

# BEYOND FORM CRITICISM: THE RELATION OF DOOM AND HOPE ORACLES IN MICAH 2-6

by

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The book of Micah is enveloped in lamentation. In chapter 1, the Divine Warrior descends in theophanic display to fight, not for as expected, but against his dear daughters: Samaria, Zion, and their sister Shephelah cities. The result is not the traditionally and form-critically expected victory hymn of praise,<sup>1</sup> but rather lamentation through one of the Hebrew Bible's most poignant dirges which functions and coheres through the techniques of paronomasia and wordplay. In chapter 7, form critically a lament,<sup>2</sup> Daughter Zion wails alone, recalls the Exodus (v. 15) and hopes for the return of the Warrior to fight on her behalf.<sup>3</sup> In between, a poet, perhaps the prophet himself, has redacted the oracles of Micah into what we call chapters 2-6. Employing the three unifying traditions from the envelope (lamentation, Divine Warrior, and personification of the people as a woman), he continues to use paronomasia and wordplay to create a cohesive composition.

## Micah 2

Chapter 1 closes with a call to a woman to commence funeral rituals (feminine singular imperatives and pronominal suffixes).

Shave your head! Shear your scalp  
in memory of your beloved children.

1. Cf. Judges 5, Deuteronomy 33, 2 Samuel 22/Psalm 18, Habakkuk 3, Psalm 68, Psalm 97.

2. Opening cry (v. 1a), description of troubles (vv. 1b-6), confession of trust (vv. 7-13, 16-17), petition (vv. 14-15), concluding praise (vv. 18-20).

3. Space does not allow more than this summary of chapters 1 and 7 here. See Luker, pp. 135-65 and 188-217, and the forthcoming revision of that study.

Make yourself bald, bald as a vulture:  
they are leaving you for exile.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 2 opens with the funeral cry, הרי 'alas!' 'woe!'.<sup>5</sup> As employed by the prophets, הרי functions with the vocative, parallel to שמעו 'hear!'<sup>6</sup> Mic 1:2 summons international attention; Mic 2:1 summons the ראשים 'heads of society' (3:1) and, alas, Judah/Israel herself, to their (her) funeral.

Chapter 2 is composed of three parts, vv. 1–5, 6–11, 12–13, though these parts are laced together. Part 1 (vv. 1–5) is a masterpiece of symmetry.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| v. 1 Introduction:   | v. 3aβ–3b Response to introduction:   |
| הרי חשבי־און . . . רע על-משכבותם   | הנני חשב על-המשפחה . . . רעה<br>אשר לא-תמישו משם . . .<br>לא . . . רעה                              |
| v. 2 Dirge in <i>qinah</i> meter:  | v. 4 Reversal of dirge in "reverse <i>qinah</i> " meter:  |
| The heads "lift" (נשא) houses,<br>seize fields (שדות), oppress<br>another's inheritance. | The heads "lift" (נשא) up a<br>lament, lose their fields (שדות),<br>and their apportioned property. |
| v. 3aα . . . לכך   | v. 5 . . . לכך  |

It is held together by ש/מ alliteration, the backbone of which (see Allen) is: the nighttime plotters (משכבותם, v. 1) composing such a family (משפחה, v. 3) who cannot escape (תמישו משם, v. 3) the prophetic משל (v. 4) which will remove (ימיש, v. 4) from them their inheritance and leave them without representation (משליך, v. 5) when it comes time for reapportionment. Numerous individual uses of מ and ש put sinew on this skeleton, and there are other alliterational appendages, the chief of which occur in v. 4, נהה נהי נהיה; שדינו . . . שדוד נשדנו, and in v. 5, where every word contains a ל except for the divine name and its etymon.

Part 2 (vv. 6–11) emerges gently, since the ל alliteration is continued into v. 6; but it has a certain autonomy of its own, framed as it is by plays on the verb נטף 'to preach', literally, 'to dribble' (vv. 6 and 12). The

4. Verse 16; translations are my own.

5. It is clear from 1 Kgs 13:30, Jer 22:18 (4 times), and 34:5 that הרי was a cry of lamentation for the dead. Cf. Amos 5 where the wailing cry, הו הו (v. 16) is followed by mourning (v. 17) and repetitions of הרי (v. 18 and 6:1). הרי is often an independent cry of grief, e.g., Isa 17:12 (cf. 11, 14) and Jer 30:7. See Brown, p. 222; Zobel, and the works listed in the latter, p. 359.

6. Mic 1:2; see Hilliers, "Hôy"; cf. Isa 1:2, 4, 24.

stanza expresses the mindset not only of the pseudo-prophets, but of the society they represent (cf. part 1). Within this primary נטף wordplay, more subtle puns operate. The people should walk uprightly (הולך, v. 7), but they have arisen as the enemy (יקומם, v. 8); thus their punishment: קומו ולכו, v. 10. They strip away the honor (אדר) from the poor man's cloak; so the honor (הדר) will be taken from their (literally, Jerusalem's) children (v. 9). These common people of the שלמה 'cloak' are an עם-שלום opposed to the מלחמה 'militarism' of the upper class (v. 8).<sup>7</sup> The latter delight in inebriating words (שכר) from their preachers, even though such speeches are lies (שקר), v. 11.

This same type of internal paronomasia is carried on between part 2 (vv. 6-11) and part 1 (vv. 1-5) in two striking ways. Those simple poor whom society's heads call the recreants (שובב, v. 4) are in fact those averse to the faithless militarism (שובי מלחמה, v. 8) rampant among the elite. And part 1's conclusion, which centered on the lack of one to cast the חבל 'property-apportioning cord' (v. 5) for society's presently landed gentry, forebodes the utter destruction (תִּהְיֶה לְךָ חֵבֶל, v. 10) predicted in part 2.

אסף (אסף) of v. 12 bounces off אטף (מטיף) of v. 11, but the primary unifying play here is the double meaning of the verb אסף: both "to gather" and "to remove," often "to gather in order to take away and destroy."<sup>8</sup> Hence, "I will cull you, O Jacob." But culling is also a selecting; and its meaning is refined through parallelism with קבץ: "I will gather together a remnant from Israel." This culled and gathered remnant will be divinely unified, made קדוש, as ideally it should be (v. 12b).

Verse 13 paints a portrait of exile, but in hues sufficiently pastel to convey double-entendre. עלה is a military term, and פרץ is regularly used for the Divine Warrior's anger which breaks out on his enemy (cf. v. 8).<sup>9</sup>

7. Verse 8b, literally, "You strip away the honor from the cloak, from trusting passers-by averse to war," should be translated, "You dishonor the cloak of trusting passers-by averse to war." The accusation is the oppression (cf. v. 2) of the simple poor by the ruling class who ignore the laws regarding the poor man's שלמה taken in pledge (חבל), a cloak which, according to Torah, was to have honored status. See Exod 22:25-26; Deut 24:12-13; cf. Amos 2:8.

8. As in 1 Sam 15:6, Ezek 34:29, and with the infinitive absolute as here, Jer 8:13-14, Zeph 1:2. English "cull" approximates the ambiguity. The Greek versions use *συνάγω* which may carry a hostile sense, though it generally needs a noun to do so (see Liddell, p. 1691, 1.3). In the New Testament *συνάγω* bears the sense of "take away for destruction" in Matt 3:12 par. Luke 3:17; Matt 13:30; and is ambiguous in Matt 13:47; 25:32; Luke 15:13.

9. On עלה, see Brown, p. 748, #2c; Allen. On פרץ, see Brown, p. 829, #6; cf. also Pss 80:13; 89:41.

At one level, the divine anger breaks out on his people (cf. the divinely commissioned הירש, 1:15); so they break out and exit through the שער ירושלם (cf. 1:9, 12, 13). This is no chance happening, no vagary of history. God has caused the breaking out (he is הִפְרֵץ). Nor does the One who breaks out abandon his people. He accompanies them into exile; indeed, as Israel's true מֶלֶךְ, he leads them (13b). Yet Judah/Jerusalem also has a human מֶלֶךְ, and in irony the poet pictures this messiah as leading the band of prisoners, behind only YHWH, into exile.

At a second, deeper level, this final stanza of chapter 2 offers hope. Certainly such is already implied in the first, present-oriented level of meaning just described, since YHWH accompanies his people to the place where they will be culled, gathered, and unified. But there is here a further, future-oriented vision of that flock in exile, alone in their unity like a flock in a fold (and in distress)<sup>10</sup> or a herd in a pasture, huddling together for security, uneasy when aliens approach.<sup>11</sup> From this exile, too, they shall break out. The divine פֶּרֶץ will break down the gate of their prison-corral and help them to break out and exit with him. At this level the picture is one of return, a remnant culled and gathered, in procession back to Jerusalem. Their divine King leads them back just as he had lead them away. Their messiah-king is right behind him, though now a new and purified מֶלֶךְ, worthy to re-establish the divine rule (cf. 5:1-3).

Part 3 (vv. 12-13) continues the assonance in which our poet delights:

שארית ישראל . . . שער . . . ראשם; קבץ אקבץ; אסף אסף  
 עלה הפרץ לפניהם פרצו ויעברו . . .  
 ויעבר מלכם לפניהם . . .

In addition, wordplay is used to lace this stanza to part 2. אסף/אטף has already been mentioned. Root עבר sets up a gentle echo throughout both parts (מעברים, v. 8; בעבור, v. 10; ויעברו and ויעבר, v. 13). The עדר in the pasture, v. 12c, recalls stolen אדר, v. 8 (and lost הדר, v. 9).

The unifying traditions of chapter 1, summarized in the first paragraph of this essay, are continued through chapter 2: the Divine Warrior approaches, resulting in lamentation.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, while most of this

10. Repoint בַּצְרָה, assuming a Hebrew צַר(י)רָה 'fold' based on Arabic cognate *yāra* 'fold'. There is a clever wordplay here consonant with the ambiguity of this passage; בַּצְרָה means "in distress," exactly what LXX read, ἐν θλίψει. Cf. בַּצְרָה, dearth, destruction.

11. In the last phrase of v. 12 the מן is causal, giving the source of the disquietude as with verbs of fearing; cf. Brown, p. 540; Allen. Lit.: "They will show disquietude/murmur because of humans." The picture is of a flock of sheep/herd of goats in the midst of a pasture, content until the alien human approaches.

12. Isa 30:27-33 and 31:1ff. reveal a similar editing: theophany followed by הוי oracle.

poem is directed to the heads of society, in the midst of the audience sits Lady Jerusalem herself (v. 9): the נשי עמי are not driven from “their homes,” but out of “her beloved house”; nor is the divine glory removed from “their” children, but from “hers” (see Hillers, *Micah*).

### Micah 3

Micah 3 is welded to 2:12-13 by means of a delightful wordplay on ראש. Chapter 2 concluded with a vision of God leading his people בראשם ‘at their head’; but chapter 3 must address the unfortunate reality: Jacob’s current ראשים ‘heads’. Hence the last word of chapter 2 introduces the theme of chapter 3. It is clear from 3:9-12 that the “heads” and “chiefs/pillars of society,” קצינים, are a broader reference than governmental rulers; these embrace the entire spectrum of political, economic, and religious life. These have forsaken God, their True Head (2:13), and have made themselves Heads (3:1, 9, 11, *passim*), merely using God as a prop for their idolatry (3:11).

Further cementing of this connection between chapters 2 and 3 stems from the שארית ישראל ‘remnant of Israel’ assonance established in 2:12 and carried through chapter 3. An important concept for Micah, as for Isaiah his contemporary, is that the remnant is the result of the culling-gathering process. Disastrously, the heads of society must be discarded so as to preserve this remnant—what the prophet calls עמי ‘my (God’s) people’, those simple folk with whom the Morashtite was most at home. Hence, in the style of our poet, assonance is created to support and develop the conceptual continuity. Note how the introduction of the remnant concept leads naturally to need for the True Head; on to the bogus current heads; and to their deeds which will, in the end, exclude them from the remnant:

|   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ‘I must cull . . . a remnant of Israel’ | שארית ישראל . . . (אסף אסף) 2:12 |
| ‘YHWH as True Head’                     | ראשם 2:13                        |
| ‘current Heads’                         | ראשי . . . ישראל 3:1             |
| ‘haters of good’                        | שנאי 3:2a                        |
| ‘rippers of flesh’                      | שארם 3:2b                        |
| ‘eaters of flesh’                       | אשר . . . שאר 3:3a               |
| ‘dividers of flesh’                     | ופרשו כשאר בסיר וכבשר . . . 3:3b |
| ‘resulting loss of True Head’           | ויסתר . . . כאשר 3:4             |

This assonance is especially effective in joining 2:12-13 with 3:1-4, but it ricochets within the remainder of chapter 3: אשר (v. 5), ישראל (v. 8), וירושלם . . . ישראל . . . ראשי (v. 9), וירושלם (v. 10), ראשיה (v. 11), וירושלם (v. 12).

A third factor joining 2:12–13 to chapter 3 is the recurrence of the Jacob-Israel pair introduced in 2:12. It is a favorite of our prophet, employed already in 1:5, and now repeated in 2:12; 3:1, 8, 9 (and Micah *passim*), lending a stream of continuity through 2:12–3:12.

The making of human stew described in 3:2–4 is in many ways a metaphorical iteration of the sins of the heads as described more literally in chapter 2. These גול ‘tear away’ the skin in 3:2, and גול the fields in 2:2. They פשט ‘strip off’ the skin in 3:3, as they פשט the honor from the sacrosanct cloak of the poor man in 2:9. In 2:7 the heads questioned God’s מעלליו ‘deeds’, but in 3:4 there is no question about the corruption of their own מעלליהם which excoriate (מעלליהם, 3:2, 3) God’s people. In this context of deeds, the True Head “causes good” (hiphil of יטב, 2:7) while the current heads “cause evil” (hiphil of רעע, הרעו, 3:4). Or (the poet gets more precise) the divine message will cause good to the ישר ‘upright’ (2:7); but the heads עשק ‘practice oppression’ (2:2) and everything ישרה ‘upright’ (3:9) they עקש ‘twist’ (3:9, in parallelism with the abhorrence of משפט, which in Hebrew law equals oppression).

Even the “prophets” get into this act of oppression, עשק (2:2). הנושכים בשניהם ‘They bite with their teeth’ (3:5) at base means, “Feed them and they’ll say all is well.” But נושך also means ‘pay interest’, and נושך is ‘usury’. (Recall that נושך is often used of the bite of the cunning snake.) All the heads are involved in using “my people” (and in using God as well, 3:11).<sup>13</sup>

Of course there is also a pleasant unity within the chapter itself, with wordplay and assonance too numerous to mention comprehensively. 3:9 repeats 3:1, with the Jacob-Israel pair standing in 3:8 as transition. The prophets lead people astray, המתעים (3:5) while political and economic heads specialize in abhorring justice, המתעבים (3:9). Verse 11 expands the vocabulary of vv. 5–7.

In the midst of the chapter stands v. 8, the prophet’s personal confession, in stark contrast to the deceptive and inebriating words of the popular windbags (2:11). Here he returns to his unifying traditions: in the context of mourning (vv. 4, 7) the Divine גבור speaks through the mouth of his prophet (גבורה). The poet revives the lamentation in two ways: by the use of זעק (v. 4), common to cries for help in laments, and the gesture of mourning (covering the lip) in v. 7. In both cases the divine response is a surprise analogous to that in chapter 1: rather than coming to the rescue, the Deliverer refuses to answer. Surely it is a calamitous time, עת רעה היא (2:3) when Israel’s Protector hides his face

13. See Brown, p. 675; cf. Hab 2:7.

(הרעו) . . . בעת ההיא (3:4) and, contrary to expectation, רעה 'calamity' (3:11b) will befall.

The Divine Warrior reaches his ultimate destination, Jerusalem, in 3:12, and the attack is described in language reminiscent of the opening theophanic descent (1:5-6). The central 3:8 had prepared the listener by repeating the original *יעקב פשע/ישראל* pair from 1:5. The Warrior's first stop had been Lady Samaria, who had been made an *עי השדה* where grapes are planted. Likewise, Lady Jerusalem now becomes *עין* and a *שדה* to be plowed. But the author's most brilliant pun is saved for the final phrase of the chapter. In chapter 1's theophany, having begun his descent to *הרים* and *במות* (1:3-4), the Divine Warrior wreaked havoc on these, then destroyed Samaria amidst ominous mention that Jerusalem, too, was merely a series of *במות* (1:5). So now in chapter 3, as he reaches Mount Zion (*הר הבית*), she in fact is reduced to *במות יער* 'thicketed high places' (3:12).<sup>14</sup>

Through all this, Mother Zion watches. We assume that she grieves, but for the moment she is reticent. She is present nonetheless, aware of "her" rulers, "her" priests, and "her" prophets (feminine pronominal suffixes, v. 11) who are bringing her to ruin (v. 12). Later she will mourn openly and then burst into song in the book's closing lament (chapter 7). But for now she is quiet, though the focus of attention; for this is her funeral.

#### Micah 4:1-5:3

Chapter 3 concluded with the Divine Warrior's goal, the subject for 4:1-5:3: *והר הבית* (תהיה), 3:12; *יהיה הר בית יהוה*, 4:1. Once again our poet has used wordplay to unite two sections of his work. This play continues throughout the first poem of this section (4:1-7) with *בראש ההרים* (v. 1), *הר יהוה* (v. 2), *בית אלהי יעקב* (v. 2), which also recalls 3:9, *בית יעקב*, concluding with *הר ציון* (v. 7). Thus this first poem is framed by Mount Zion, with which the previous poem concluded. In addition, *ראש ההרים* (v. 1) continues the *ראש*-play from chapter 3 (vv. 1, 9, 11).

The poem peers beyond the imminent warfare but is still centered on the same divine mountain. It is a reversal of the theophany in 1:2-4 where mountains were melted; here the Mountain is raised. It points beyond 3:12 where Zion is left desolate; here she is a repopulated and international center of true religion as Micah understood it. Likewise, it is the same Divine Warrior who approaches, as his title, *צבאות יהוה*

14. All suggestions to emend this final phrase of the chapter miss the point entirely. It is perhaps no coincidence that in 1 Kgs 7:2 Solomon's palace is termed *בית יער הלבנון*.

(v. 4) and the references to his "day" (vv. 1 and 6)<sup>15</sup> make clear. But מלחמה (2:8; 3:5; 4:3) has become שלום. The militarism of 1:10–16 and 3:5 has been overcome. In short, the שלמה-people 'the people of the cloak' (2:8) have been vindicated.

With this vindication comes משפט. משפט is the responsibility of the ראשים (3:1), but they abhor it (3:9) and administer it for a bribe (ישפט, 3:11) which is no administration at all. The prophet is filled with it (3:8) by Divine enabling; similarly when Zion is made ראש (4:1) by divine fiat, God will rule (4:7), and right judgment will return (ושפט, 4:3; cf. 4:14 and below). This proper judgment (שפט) is in contrast to the injurious stripping (פשט, 2:8; 3:3) perpetrated by the false ראשים. With משפט comes תורה, perverted by priests in 3:11 (יורה) but restored in the purified Zion (תורה, ריורנו, 4:2).

Hence, 4:1–7 is intimately tied thematically to the foregoing, and in the well-established custom of our poet, these thematic links are reinforced with wordplay.

As we have become accustomed to expect, other repetitions of root and sound abound within the poem itself. When true and pure Zion becomes primary (נשא, 4:1), the nations cease to fight (נשא, 4:3). The repopulated mountain is a veritable stampede of walkers (הלך, three times in v. 2, two times in v. 5). Verse 5 repeats כִּי־אִישׁ from v. 4. The restored and reunified Israel will be a גוי עצום (v. 7) with authority among the other גוים עצמים (v. 3), authority based on her own divine rule. The future-oriented and eternal nature of this vision is emphasized by the iteration of ועד־עולם (v. 5), לעולם ועד (v. 7).

Part 2 (4:8–5:3) continues the subject of Zion, personifying her as a woman (note the feminine verbs and pronouns).<sup>16</sup> הר ציון (v. 7, part 1) introduces בת־ציון (v. 8, part 2) who is nicknamed (through synecdoche)<sup>17</sup> מגדל־עדר (v. 8), a reference to the עפל section (v. 8) of the old city of David. The sobriquet extends the shepherding imagery with which the poem will end (5:3) by also pointing to the messianic shepherd who will be born of Mother Zion. בת־ירושלם (v. 8)/בת־ציון (v. 10) must shriek and cry out כיולדה (vv. 9, 10; 5:2). It is a time of pain, but the necessary

15. יום יהוה. While specifics of the term's origin may be debated, the tradition's intimate connection with holy war and theophany (chapter 1) is not.

16. The framing oracles of the poem, 4:8 and 5:1, address sections of greater Jerusalem in the masculine mode under the influence of מגדל־עפל (4:8), a military metaphor, and בית־לחם (5:1), the village of King David. אתה is also necessary for assonance with עתה. See below.

17. As Hillers (*Micah*) correctly notes, p. 56, nn. b and c (the Nehemiah reference is 11:21, not 17:21). See also Allen for a good discussion.



pain will bear the future in which the tables will be turned. בת־ציון (v. 13) will tread down her assailants who are described in v. 11b in terms of men taking advantage of a woman. Another nickname recalls the present unfortunate reality of misdirected militarism and consequent lamentation: בת־גִּדּוֹד (v. 14).<sup>18</sup> But Lady-of-the-Troops' funeral ritual is part of the lincination which precedes the joy. There is a house of plenty in greater Jerusalem, בֵּית־לֶחֶם (5:1) by name, from which this Lady in labor, יִלְדֶה (5:2, cf. 4:9, 10) will bear one fit to be מֶלֶךְ and יוֹעֵץ (4:9) and to rule for the Shepherd of the flock in the age of peace to come (5:3, continuing the theme of part 1, 4:1-7).

The structure of part 2 (4:8-5:3) is founded on the wordplay and assonance between אַתָּה and עַתָּה which initiates the poem's six individual oracles. אַתָּה provides the frame by opening the first and final oracles (4:8 and 5:1), and עַתָּה begins each of the four oracles in the poem's center (4:9, 10b, 11, 14). This construction holds the listener's attention, as it was meant to capture Lady Zion's. Providing the transition from part 1 to part 2 is מַעֲתָה of 4:7b, and yielding the climactic conclusion is כִּי־עַתָּה of 5:3b. In summary:

מַעֲתָה . . . (4:7b), transition from part 1 (4:1-7) to part 2 (4:8-5:3)

. . . וְאַתָּה (4:8)

. . . עַתָּה (4:9)

. . . כִּי־עַתָּה (4:10b)

. . . וְעַתָּה (4:11)

. . . עַתָּה (4:14)

. . . וְאַתָּה (5:1)

כִּי־עַתָּה . . . (5:3b), climax/conclusion to part 2.

A wordplay encases the collection: the introductory address to מַגְדָּל (4:8a) and the concluding hope that יִגְדֵל (5:3b); as does the pastoral reference: עֹדֵד in 4:8 and רֹעֶה in 5:3. There is likewise a conceptual symmetry: the opening 4:8-9 introduce a crying בת־ציון with allusions of hope from the old fortified city of David, the עֶפְלָי; the final two oracles,

18. The verse should be translated, "Now you are lancing yourself, Daughter of lancers. . . ." The brilliant pun is that גִּדָּד (hithpolel) means both "to cut oneself" (a well-known mourning ritual) and "to gather or go in bands or troops," and the denominative גִּדּוֹד means both "cutting" (a sign of mourning in Jer 48:37) and "band or troop"; see Brown, p. 151. Thus at one level, "Now you are cutting yourself (or may you cut yourself), Daughter of Cutting"; and at a second level, "Now you are gathering in troops (or may you gather in troops), Daughter of Troops." Lance/lancers, in the above translation, captures the pun fairly well.

4:14, 5:1, present a mourning בת־גִּדּוּד whose hope lies in the city of David, בית־לחם.<sup>19</sup>

Internal assonance abounds; some examples:

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 4:8  | מגדל־עדר עפל<br>הממשלה הראשנה ממלכת             |
| 9    | תריעי רע  |
| 9–10 | כי־החזיקך חיל כילודה: חולי וגחי... כילודה כי... |
| 11   | תחנף ותחזו                                      |
| 14   | שכט/שפט<br>תתגדדי בת־גִּדּוּד<br>יכו על־הלחי    |
| 5:1  | יצא/ומצאתיו                                     |
| 2    | יולדה ילדה                                      |

The poem nears its conclusion by ending and binding successive parallel bicola with the thrice-repeated ישראל:

|      |             |
|------|-------------|
| 4:14 | שפט ישראל   |
| 5:1  | מושל בישראל |
| 2    | בני ישראל   |

This is the same technique employed by the poet to close his initial poem (1:13–15).

A number of features serve to connect this poem with part 1 and with previous poems. As a foil to Lady Zion throughout parts 1 and 2 are the גוים/עמים רבים (4:2, 3, [5], 11, 13). Mic 4:7 (part 1) reintroduces the concept of the שארית from 2:12, while 5:2 (part 2) extends it with יתר; and as the image of the עדר defined the שארית in 2:12, so recall of the שארית in 4:7 (part 1) prompts mention of the עדר in v. 8 (part 2). Both 4:4 and 5:3 (parts 1 and 2) present a vision in which one may ישב in safety, and both visions have an עולם quality (4:5, 7; 5:1). Meanwhile, the author continues his affection for pairing euphonic imperatives: 1:16; 2:10; 4:10, (11), 13, (4:2); cf. 6:1.

Mic 4:6–7 (part 1) repeated the אסף/קבץ pair in the context of the שארית as introduced in 2:12. The latter was quite ambiguous in its double-entendre; the current oracle is more clearly positive, though not without its own somber, sober truth: “her” who limps, “her” the outcast, “her” the exiled, “her” whom *I* have hurt. The equivocal pair is employed consistently in 4:11–12 (part 2) where the Divine stands behind the

19. Implication that humble beginnings offer more hope than fortifications is probable, and certainly congruent with Micah’s thought elsewhere.

niphal אסף (v. 11), now gathering the גרים רבים as an instrument of discipline for Lady Zion but, as part of the greater scheme of things, planning that these nations too will be gathered, קבץ (v. 12), and punished.

The ancient traditions of Zion and David are prevalent in this entire section (4:1-5:3). The vision is of a day when God will rule from his holy mountain; the rule will be complete and universal, as the opening theophany in chapter 1 had suggested it should be (1:2-5) and the intervening chapters have proved it is not. The instrument of his rule will be his king, a son of David. With his royal שבט he will be Israel's שפט (4:14) ruling for the Divine Chief Justice, שפט (4:3), and establishing the משפט that has heretofore been missing (3:1, 8, 9, 11; 4:3; [2:8; 3:3]; see above). The entire passage holds together well and progresses logically from the restoration of Zion (4:1-7) to the establishment of the rule of YHWH (4:7) to Davidic allusions (הממשלה הראשונה), עפל, 4:8; מוצאתיו מקדם מימי עולם, בית-לחם; 5:1), and appearance of the ideal shepherd (5:3).

This kingdom of God will mark the end of war and the need for it (4:1-5) since the Divine Warrior will be now the peaceful ארון כל-הארץ (4:13). His presence in his mountain house will attract the nations, not terrify them (as in 1:2-5). Yet this is a distant vision of hope; the language of holy war remains: exile from the city (4:10), gathering of foreign armies (4:11), collection for destruction (4:12), treading and threshing by the armored ox (4:13), the חרם (4:13), the gathered troops, the siege, the smitten king (4:14).

So also do anguish and lamentation persist. Recurrent are the cries of the woman in labor (4:9, 10; 5:2), a conventional Hebrew metaphor for reaction to disaster (cf. Allen, p. 333) used here, similar to Jer 6:24-26, in the context of mourning, as the funerary lacerations of 4:14 make explicit.

#### Micah 5:4-14

As the previous section was a series of oracles introduced by אתה/עתה, so this section is a collection of four oracles inaugurated by ויהיה (vv. 4, 6, 7, 9). Together they continue the vision of the age to come, though as above, not without their own reminder of imminent judgment.

The previous section concluded (5:3) with a picture of the ideal Davidic king shepherding (רעה) his flock in the universal empire of a future age, an age of שלום—security, salvation, universal wholeness; ideally peace (4:1-4), though the prophet evidently understood it as a kind of *Pax Israelitica*, a world-wide peace achieved by the Divine

Warrior and maintained by his new King David from Mount Zion, hence 4:5, 13; 5:4–8.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the first והיה oracle (5:4–5) and those which follow describe this שלום age. The tables will be turned. In this new age (contrary to the present), should Assyria attack, Israel will be victorious. The reference to the seven or eight human rulers is a general one which envisions a renewal of the Davidic empire when Zion and her king held sway over surrounding tribes and states.<sup>21</sup> In this new age, “he” (the new David allied with God) will save; “he” will deliver (נצל, v. 5).<sup>22</sup> The oracle is closely tied to the foregoing verbally and conceptually by the continuation of the רעה imagery (ורעה, 5:3; רעים, 4; ורעו, 5, possibly punning with רעע ‘break’) and the vision of the ארץ (international, 5:3; ‘our land’, 4; ‘their land, Assyria’, 5a; ‘our land’, 5b), and is strikingly symmetrical:

אשור כִּי־יבוא בארצנו וכי ידרך בארמנתינו . . .  
והציל מאשור כִּי־יבוא בארצנו וכי ידרך בגבולנו.

The next two והיה oracles of vv. 6 and 7–8 are closely allied, both having to do with the שארית which, as we know from 2:12 and 4:7, will compose Israel in the שלום age. In the style of our poet’s assonantal wordplay, אשור, thrice repeated in oracle one, gives way to שארית, vv. 6–7, helping to bind these three והיה oracles together. These latter two oracles are also symmetrical. Their opening lines are virtually identical,

20. Cf. Mowinckel, “Having this endowment [the spirit of God] he [the messiah] can display superhuman, heroic strength as a warrior in the *defense of land and people* (Isa. ix, 5), for early Judaism did not think of the blissful age of restoration as free from the need of defense against foreign hostility and envy (Mic. v, 3f.),” p. 176; and re: Zech 9:10 but in the same context of Micah and Isaiah, “But the ‘peace’ (*šālôm*) of which the prophet speaks here, comprises more than the mere prevention of war and victory over enemies. The word also includes all good fortune and well-being, safety and security, good order and morality in the nation, fellowship (‘wholeness’) and brotherhood, in short whatever may be described as material well-being and sound social and moral conditions,” p. 177. A number of scholars, e.g., Mowinckel, p. 176, Harrelson, p. 159, and Hillers (*Micah*) understand Mic 5:4a as the conclusion to the foregoing messianic oracle (“and this one will be peace,” cf. Isa 9:5), and they are probably correct. At the same time, parallelism with vv. 6, 7, and 9 insists that the phrase serve also as the introduction to the series describing the messianic age to come (“and this will be peace”). It is a well-known characteristic of Hebrew poetry that such a line is used to serve double duty in order to create continuity; here, as the conclusion to the messianic oracle (5:1–3) and the introduction to the Age-of-Peace oracle (5:4–14).

21. See Hillers (*Micah*) though, emendation of אדם to ארם is not necessary.

22. If דרך, common to theophanies and battle language, is original to 1:3, there may be an implication here that any nation who treads (דרך, vv. 4–5) on Israel in the future will have to deal with the Divine Treader, though 1:3 is distant for such a verbal link without further support for it in the present context.

with only the slight twist our poet is fond of making for variety. (See the example of vv. 4a and 5b above.) Each opening line is then followed by a double simile, and the little poem is concluded with a statement of trust which will introduce the final וְהָיָה oracle (vv. 9-14).

Hence the dew simile is parallel to the lion simile and is threatening, as in 2 Sam 17:12 (see McKeating; Rudolf; Hillers). The point is not only that the dew (i.e., divine rule) is pervasive, but that it is *מֵאֵת יְהוָה*; the new *שְׁלוֹם* age may employ *נְסִיכֵי אָדָם* (v. 4), but it is not controlled by *בְּנֵי-אָדָם* (v. 6). This picture of the new age is consistent with 2:12 where the flock "bleats uneasily when *אָדָם* draws near," and with 4:4 where all rest secure, *וְאִין מַחְרִיד* 'and no man will terrify'. Likewise, the lion simile likens the *שְׂאֲרִית* to an *עֵדֶר/צֹאן*, linking the oracle to 4:8 and 2:12. This lion who rules among the *בַּחֲמוֹת יַעַר* will be a welcomed reversal of pre-*שְׁלוֹם* Zion who is destined to become *בְּמֹת יַעַר* (3:12). The little flock is still among the *גּוֹיִם/עַמִּים רַבִּים* as she was in the previous section (cf. 4:2, 3, 5, 11, 13, and above); and as the first oracle ended with a reminder that only "he" will deliver, *הַצִּיל* (v. 5), the third reminds that without him there is "none to deliver," *מִצִּיל* (v. 7).

The fourth וְהָיָה oracle derives its organization and cohesion from the last word of oracle three, *יִכְרְתוּ* 'will be cut off', which gives way to a rhythmic series of verdicts beginning *וְהִכְרַתִּי* 'I will cut off' (vv. 9b, 10, 11, 12). At first hearing, this divine assault seems incongruous with the foregoing description of the *שְׁלוֹם* age. But we meet again the consistently bifocal vision of our prophet. The *שְׂאֲרִית* (vv. 6-7) who rules *אֲשׁוּר* (vv. 4-5) must be a *שְׂאֲרִית* devoid of *אֲשִׁירִים* (v. 13), idols of all sorts which claim divinity in place of the Divine. In short, there will be no *שְׁלוֹם* until the flock is culled and gathered, purified, purged; or to use the language of this oracle, until all her idols are "cut off." Such is the task of the Divine Warrior who, ironically, must wage war to destroy militarism. Yet the *שְׁלוֹם* age is impossible until Israel (the pronouns are masculine singular here), especially its current head(s), recognizes the divine rule and ceases from the worship of militarism as well as the more conventional idols and false objects of faith. Thus, the theme of this fourth oracle is quite similar to the destruction of handmade gods (1:7) and fortified cities (1:10-16) in chapter 1; and here as in chapter 1 the focus narrows to the *עֵיר*, a motif which will be pursued in chapter 6.

The rhyme and assonance of this final וְהָיָה oracle are intense, as the series in vv. 4-14 builds to its climax. The repetition of *מִקְרָב* (vv. 9, 12, 13) rebounds from the echoed *קָרַב* in the previous two oracles (v. 6 parallel *כַּרְבִּיבִים*, v. 7 parallel *כַּכְפִּיר*): "Israel, for you to rule *בְּקָרַב עַמִּים* (כַּכְפִּיר): "Israel, for you to rule *בְּקָרַב עַמִּים*, *רַבִּים*, you must remove, or have removed, the false gods *מִקְרָב*."

Consistent with the poet's international perspective, Israel could be called in 4:7 a גוי and is here too a גוי among גוים who hear, שמעו (1:2; 3:1, 9), the universal, theophanic warning yet will not listen, שמעו (5:14).

### Micah 6

The clever and arresting link between chapters 5 and 6 is clear to any hearer of the text and, as usual, works on two levels. (1) There is conceptual continuity with the typical Micah twist. Chapter 5 ends with "X will happen to those nations who do not listen"; chapter 6 opens addressing Israel in covenant language: "So *you* listen now. . . ." (2) This conceptual link is soldered with a metaphonic wordplay: the last word of chapter 5 is שמעו and the first word of chapter 6 is שמעו (both verbs employed with אשר).

The latter שמעו introduces a *rib* which renews the theme of 1:2. Now the Divine Warrior is enthroned as King and Judge (see Cross, pp. 188ff.). In a cosmic call similar to chapter 1, the גבעות, הרים, and מסרי ארץ are addressed to be witnesses, as אלהי מרום (v. 6, the attribute used to describe the enthroned Divine Warrior in Pss 68:19 and 144:7) indicts his people for breach of contract. Link with the more serene 4:1, where the same גבעות/הרים pair is employed, is also evident. Again the חטאת/פשע duo recurs from 1:5: the result for Samaria was a שממה (1:7); "the City" here addressed will meet the same fate, השמם (6:13), שמה (6:16). Gaining maximum rhetorical mileage from the שמעו-play, the poet repeats the verb in vv. 1b and 2, and renews its call with קול יהוה (v. 9a) and a third repetition in v. 9b.

Many have argued that vv. 6–8 are part of the *rib*, which generally includes an exhortation to reformed conduct or a judgment or both. Our poem is similar to Psalm 50 where theophany yields a court scene including recommended reform (vv. 14–15), though announcement of a verdict is more common, as in Deuteronomy 32 (vv. 19ff.; see below).<sup>23</sup> We have both in Micah 6. In addition, vv. 1–8 are held together rhetorically by repeated play with מה:

What have I done to you, v. 3a  
 What have I done to make you tired of me? Answer me! v. 3b  
 Remember what Balak plotted, v. 5aα  
 and what Balam answered! v. 5aβ  
 With what shall I come before YHWH . . . ? v. 6a  
 He has told you what is good, v. 8a  
 and what does YHWH require of you, except . . . ? v. 8b

23. Micah 6 contains both and is a form-critical unity. That the language of vv. 6–8 is "Deuteronomic" is far from clear. See the apt comments of Hillers (*Micah*), p. 79.

Again concept, form, and wordplay support each other. Repetition of ענה (vv. 3, 5) reinforces the מה-play. הלאתיך “How have I wearied you?” (v. 3) gives way to העלתיך “On the contrary, I brought you up from Egypt” (v. 4). Verse 5 ends with צדקות יהוה, while vv. 6-8 describe a צדיק.

Nor do vv. 6-8 lack a place within the greater scheme of the author. Lack of priestly torah (3:11; 4:2) required this “prophetic torah” at the core of which is משפט, currently missing in the people’s conduct (see 3:1, 8, 9, 11; 4:3; [2:8; 3:3] and above).

!קול/שמעו! renew the *lib* in v. 9, with the prophet speaking for the Divine Judge to the Tribe and the City (vv. 9-12). As one who has been witness to the heavenly court, the prophet is then obligated to bring to earth the verdict (vv. 13-16; see Cross, pp. 186-90).

Verses 9-12 are united with a sibilant alliteration in which רשע is prominent; again sound supports sense. The opening summons to the City, v. 9, gives way to two rhetorical questions, vv. 10-11, until the City is once more addressed in v. 12.<sup>24</sup> Hence the section is framed by reference to the City whose inhabitants are the antithesis of משפט both in word and deed; they use weights which are מרמה (v. 11) and their tongues are רמיה (v. 12). Such reference to the City not only recalls previous oracles, but ties this passage specifically to chapter 5 where the term עיר was introduced (5:10, 13; 6:9, 10; cf. the concluding feminine reference, v. 16b). Once again a Lady is addressed, this time unnamed. Perhaps she is Jerusalem, perhaps Samaria, perhaps another of Israel’s prostitutes; chapter 1 made it clear that there was no shortage of doomed cities, and the referent is likely indefinite by intent.

The Warrior-King’s judgment on sin, חטאת (vv. 7, 13) is rendered in the chapter’s concluding section, vv. 13-16. The I-Thou volley, structurally reminiscent of the You-Now volley of 4:8-5:3, reverses the normal I-Thou exchange of covenant language (e.g., Joshua 24):

אני v. 13 I

אתה v. 14a thou

24. The first word of v. 10, עור, should be read עיר as the final word of v. 9 (see LXX and Elliger) and the phrase translated, “The City—who has named her for destruction?” Cf. Jer 47:7. For the grammar of a pronominal suffix followed by the defining noun, see Kautzsch, 131 m. אשר and the feminine pronominal suffix of v. 10 then bring the listener back to the City introduced in v. 9; English requires repetition of the noun: “O City, whose rich are full of violent wrong, whose inhabitants are speakers of lies with mouths caging treacherous tongues.” These verses are not out of order as is commonly argued. The structure is: the עיר (vv. 9 and 12), with inserted description of the עיר (vv. 10-11), held together with sibilant alliteration, wordplay, and repetition of roots. Meanwhile, there is subtle linear development of thought.

אתן v. 14b I  
 אתה v. 15a thou  
 אתה v. 15b thou  
 תחי v. 16b I

The predominant alliteration shifts from sibilant to dental (“t”), a harsh, piercing tone commensurate with the verdict.

A curse from Lev 26:26 touches off a series of rhythmic and symmetric bicola which reverse the covenant promise of prosperity in the promised land. “From Shittim to Gilgal” (v. 5) is a poignant reminder of the Divine Warrior’s leading of his people in Holy War across the Jordan into Canaan (Cross, p. 141), and it is significant that mention is made of the prophetess Miriam (v. 4) whose role it was to sing the victory song. Here, however, the land is vanquished. The citizens are still the covenantal עמי (vv. 2, 3, 5, 16), but their City is a wasteland (vv. 13, 16) pillaged by war at the hand of the Warrior and devoid of food, farms, fertility. Hence she lifts up no song of victory, but consistent with the rest of the book of Micah, breaks forth into lamentation: ‘אללי לי! Woe is me!’ (7:1ff.). Chapter 7 is her lament.

This lone lamenting lady of chapter 7 cries out in the barren land described in 6:13–16, such that the poet builds on the harvest imagery of 4:12–13, and she expresses her חרפה ‘reproach’ (6:16) in the context of חרף ‘harvest’. לאכול (7:1) echoes תאכל (6:14) and בציר (7:1) recalls תקצור (6:15). Lack of a חסיד (7:2) explains the lack in harvest (6:13–7:4), for חסד is precisely what God requires (6:8); fortunately the Divine is filled with it (7:18) and will share it with his covenant people (7:20). Similarly, משפט was lacking but required in the *rib* of chapter 6; while in 7:9 confidence is expressed that there will someday be a *rib* in which Israel is defended and משפט established. Then the פשע/חטאת pair from 6:7 and previously in the book (1:5a, 13; 3:8) will be forgiven and wiped out (7:18–19, cf. v. 9). All this is because, though Israel, like the nations, could not listen, שמעו (6:1 and Micah *passim*), her God can and does and will, ישמעני (7:7). This God’s צדקוּת in Exodus and Conquest are recalled in 6:4–5 and 7:15 as the basis for a new ירוּה (7:9), and the covenant language so prevalent in chapter 6 recurs in chapter 7’s conclusion (vv. 18–20).

Within the enveloping context of a *woman who laments* due to the approach of the *Divine Warrior* (Mic 1 and 7) stand chapters 2–6 which cohere because of the same tripartite imagery. In an “un-English” but Hebrew style, wordplay and paronomasia have been used by the redactor to cement the prophetic oracles around these three traditions.



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