intentions of their hearts. They never rest from their injustice.

They ruminate upon it on their beds and they are eager to get back to its performance when the morning comes. One of the concerns of the Mosaic law was to ensure that families retained their possession in the land. The land was a source of economic security.

It was a patrimony that bound people to their place and supported the continued life of the family and the community. It was also a token of the people's membership of the people of the Lord, who had been given the possession of the land as a sign of his love. One of the purposes of the Jubilee, for instance, was to ensure that people were not

alienated from their ancestral lands and that people's position in the land did not become precarious.

More generally, the law was designed to discourage the establishment of a gulf between rich landowners and a poor landless class. Economic practices were tempered by prohibitions on usury and predatory dealings. We see some of the economic principles of the law expressed at more length in places like Leviticus chapter 25 verses 23 to 42.

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me, and in all the country you possess you shall allow a redemption of the land. If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold.

If a man has no one to redeem it, and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, let him calculate the years since he sold it, and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and then return to his property. But if he does not have sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of Jubilee. In the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.

If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a year of its sale. For a full year he shall have the right of redemption. If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer, throughout his generations it shall not be released in the Jubilee.

But the houses of the villages that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the Jubilee. As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites may redeem at any time the houses in the cities they possess.

And if one of the Levites exercises his right of redemption, then the house that was sold in a city they possess shall be released in the Jubilee. For the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel. But the fields of pasture land belonging to their cities may not be sold, for that is in their possession forever.

If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave. He shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner.

He shall serve with you until the year of the Jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.

They shall not be sold as slaves. In Micah's day, however, larger landlords were buying up lots of small farms, stripping vulnerable landowners of their ancestral possessions, reducing them from the owners of land and means of production to a more dependent class of unemployed persons or poor laborers on others' property. Micah's contemporary Isaiah describes the same situation in Isaiah 5, verses 8-10.

Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing, surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a home of seed shall yield but an ether.

While the economic system and the situation allowed for such accumulation of land in the hands of the few, this was an abomination to the Lord. It was a practical denial of the fact that the land was His, and that He desired all of His people to enjoy its goodness. The rich were supposed to treat the poor as their brothers and sisters in the land, and not to seek to profit upon the back of their losses.

All were supposed to act as faithful and responsible stewards of the land, recognizing their indebtedness to the goodness of the Lord and their responsibility to their neighbors. They were, as Leviticus chapter 25 teaches, to think of themselves as strangers and sojourners with the Lord Himself. Leslie Allen reminds us of the story of King Ahab and Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings chapter 21 as an example of an attempt to take over people's ancestral land.

Micah declares that these oppressive landowners will receive their just desserts. The Lord will act against them, stripping them of their possession in the land and rendering them an object of derision. Verses 4 and 5 seem to relate to the practice of reallocating lands in a particular tract by lot.

The rich had sought to remove the poor from their portion and stake in the land, and so the rich themselves would suffer the same fate as they had sought to inflict. They would be uprooted from their territory and left without any stake of their own. Micah's message was not a popular one.

It should come as no surprise to us that in speaking out against the rich and powerful in his land, like several of the other prophets, Micah invited opposition and resistance. Micah's words specifically addressed the wealthy landowners, but the immediate resistance he faced, described in verses 6 and 7, seems to come from false prophets, who opposed Micah's message and his challenge to the rich and powerful in the land.

Verses 6 and 7 are difficult to translate and interpret.

It isn't entirely clear who is speaking at various points, nor is it clear exactly what is being said. Micah's opponents begin by commanding that he not preach. Different commentators divide up the verses that follow in different ways though.

Alan, for instance, translates the verses as follows. Stop your preaching, they preach. They should stop preaching in this vein.

Humiliation won't overwhelm us. The community of Jacob is party to the covenant. Has Yahweh lost his temper? Is this the way he acts? Do not his promises spell good fortune? Do we not keep company with one who keeps his word? He attributes almost all of the words to Micah's opponents.

James Mayes does much the same. John Goldengay, however, cuts off the opponents' words halfway through verse 7. Kenneth Barker's reading is similar, but he sees the opening line in verse 7 as introducing a second reported statement of the opponents, rather than itself being part of it. Joanna Hoyt restricts the words of the opponents to the very beginning of verse 6 and the middle lines of verse 7. Their opposition to Micah is reminiscent of Amaziah's confrontation with Amos in Amos 7.16. Do not prophesy against Israel and do not preach against the house of Isaac.

Micah does not seem to be alone in his message. We've already noted that his contemporary Isaiah presented the people with a similar challenge on this front. The opponents' imperative to cease from preaching is a plural one.

Micah's opponents seem to resist his message on the grounds that it ill accords with the positive way that the Lord treats his people within the covenant. Micah's message is entirely too negative and judgmental and ends up putting the long-suffering and gracious God in a bad light. One can imagine such a message being very compelling to many of their contemporaries.

Besides the way that it can be expressed in a very pious way, it has the advantage of not being awkward and confrontational. It's far more congenial a message to the movers and shakers in Judah's society. Presumably the rich men of Judah were also wealthy patrons of these prophets who were concerned not to bite the hand that fed them.

They were obliging and flattering chaplains, wary of rocking the boat, not faithful prophets. Micah proceeds to speak directly to some of the sins that the false prophets were papering over. The situation described is likely one of oppression through vicious use of the law but the villains are described like bandits and enemy warriors, viciously despoiling a vulnerable people.

Under the rubric of the Eighth and the Ninth Commandments, against stealing and bearing false witness against one's neighbor, the law addressed abuses of power

structures and systems of justice and economics which were most likely the primary mechanisms of oppression here as the wealthy and powerful used that power and the economic and legal systems as means of predation upon the poor, indebted and vulnerable rather than seeking to protect them from expropriation and providing charity for them. Their cruelty is underlined in verse 9. Like a military force, they seek to expel widows and orphans from their houses and their heritage for their own selfish gain. Their crime, however, is not merely against the vulnerable poor.

They are stripping from the vulnerable poor what the Lord Himself has given to them thereby offending more directly against Him too. The verdict against these oppressors is clear. They have polluted and destroyed the Lord's good land with their injustice undermining the grace that grounded the people's presence within it.

Consequently, they would be expelled from it as unfit to dwell within it. As they had evicted widows and orphans, the God who protects the defenceless poor would evict them. The Lord's indictment against Micah's opponents is sharp and direct.

They are like those who prophesy of the blessings of wine and of intoxication flattering the people that the Lord will establish their good and rendering them insensible to the looming disaster. This does not mean that Micah's message is devoid of hope although verses 12 and 13 seem to represent a different oracle likely from a different time, perhaps around 701 BC in the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib. It illustrates positive dimensions of Micah's message.

There is a hope of restoration after judgement although it does not seem to be directed at the rich oppressors and false prophets to whom the earlier parts of this chapter were addressed. The Lord will gather a remnant of His people even amidst the crisis perhaps in Jerusalem itself. This might relate to the people of the land taking refuge in Jerusalem as Sennacherib of Assyria swept through the land.

There will, however, be deliverance and triumph. The Lord will lead the people out to repossess the land. He will be at their head.

He is their God and they are His people. A question to consider. What might have been some of the forces encouraging the false prophets in their unfaithfulness? Micah chapter 3 contains three oracles.

Verses 1-4, 5-8 and 9-12. These three oracles are bound together, as Leslie Allen suggests, by a common theme of justice. Although dating the oracles of Micah with certainty is difficult and it is likely that, as in other prophetic books, they are out of chronological sequence at various points being ordered more according to literary, theological and thematic principles we do have an external reference that helps us in dating material in this chapter.

In Jeremiah chapter 26 verses 17-18 we have a reference to verse 12 of this chapter which places it during the reign of King Hezekiah. And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be ploughed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. The first oracle is addressed to the rulers and officials of the people and the words here are Micah's own.

Allen notes that since the oracles of this chapter seemingly date to the period of King Hezekiah Jacob and Israel here must refer to the southern kingdom as the northern kingdom had already been wiped out by the Assyrians. The task of the judges, officials and rulers of the people was to know and to execute justice acting as the representatives of the Lord. However, so far were these men from knowing and wanting to execute justice that they hated the good and loved the evil.

The actual performance of justice requires a posture of heart towards that which is evil and that which is good. Hating the evil and loving the good. This is described in Amos chapter 5 verse 15 in the charge that is given to the people there.

Hate evil and love good and establish justice in the gate. It may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. Wicked rulers are condemned for their perverted hearts in Isaiah chapter 5 verse 20.

Following on from the preceding chapter we get a clearer sense here of the structures of oppression. The rich landowners were taking advantage of the precarious state of the poor and removing them from the land. The false prophets were covering for them with their flattering words and the unfaithful judges were turning a blind eye or even aiding and abetting them through their failure to execute justice.

Micah describes these leaders in the most arresting imagery. They are savagely tearing his people apart and butchering them like meat to be consumed. He closely identifies with the victims of these evil rulers.

He speaks of them as his people. These wicked officials and rulers had closed their ears to the distress of the people. Now the Lord would close his ears to their cries in the day of their distress.

This is an instance of the principle described in Proverbs chapter 21 verse 13. Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered. The second oracle addresses the false prophets.

This time the words are those of the Lord himself. The task of the faithful prophet was fully and fearlessly to declare the word of the Lord. These prophets however were flatterers and mercenaries.

Their messages were designed to line their pockets rather than truthfully to communicate the word of the Lord. They would weaponize and adulterate the word of the Lord for their own gain presenting divine approval as contingent upon people's willingness to give money to them. The wealthy clients who funded them would receive flattering words while any who failed to do so would receive messages of condemnation, judgment and doom.

In such a manner they would have brought dishonor upon the word of the Lord and would have caused people to distrust prophets more generally. These prophets would face the darkening of their vision as a result putting them to shame. The prophets do seem to enjoy some measure of genuine insight but that would soon be denied them in a way that put them to a more open shame revealing them to be charlatans.

They had, like Balaam, perverted actual gifts for their own gain and would suffer judgment accordingly. Against the flattering falsehoods of the unfaithful prophets the words of Micah are the real thing. As a prophet he is anointed and filled with the spirit of the Lord for his divinely appointed mission.

His mission is that of declaring Israel's sin to it. He speaks with manifest power and with demonstrable justice. He isn't hiding any of the truth from the people or denying the issues.

He speaks with candor and with courage. He unflinchingly addresses realities that others shrink back from lest they jeopardize their income or their status. The source of the power and the courage that he expresses is the Lord himself.

The third and final oracle of the chapter begins in verse 9. It's very similar to verses 1 to 4. It begins with the same sort of words. Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel. It's the same addressees.

Once again they are condemned for their hatred of justice and the way in which they pervert all that is straight. They systematically adulterate the truth and justice. The entire society of Jerusalem and of Judah by extension is built upon iniquity and injustice.

Corruption is pervasive at its heart. The officials and judges pervert their judgments for bribes. Priests and prophets who should be committed to delivering the full counsel of the Lord to upholding the law and delivering his word of revelation are fueled not by faithfulness but by desire for material gain.

And while doing all of this they are presumptuous. They believe that since the Lord is in their midst in Jerusalem nothing terrible can befall them. We might here recall Jeremiah's Temple sermon in Jeremiah chapter 7 verses 3 to 10.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel Amend your ways and your deeds and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words. This is the temple of

the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds if you truly execute justice one with another if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless or the widow or shed innocent blood in this place and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm then I will let you dwell in this place in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. Behold you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely make offerings to Baal and go after other gods that you have not known and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say we are delivered only to go on doing all these abominations.

In chapter 1 verse 6 judgment has been declared upon Samaria for its sin. Therefore I will make Samaria a heap in the open country a place for planting vineyards and I will pour down her stones into the valley and uncover her foundations. A similar sentence is declared upon Jerusalem here.

She will become a heap of ruins and the mountain of the house a wooded height. A question to consider in verses 2 and 3 Micah uses the imagery of butchery to describe the way that injustice has come to function within the land of Judah. Why do you think he chose this particular image? Why might it be an especially apt way of thinking about injustice and the way that it functions? Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah and they spoke to many of the same social and political realities.

However in Micah chapter 4 verses 1 to 5 we encounter a passage that raises more immediate questions about the relationship between the two prophets. This is because the exact same prophecy is found in Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2 to 4 with the absence of Micah chapter 4 verse 4 and the truncated form of the material of verse 5 in Isaiah's version being the chief divergences. While there are various other occasions where we see similarities between prophetic books one prophetic book citing another or even common sources such extensive common material is a unique occurrence in the prophetic literature.

There are various ways that we might understand the presence of this prophecy in two different books. We could conceivably argue that both were independently inspired to make a largely identical prophecy. This is definitely possible although it isn't a popular position and we should consider the ramifications that it might have for our understanding of prophetic inspiration.

Other more popular approaches include the positions that it is later material that was inserted into the text of one or both of the prophets that one of the two was quoting a prophecy of the other or had part of the other inserted into their text or that both were using the same earlier material. There are various considerations that should inform our final judgement on this question. Some commentators adduce the greater prominence of Zion within the theology of Isaiah as evidence that this prophecy most likely originates

with him.

On the other hand, the omission of verse 4 of Micah's version in Isaiah's version might suggest that Micah's is the original or alternatively that he more fully quotes the original source. Then there are stylistic features. For instance, while Micah chapter 4 verse 4 is only found in Micah's version the expression, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken is quite Isaianic in its style found in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 20 40 verse 5 and 58 verse 14 but not really found elsewhere in scripture.

Isaiah's account begins with the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem which adds weight to the argument for the originality of the prophecy with Isaiah. However, one could take the introductory formula in Isaiah as referring to something that Isaiah read in Micah or elsewhere. Just as we see Daniel reflecting upon the prophecy of Jeremiah's 70 years in Daniel chapter 9 so Isaiah might be reflecting upon the meaning of his contemporary Micah's prophecy.

There are various examples of cross fertilization among the prophets elsewhere and as Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries who almost certainly knew each other in person we should probably beware of thinking of their ministries as hermetically sealed from each other. The two prophets used the common material in different ways in their respective books. In Micah for instance the material opens up a new section of the book.

Some have suggested tension between the vision of the two prophets based on the question of whether the nations would still worship false gods in the latter days or not. This is a question that is raised by Micah chapter 4 verse 5 and pressed by Marvin Sweeney. Such textual questions are challenging not least when we bring Qumran's scrolls with different forms of the text of Isaiah into the picture.

We should also consider the various hands that were involved in the reception, recording, compilation, transmission and ordering of Micah and Isaiah's prophecy during their lives and afterwards. It is not unlikely that the same group was involved in shaping both. At points like this we might be seeing tantalizing indications of various unknown fingerprints upon the text or indications of richer interactions between the authors and editors of these two prophetic books.

Perhaps Micah and Isaiah, both the men and the books were informative interaction from the time of their initial oral ministries to the final form of their respective texts. Mark J. Lett, following Brother Charles canonical approach cautions about resting too much upon the question of which was the original. What matters far more is the literary form in which they have come down to us in the canon.

The previous chapter ended with a pronouncement of doom upon Jerusalem. Therefore because of you Zion shall be ploughed as a field Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins and the mountain of the house a wooded height. Chapter 4 begins with a sharply

contrasting vision concerning the mountain of the house terminology that connects these two prophecies.

Within this prophecy we can hear the themes of like the earlier traditions such as the songs of Zion in the Psalms within which Mount Zion comes to assume great significance. Psalm 46 or 48 or 76 are all referenced by some commentators in this context. Psalm 46 verses 4 to 10 for instance.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved.

God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter.

He utters his voice. The earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. Come behold the works of the Lord. How he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots with fire.

Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.

Mount Zion is a very modest elevation. It isn't even in the top 100 tallest mountain peaks in Israel only being around 2500 foot tall. However, as the site of the temple, it is the mountain of the Lord.

And according to this prophecy, it will function as the cosmic mountain. The mountain to which the whole world will gather and the mountain that will join heaven to earth. We see Zion set over the other mountains in places like Psalm 68 verses 14 to 18 as well.

When the Almighty scatters kings there, let snow fall on Zalmon, O mountain of God, mountain of Bashan, O many peaked mountain, mountain of Bashan. Why do you look with hatred, O many peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for his abode? Yes, where the Lord will dwell forever. The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands.

The Lord is among them. Sinai is now in the sanctuary. You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.

Mount Zion will become like Eden, the beating heart of the world, the place from which all life flows and the place to which it will all return. Elsewhere in scripture, water flows out of the temple in Zion in places like Ezekiel chapter 47 and Joel chapter 3. But here the stream is of nations flowing up to Zion in pilgrimage, an image that we also see at

the end of Zechariah chapter 14, which brings the two images together, living waters flowing out from Jerusalem and the nations flowing up into her. This would be a fulfillment of the Lord's purpose for his people as a means of bringing his blessing to the nations.

The nations come to Zion to learn the law and the ways of the Lord. And the law and the word of the Lord also come out from Jerusalem as their principles start to inform life elsewhere. The Lord's justice would be known on earth as he would judge between peoples and nations, settling disputes and establishing justice.

The outcome of the rule of the Lord among the nations would be peace, illustrated by the refashioning of weapons of war into tools of cultivation and the freedom to abandon the practice and the learning of conflict. Joel chapter 3 verse 10 uses the same imagery but moves it in a different direction where people must fashion weapons of war out of their agricultural tools. Micah's day, as we have seen, was one of international conflict but it was also one of predatory injustice at home, with rich landowners accumulating property and dispossessing the poor who were left landless.

The vision that Micah relates here is not merely of the cessation of international conflict, it's also one of good relations at home, where every man sits under his own vine or fig tree. Everyone with his own vine and fig tree is an image of the fruitfulness of the land and the participation of every single person within that fruitfulness. No one is left landless.

Everyone enjoys access to literally fruitful means of production, means of production that are fruitful enough that they are able to rest in their labours. The same language is found in 1 Kings chapter 4 verse 25 describing the situation of Israel at the height of Solomon's reign, the greatest period of the nation's glory was seen in every single person enjoying his own land and having fruitfulness within it. Zechariah chapter 3 verse 10 also uses that imagery.

Ginnilet pushes against the readings of such a Sweeney who on the grounds of verse 5 pits Micah against Isaiah. Rather, he argues, we might read verse 5 as bringing the hearer's eyes back down into the immediate present from the future horizon laid out by the prophecy of the first four verses. This invites them to live in the present in a way informed by the eschatological hope that has just been set forth.

While the other nations might at this time in history live in terms of their gods Israel trusts in the Lord knowing that this is the future that they are looking forward to. However, the movement from the people's current beleaguered position to the glorious future that has been promised to them is not an easy one. The oracle that follows in verses 6 to 8 gives some sense of how that movement will take place.

The Lord will gather the scattered flock. All the lame and the wounded will be gathered

as a remnant and those who had been cast off in judgment would be made into a strong nation. The Lord would once more be in their midst as their shepherd, as the one leading them and protecting them.

A nation that had been stripped of its sovereignty would enjoy it once more. The stronghold of the flock, the hill of Zion in which they were protected from adversaries would be built up once again and they would be safe. The reference to the tower of the flock in verse 8 might be an allusion back to something in Genesis chapter 35.

In Genesis chapter 35 Rachel dies in childbirth on the way to Bethlehem verses 19 to 21 of that chapter. So Rachel died and she was buried on the way to Ephrath that is Bethlehem and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb which is there to this day. Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Edah this tower of Edah or tower of the flock then would recall the story of Rachel and the tragic manner of her death.

It was in the context of Genesis chapter 35 that Jacob first received the promise that kings would come from his loins. Reading the verses that follow in verses 9 to 10 we might see the prophet taking up some of these themes and developing them. The woman crying in labor would recall Rachel likewise the lack of a king might refer to the woman struggling and failing seemingly to give birth to the king that is expected.

The birth pangs that are described are painful birth pangs pangs of suffering which will involve going into exile itself. At this point Babylon was not the major power of the region, it was Assyria. Perhaps the first heroes of the prophecy in verse 10 would have imagined Assyria taking them captive and bringing them into the land of Babylon and resettling them there.

However the actual exile would take place under the rule of Babylon itself. Rachel had died in giving birth and Zion would also have to die in giving birth. They would go off into the death of exile but they would be brought up from that grave as the Lord would redeem them from their captivity.

Jean Olier comments upon the way that the stories of Jacob are being used in this passage. The echoes of the story of Rachel and her tragic death and the birth of Benjamin, the tribe from which the first king would arise, are presenting Israel with a way of thinking of its future in terms of its past. He writes, There the Lord will redeem them.

The chapter ends with an image of many nations coming up against Zion. Likely this is an image of Assyria and its tributaries gathering together against Jerusalem in 701 BC. As Joanna Hoyt observes, The gloating of the nations here very much tallies with the way that the Assyrians and their allies under Sennacherib are described in 2 Chronicles chapter 32.

Sennacherib and his people think that they have beaten Jerusalem that there is no hope for the people of the Lord. Yet Sennacherib and his men do not know the plans of the Lord and they will be threshed like sheaves on the threshing floor. We might see some initial token of the fulfillment of these prophecies in this chapter in the story of 2 Chronicles chapter 32 in verses 22 to 23 of that chapter.

So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib, king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies and he provided for them on every side and many brought gifts to the Lord to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward. A question to consider how might we see the opening verses of this chapter being fulfilled in the new covenant? In treating the end of Micah chapter 4 we notice the character of Rachel present just beneath the surface of the text. The text mentioned a particular location Migdal Eder or the Tower of the Flock and then proceeded to talk about a woman struggling in birth.

All of this could be seen as a subtle allusion to the story of Rachel back in Genesis chapter 35 while Rachel was still pregnant with Benjamin. The Lord had promised Jacob that kings would come from his own body in verses 16 to 21 of that chapter we read what happened next. Then they journeyed from Bethel when they were some distance from Ephrath Rachel went into labour and she had hard labour and when her labour was at its hardest the midwife said to her Do not fear for you have another son and as her soul was departing for she was dying she called his name Ben-Onai but his father called him Benjamin so Rachel died and she was buried on the way to Ephrath that is Bethlehem and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb which is there to this day Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the Tower of Eder as we read on into chapter 5 the nation being compared to its great matriarch Rachel is struggling in its pangs facing the invading Assyrians for instance the great awaited royal leader of the people who would be the full fulfilment of the promise made to Jacob back in Genesis chapter 35 has not yet arrived yet in these reminders of the tragic story of Rachel Migdal-Eder Bethlehem Ephrath the woman struggling in birth and the threat of death we discover a new promise that is brewing the birth of a new child a one who will rule his people the chapter however begins with a reminder of how low the line of David has been brought the son of David is supposed to rule the nations with a rod of iron yet the nations are striking him on the cheek he is being surrounded and besieged by the Assyrians and their tributaries presumably we should see the events of 701 BC at the background here with the invasion of Sennacherib Bethlehem of course was the town from which David hailed from the place that David first came an heir of David would arise Bethlehem as a town promised little it was not a great town it was not a place that could muster a great quantity of troops yet Bethlehem would be the place from which the great ruler of the people would arise just as in various places in the book of Isaiah for instance we see here the line of David that has been nearly cut off and then as it seems

to have been removed from the place where David first came his greatest son would come forth springing up like a root out of dry ground as Isaiah chapter 53 puts it Rachel had struggled and failed to reach Bethlehem and had died on the way yet now the woman who was struggling to give birth would reach Bethlehem and in that town of Bethlehem the great child that has been awaited would be born in the Christian tradition the end of verse 2 has commonly been taken as a reference to Christ's eternal origins the text certainly does not need to be read this way and we should beware it seems to me of trying to press it into that theological mould nevertheless there is something of a mythic quality about this statement that might suggest something akin to deep magic from the dawn of time there is here displayed something of the deeper mystery of God's purpose from the very beginning the return to Bethlehem, the place of David's birth and the origin of the dynasty takes us back behind the current Davidic king on the throne to the very root of Jesse in Bethlehem beneath him it will be from Bethlehem not Jerusalem that the awaited one who was always the destiny of the Davidic line would come forth this awaited son of David like his forefather would be a shepherd of the people acting with the strength and the authority of the Lord as his son he would execute justice in the land and deliver his people he would be the means of redemption for his brothers who would return to the land from exile behind this great prophecy we should also hear the words of the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7, verses 12-16 In addition to restoring the people as the great shepherd and giving them security, his glory would also go out to the surrounding lands and even to the ends of the earth.

He would be the source of their peace, the prince of peace, as Isaiah speaks about. As he establishes his rule, the nation will find security and strength against its enemies on all sides. The Assyrians, being the current great threat to the nation, are set forth as paradigmatic examples here.

Verses 7 and 8 are clearly paralleled. In the first, the remnant of Jacob are compared to Jew and showers on the grass, and in the second to lions among the peoples. The clear literary paralleling of these two verses invites us to see not just the similarities but the contrasts.

The first one is one that explores an image of blessing, the Jew which revives the grass and the land, saving it from the parching heat of the sun. Jacob is here presented as a blessing for the nations, a means by which they will be revived and given health, all we should recognize in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The second image, however, is an image of Jacob as an agent of divine justice.

Jacob here is seen not just as a means of giving health to the nations but as a threat to any that will resist the power of the Lord. This purpose of the Lord for them should, in the present, give the people a confidence over their adversaries. They should act with confidence, knowing that the time would come when all of their opponents would be cut off.

Leslie Allen notes the presence of a hook and line device here that connects verse 9 and verse 10. Verse 9 speaks about being cut off, and the new oracle that begins in verse 10 also plays upon that word for being cut off. Now it is not the enemies that are being cut off but the unfaithful of the people.

The context again seems to be the events of 701 BC and the invasion of Sennacherib and the Assyrian forces. As we see in 2 Kings chapter 18 verse 24, Judah had looked to Egypt for military aid, specifically depending upon Egypt for horses and chariots. This war machine gave Judah a sense of its security.

Likewise, Judah also felt confidence in the great fortified cities of the land. However, when the Assyrians came to the land, the fortified cities would be breached, and the great war machine that Hezekiah had built up would be of little avail against them. They had clearly forgotten the lesson of Psalm 20 verses 7-8.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. Judah's strength never ultimately rested in the might of its war machine, but in the power of its God.

And on the other side, when it trusted in its war machine and failed to trust in God, the war machine would prove absolutely useless when the Lord Himself turned against the people. Besides the false trust that the nation put in its military might and its strong defenses, it also trusted in sorcery, divination and idolatry. Just as Israel had been instructed not to go back to Egypt for horses and chariots, they were not supposed to worship false gods or engage in any of these occult practices.

And the Lord would strip them of all of these things, not least because they are futile. They are bowing down to the work of their hands. Here we see a reminder of the common prophetic polemic against pagan idolatry.

As the Lord stripped His people of all of those things in which they falsely placed their trust, instead of placing their trust in Him, He was graciously removing things that were preventing them from turning back to Himself. Judgment would begin with the house of God, but the chapter ends with a broader declaration of divine vengeance that should be expected by those disobedient nations that did not obey the word of the Lord and gave themselves to idols. A question to consider, how do we see the prophecies of this chapter used within the New Testament? Micah chapter 6 begins with a covenant indictment that the Lord brings against the people, with the mountains and the hills summoned as witnesses.

In Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 1, the heavens and the earth are summoned as witnesses for the song of Moses. Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. The summoning of the mountains and the hills gives a sense of how serious the Lord's indictment is.

However, where we might have expected the Lord to open with a searing declaration of His people's guilt, He actually invites His people to bring forth evidence against Him. He's looking for some evidence, any evidence, to support their behaviour towards Him. Was He unfaithful to them in some respect, or did He needlessly burden them? He recounts what He did for them.

He led them out of slavery in the Exodus, the great founding event of the people, the event upon which everything else rested. He provided them with gifted leaders, Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Moses and Aaron are mentioned as a pair in 1 Samuel chapter 12.

Psalms 77 verse 20 declares, This verse is surprising for including Miriam alongside them. Miriam, of course, was the sister of Moses and Aaron. She was involved in Moses' deliverance as an infant.

She also led the women in song in Exodus chapter 15. This passage is reminiscent of Joshua chapter 24 verses 5 to 10. This passage is reminiscent of Joshua chapter 24 verses 5 to 10.

Instead, He blessed you, so I delivered you out of His hand. As in Joshua chapter 24, Micah singles out Balak's attempt to curse Israel as a significant instance of the Lord's deliverance of them. Reflecting upon the Lord's faithfulness to and deliverance of them in their history should spur them to current faithfulness.

The reference to, from Shittim to Gilgal, presumably relates to the crossing of the Jordan, another signal event of deliverance, also referenced in Joshua chapter 24. The prophet then takes up the question of what renders a person, or people, fit to enter into the presence of the Lord. Many would think that what the Lord most wanted was great numbers of sacrifices, perhaps burnt offerings of the finest animals, offering the whole animal to the Lord rather than just having a sacrificial meal.

How about multiplying sacrifices countless times over, perhaps even like the sacrifices with which Solomon dedicated the temple? Maybe the more generous and extravagant libations of oil would do it. If that weren't enough, perhaps the worshipper should offer his own firstborn child for his sin. Would that be sufficient? A common and important theme in the prophetic literature is the critique of mere ritual sacrifice apart from covenant faithfulness.

1 Samuel chapter 15 verse 22 Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. Isaiah chapter 1 verse 11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats.

In verses 16 to 17 of that chapter Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the

evil of your deeds from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. So what then does the Lord require of someone? Micah's answer here is reminiscent of Hosea chapter 12 verse 6 So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God. Also of Deuteronomy chapter 10 verses 12 to 13 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good? There are also similar statements in places like Psalm 15, answering the question of the sort of persons that will enter into the Lord's presence.

The first requirement is a commitment to justice. A mere negative avoidance of injustice is not enough. There should be a desire to address injustice more broadly, and to bring justice as a positive condition.

Loyalty or kindness is the second requirement. Here described as something that the faithful worshipper must love. Such loyalty must be manifested in relationship with God, but also in relationships with one's neighbours.

Loyalty extends itself towards others. Justice by itself can become harsh very easily. Just as kindness by itself can be lacking in justice's orientation towards truth, but tempered with kindness, it can be a beautiful thing.

The final requirement is to walk humbly with God. This is at the heart of it all. Where this is lacking, all else starts to become disjointed and hollow.

True worship is not just ethical, the performance of moral deeds. Rather, true worship is at its very core a heart set upon the Lord. To love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This is what the Lord looks for and desires from us. Anything less is not enough for the worship of our Maker. In verse 9, Micah acts as the herald of the voice of the Lord.

The Lord is speaking and all should be summoned to attention. The second half of the verse, translated as, Hear of the rod and of him who appointed it, in the ESV, could also be read, as Leslie Allen suggests, as a summons to attention for a group of people, listen tribe and assembled citizens. If the first reading is correct, it is a reference to the Lord's punishment and of the one who ordained it.

In the second case, it is presumably addressed to Judah at a time when the people would have been assembled together. In verses 10-12, there are three key indictments of the people. The indictment focuses upon stealing, deceit, lying and false measures.

As in the book of Amos, the rich of the land are here condemned for their predatory

dealings with the poor. Their riches are gained through falsehood, oppression and injustice. And the more that they gather, the more that those riches testify against them to the Lord.

The Lord promises, as their sentence and judgement, that he would make them desolate for their sins. Verses 14 and 15 give us curses of futility, similar to those found in Deuteronomy chapter 28, verses 38-41, in the curses of the covenant. You shall carry much seed into the field, and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it.

You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity.

Although Micah is addressing people in the southern kingdom of Judah, they are accused of keeping the statutes of Amrei and the works of the house of Ahab. This might seem strange until we consider that the influence of the Amreits has spread to the south, as the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, had married King Jehoram. To secure his reign, Jehoram had killed six of his brothers, and through Athaliah all sorts of idolatry and other pagan influences came into the nation.

Athaliah herself had reigned as a usurper and tried to establish the worship of Baal in the southern kingdom. Those who followed in the path of the Amreits, however, would be cut off, they would be made desolate, and they would be scorned by those who were faithful. A question to consider, how does walking humbly with our God help us to do justice and to love kindness? The final chapter of the book of Micah laments the state of a corrupt society.

The righteous are few, treachery and deceit are pervasive, and there is no one left to trust. It concludes, however, with a confident expression of the prophet's hope in the Lord. The prophet compares the situation to a man coming to a vine or fig tree after everything has been harvested, hoping to find something tasty to eat and finding that there is nothing left.

We might think of the episode in Mark chapter 11 verses 13-14 here, as Jesus might have been alluding to this passage in his judgment upon the fruitless fig tree. And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs.

And he said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. As the prophet Micah scours the land, he cannot find godly and upright persons.

They seem to have vanished from the land. Everywhere he finds wickedness, violence,

oppression and injustice. Corruption is found at the very heart of the people and at the very top of their social hierarchy, in the prince, the judge and the elite.

Even those who are upstanding by comparison with others and would be held in higher honour are still like thorn hedges, hurting rather than helping their neighbours. Judah had been given ample warnings of coming punishment by the prophets. The prophets were like the watchmen of the nation and now the day that they had warned of, the day of the Lord's judgment, was near at hand.

It was upon the people. As Leslie Allen notes, the prophet here plays upon the similarity of the sounds of the words for hedge and confusion. The way that the corruption that's going to be judged rhymes with the punishment, underlines the poetic justice that the Lord will bring upon them.

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

Jesus refers to this passage in Matthew chapter 10 verses 34 to 36, as he describes the resistance and persecution that his disciples will experience within their households, communities and closest relationships. The prophet Jeremiah speaks to a similar situation, highlighting the danger of trusting in man rather than trusting in the Lord. In Jeremiah chapter 17 verses 5 to 8 he writes, The placing of verse 7 is debated among commentators.

Mark Ginnellet, for instance, sees the section that follows as beginning with verse 7, rather than verse 7 belonging with verses 1 to 6. Where we situate verse 7 will colour our reading of the relevant sections, as Joanna Hoyt notes. Does the woe oracle end on a note of hope or not? Bruce Waltke argues that what we have here is a Janus verse, a verse that looks both forward and back, connecting to both sections, closing one and opening the other. Hoyt, however, argues that the verse should be placed with the latter section, although she de-emphasises the sharpness of the divisions that some people imagine between these sections.

Micah, or the editors of his prophecy, clearly wanted hearers to move from the message of woe to one of confident hope. These should not be viewed as hermetically sealed off from each other. In a situation where there is no one to trust, Micah's response is to look to the Lord in faith.

He is confident that the Lord will both hear and deliver him in his time of distress. Allen

observes that the concluding half of the chapter can be divided into four parts, which he suggests should be understood as a liturgy, as there are various voices and forms of speech represented within the section. There is, he argues, a psalm of confidence spoken by Zion in verses 8-10, followed by an oracle of salvation in verses 11-13.

In verses 14-17 there is a prayer of supplication, and the final verses are another psalm of confidence. Reading the section as a prophetic liturgy has been popular among commentators following Herman Gunkel, who argued that the section was inserted into the book later in the post-exilic period. However, there are those who dispute this understanding.

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

The opening section leading up to verse 10, whether it begins with verse 7 or verse 8, presents us with the words of a personified Zion. The personified Zion recognises that it is really the Lord that is using these powers as instruments for his work, that he is the one that they need to relate to. The oracle of salvation that follows in verses 11-13 describes the restoration of Zion and the extension of the borders of the land.

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

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

The Lord is addressed as the shepherd of his people, pasturing his flock in good land. Bashan and Gilead are lands in the Transjordan, lands which were good for grazing, but belonged to the fallen northern kingdom and had been lost to Assyria. There is a response of the Lord to the supplication in verse 15.

The Lord speaks of a new exodus-like deliverance that he will accomplish for his people. This will demonstrate his glory in the sight of the nations, who will be put to shame. The nations would suffer the judgment apportioned to the serpent.

The chapter, and the book more generally, ends with a psalm of confidence. The confidence of the prophet is found in the character and the faithfulness of the Lord. The Lord is a God who pardons iniquity and passes over transgression.

Micah is most likely here alluding to Exodus 34, verses 6-7, where the Lord declares himself to Moses after Israel's sin with the golden calf. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. Micah expresses his assurance in the promises of the Lord, the fact that the Lord will deal with the iniquities of his people, and that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant promises, promises that go all the way back to Abraham and the forefathers.

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