

Micah 1:2-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/mic/mic-1/micah-12-7/>

This first section of Micah's first address (Micah 1:2 – 2:13) contains a call to all of the LORD's creation to be witnesses to His accusations against all of Israel. This is followed by the LORD's announcement of His judgment upon Samaria, the northern kingdom.

As if shouting as loud as possible, Micah begins the first oracle by proclaiming *Hear, O peoples, all of you* (v. 2). Each of the three addresses that comprise the book begin with the command to *hear*. The word *peoples* probably refers to all the people on the earth.

He then called *Listen, O earth and all it contains*. This is a call for all of the earth, its contents and its inhabitants, to pay attention to what is about to be said. Micah also states to *let the Lord GOD be a witness against you* (vs 2). The language used here is that of a lawsuit that the suzerain/ruler of the covenant between Yahweh/*God* and Israel was bringing against His vassals in the people of Israel and Judah.

He is called the *Lord GOD*. The word *Lord* here (Hebrew “*ādōnāy*”), sometimes translated “master,” is used to communicate God's sovereignty over all. The word *GOD* (Heb. “*Yahweh*”) is His covenant name and means “the existent One” (Exodus 6:4 – 7). Thus, the One speaking was “Lord Yahweh.”

The lawsuit (*witness against you*) would begin when *The Lord* (once again “*ādōnāy*,” “master”) spoke *from His holy temple* (vs 2). The word *temple* (Heb. “*hēkāl*”) is better translated “palace” here because this is a picture of a sovereign LORD governing from His royal residence in heaven.

Thus, this message was directed to two audiences—the non-covenant people of the world and the LORD's covenant people dwelling His Promised Land.

Indeed, the witnesses better be watchful because *behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place* (v. 3). The tense of the verb *is coming forth* (Heb. “*yōšē*”) implies that the LORD's actions would come in the near future. *His place* refers to His holy place in heaven (see v. 2). The result of His departure from His heavenly palace was that *He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth* (vs 3).

The term *high places* (Heb. “*bāmâ*”) refers to a hilltop upon which a shrine to a pagan god existed and pagan worship was conducted (1 Kings 11:7). For the LORD to *tread on* them is for Him to demonstrate His sovereignty and superiority over any deity that humans have devised for themselves (Deuteronomy 33:29)

The result of the LORD's descent upon the earth was that *the mountains will melt under Him And the valleys will be split* (v. 4). The reference to the *mountains* here could be the same as the pagan *high places* mentioned earlier, or it might refer to a normal mountain. Either way, it is a

graphic picture of the LORD's sovereignty over things (such as mountains) that in our eyes cannot be moved or altered in any way. The melting of the mountains could be a graphic image of earthquakes that cause landslides.

Another result of the coming of the LORD is *the valleys will be split*. This is probably a picture of the earth opening up into huge fissures, destroying the *valleys* and everything in them. This seems to display an upheaving and reshaping of the earth. It is similar to Isaiah's proclamation that "the earth will be shaken from its place" by the Lord in judgement (Isaiah 13:13).

Not only should Judah take note, but the entire world should take note, that God will judge the earth with fire, and remove all wickedness (2 Peter 3:7).

The words *mountains* (high places) and *valleys* (low places) form a figure of speech called a merism, the comparison of opposites to communicate totality. Here, Micah is presenting a graphic picture that all parts of the earth will be deeply affected by God's coming judgment.

So, as a result of His fiery presence, the earth will melt *Like wax before the fire* (vs 4), another simile describing the melting mountains, which would be *Like water poured down a steep place* (vs 4), a second simile of the destruction of the mountains. Nothing (not even a mountain) will be able to stand against His coming, and nothing can offer any resistance to Him. God will eventually and inevitably end wickedness, and create a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:12-13).

The reason for all of this destruction of nature was that Israel was unfaithful to the covenant with the LORD. In fact, *all this is for the rebellion of Jacob* (v. 5). The *rebellion* (Heb. "pesha'," often translated "transgression" [Psalm 25:7; 32:1]) is a reference to the willful breaking of their covenant with the LORD (Hosea 8:1). That the word *Jacob* refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel can be seen in its parallel with *the house of Israel* in the next line.

The *rebellion of Jacob* is further defined as *the sins of the house of Israel* (vs 5). The word for *sins* (Heb. "ḥaṭṭōwṭ") conveys the idea of missing the mark or falling short of the standard. Taken together, the words *rebellion* and *sins* describe a people who are consciously and deliberately disobeying the LORD's covenant law. The words *rebellion* and *sins* occur together four times in Micah (1:5; 3:8; 6:7; 7:18).

The rest of verse 5 poetically describes what this *rebellion* and these *sins* entail. It is presented in the form of questions. The first question is *what is the rebellion of Jacob?* (v. 5).

The word *Jacob* refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jacob's name was changed from Jacob ("deceiver" or "supplanter") to Israel ("God prevails"). Here Israel may be referred to as *Jacob* because of its wickedness; it failed to fill its proper role, assigned by God. God assigned Israel the role of being a priest unto all the nations of the earth (Exodus 19:6). But Israel was not doing its priestly job to show a better way to live to the other nations. This seems to infer that because Israel did not do its job, the entire earth was affected.

Micah's answer to the question *what is the rebellion of Jacob?* is also stated in the form of a question—*Is it not Samaria?* (vs 5).

The city of Samaria became the capital of the Northern Kingdom when Omri the king (885BC – 875BC), *bought the hill Samaria* (1 Kings 16:24). At the time it was purchased by Omri, it was not developed, but Omri and his son Ahab developed it into a city and made it the place where they ruled. Thus, it became the center of both government and pagan worship. In blatant disobedience to the LORD and His covenant, Ahab promoted Baal worship and other pagan deities (1 Kings 16:30-34).

The second question, similar to the first, was *What is the high place of Judah?* (vs 5). The high place was probably a reference to pagan idolatry. The answer came in the form of another question—*Is it not Jerusalem?* (vs 5).

The implied answer is “yes,” because like in the Northern Kingdom, pagan worship took place in Jerusalem, the capital city of the Southern Kingdom. The cities of *Samaria* and *Jerusalem* represent the kingdoms themselves. This was in direct violation of God's covenant/treaty agreement with Israel (Exodus 20:2-6). As a result of their covenant/treaty violation, the corrective measures prescribed therein will now be enforced (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

As a consequence of the widespread practice of idolatry amongst the LORD's covenant people in the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 14:22 – 24; Hosea 4:14), He *will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country* (v. 6). This was one of many curses prescribed in God's covenant/treaty with Israel if they disobeyed their responsibilities under the treaty to love God and love their neighbors (Deuteronomy 28:52). Israel had chosen to follow the pagan ways of exploitation rather than God's way of loving our neighbors (Hosea 4:2). Therefore, the enforcement provisions would soon be enacted.

Omri and Ahab had built Samaria into a beautiful city, but because of the pagan rebellion of the people in the Northern Kingdom, its capital would be turned into empty countryside. It would become *planting places for a vineyard* (vs 6). No longer would it be a city; it would return to becoming farmland, implying that its political and religious authority would be abolished.

Because *Samaria* represents the whole Northern Kingdom, this infers that the whole kingdom would suffer this devastating judgment. This judgement took place in 722 BC, when Assyria destroyed Samaria and exiled the people of Israel (2 Kings 17:5-6).

To ensure its complete destruction, the LORD stated that He *will pour her stones down into the valley* (vs 6). These stones were used to build walls and buildings, and He would cause all of them to fall down into the valley below. This would *lay bare her foundations* (vs 6) and thus Samaria's (the Northern Kingdom's) urban society would disappear.

Along with the loss of their urban society, Samaria would lose its pagan religion when *all of her idols will be smashed* (v. 7). This would prove that these so-called “gods” were incapable of protecting themselves or helping others.

In fact, *all of her earnings will be burned with fire* (vs 7). *Her earnings* (Heb. “etnanneyha”) here could refer to the wages earned by cultic prostitutes working in pagan shrines throughout the nation. Worshipers would bring silver and gold to the pagan shrine as offerings which would then be melted down and made into more idols. More broadly it probably refers to the economy, much of which was apparently interwoven with pagan exploitation. The means of economic production and trade will be destroyed. In fact, Israel’s population was primarily exiled to Assyria, and Samaria was repopulated by other peoples (2 Kings 17:23-24).

The LORD’s judgment would result so that *all of her images I* (the LORD) *will make desolate* (lit., “place devastation [on]”). The idols that the LORD’s people made and worshiped would be melted down by the Assyrians and made into their own images for them to worship. In other words, the LORD would wipe out all pagan worship from among His people.

Samaria, being both the capital city as well as the center of pagan worship in the Northern Kingdom, *collected them* (the wages) *from a harlot’s earnings* (vs 7), implying that much of the wealth of the nation came from pagan prostitution. Pagan (or cultic) prostitution was important to pagans because they believed that if they imitated the behavior of their gods, they would incur their favor. So, a man, in an effort to guarantee a god’s blessing of a good crop, would have sexual intercourse with a temple prostitute because he had been taught that pagan gods and goddesses had intercourse with each other. The saying “Imitation is the highest form of flattery” comes to mind here.

The LORD’s judgment was that *to the earnings of a harlot they will return*. Instead of the government receiving the wages (offerings) of the temple prostitutes, they would remain with the harlot. The corrupt commerce propping up the Samarian economy will collapse. The ability of the elites to coerce, extract, and exploit will end (Amos 4:1; Hosea 5:10, 6:9). Their political power will fail.

The LORD was the source of the Israelites’ prosperity, not pagan deities. Their obedience to Him and His covenant guaranteed His abundant provision (Deuteronomy 28:1-14; 29:9). But instead they disobeyed their covenant/treaty with their Suzerain/Ruler God, Yahweh. So now the enforcement provisions would be implemented, as provided in the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:15-68).

Biblical Text

**² Hear, O peoples, all of you;
Listen, O earth and all it contains,
And let the Lord GOD be a witness against you,
The Lord from His holy temple.**

**³ For behold, the LORD is coming forth from His place.
He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.**

**⁴ The mountains will melt under Him
And the valleys will be split,
Like wax before the fire,
Like water poured down a steep place.**

⁵ All this is for the rebellion of Jacob
And for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the rebellion of Jacob?

Is it not Samaria?

What is the high place of Judah?

Is it not Jerusalem?

⁶ For I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the open country,
Planting places for a vineyard.

I will pour her stones down into the valley

And will lay bare her foundations.

⁷ All of her idols will be smashed,

All of her earnings will be burned with fire

And all of her images I will make desolate,

For she collected *them* from a harlot's earnings,

And to the earnings of a harlot they will return.