

Micah 1:8-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/mic/mic-1/micah-18-16/>

Micah mourns the LORD's forthcoming judgement on His people.

In these verses, Micah recorded his reaction to the severe judgment the LORD had pronounced upon His people. It was a reaction based on love for his fellow countrymen. Micah stated that *because of this I must lament and wail* (v. 8). To *lament* (Heb. “*espəḏāh*”) means to mourn for someone who was deceased. Micah saw how complete the destruction would be and could only *lament and wail* (Heb. “*wə’ēlīlāh*,” “to cry out” in deep sorrow).

In addition to his inward mourning, Micah would exhibit his distress bodily by going *barefoot and naked* (v 8), both signs of extreme mourning (2 Samuel 15:30; Isaiah 20:2; 22:12; Jeremiah 25:34). He would express his distress vocally when he would *make a lament like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches* (v 8). The word *jackals* probably refers to animals that were scavengers and wandered around abandoned towns and cities. They became a symbol of judgment and desolation (Ezekiel 32:2).

The word for *ostriches* (Heb. “*ya’ānāh*”) has been translated “owls” in other versions. It refers to creatures that, like *jackals*, roamed during the night and made sounds similar to wailing. Together, it is a picture of the prophet who, in his deep grief, began screeching and howling like night creatures, because of the devastation that he saw would come upon his people. It is worth noting that although the prophet did not like the message God gave him to speak to the people, he faithfully pronounced it anyway.

The reason for Micah's mourning was that *her wound is incurable* (v. 9). The LORD's judgment would be so severe that Samaria could not recover. Judah as a nation would cease to be.

Also, this perpetual suffering *has come to Judah and has reached the gate of my people, Even to Jerusalem* (v 9). Note that Micah calls the people of Jerusalem (and by extension Judah) *my people* (a phrase used nine times in the book), indicating that he identified with the people under the LORD's judgment and was deeply saddened. This was another reason that Micah was very upset about the situation. His country will be destroyed.

Presuming Micah ministered between 735 and 700 BC, the Northern Kingdom (Samaria/Israel) was destroyed during the time of his ministry; the Assyrians conquered Samaria in 722 BC. The tribes of Samaria/Israel were dispersed throughout the Assyrian Empire, and did not return. Later, Judah and Jerusalem were threatened by Assyria in 701 BC, but the LORD intervened and they were delivered (2 Chronicles 32:1 – 22).

Judah would exist until the Babylonian captivity, which lasted from 605 BC to around 535 BC. During this time, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. So it is likely that Micah's prophecy came to pass shortly after his prophetic ministry ended.

In verses 10 – 16, Micah then describes the extent of the LORD’s judgment in a poem. In this poem, he uses wordplay, including puns. The puns involve the names of several towns and villages that were near his hometown of Moresheth-gath (see v. 1); Micah used the names of the towns to describe the chaos caused by the LORD’s judgment.

The wordplays/puns are as follows:

- *Tell it not in Gath, Weep not at all* (v. 10). *Gath* was a Philistine city and thus was an enemy. Micah did not want news of Jerusalem’s troubles to reach *Gath* because it would encourage Israel’s enemies. The pun can be seen in that the name (*Gath*) sounds similar to the Hebrew verb meaning “to tell” (Heb. “taggîdū”), resulting in the statement “tell it not in Tell” or “Gath it not in Gath.”
- *At Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself in the dust.* The town of *Beth-le-aphrah* is an Israelite city whose name means “house of dust.” Micah used a pun here to tell the citizens of “house of dust” to *roll yourself in the dust* to express their distress and mourning (Jeremiah 25:34) at the coming judgment. This would result in the statement “roll yourself in the dust, O house of dust.”
- *Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir, in shameful nakedness* (v. 11). The name *Shaphir* means “beautiful” or “pleasant,” and Micah calls upon the inhabitants to walk around *in shameful nakedness*. In other words, that which was beautiful is about to be turned into that which is shameful and dishonorable.
- *The inhabitant of Zanaan does not escape.* The name *Zanaan* (Heb. “ša’ānān”) sounds like the Hebrew word translated “come out” (Heb. “yāšə’āh”). Micah’s point here is that the residents of *Zanaan* cannot *escape* (or go out) of the city in order to escape its destruction, possibly because it is under siege.
- *The lamentation of Beth-ezel: "He will take from you its support."* The town of *Beth-ezel* (“house of removal”) needed to lament because the LORD was about to *take from you its support*, meaning the LORD will remove everything that the city depends on for its existence.
- *For the inhabitant of Maroth Becomes weak waiting for good* (v. 12). The name *Maroth* sounds like the Hebrew word for “bitterness.” The idea here is that citizens of *Maroth* would become bitter when, *waiting for good*, instead *a calamity* (Heb. “ra’,” “evil”) would *come down from the LORD To the gate of Jerusalem*.
 - - This is likely a reference to the Assyrian invasion of Judah when they conquered dozens of Judean towns (possibly including *Maroth*) and besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC (2 Kings 18 – 19).
- *Harness the chariot to the team of horses, O inhabitant of Lachish* (v. 13). The pun appears with the Hebrew word for *to the team of horses* (Heb. “rekesh,” lit. “steeds”) and

the name *Lachish* (Heb. “lakish”). *Lachish* was a town known for its horses, being a fortress city defending the western boundary of Judah. It was with much sarcasm Micah implored the people in Lachish to hitch horses to chariots and escape the town before it and they were destroyed by the Assyrians.

But there was a problem. Micah declared that *She* (Lachish) *was the beginning of sin To the daughter of Zion. The daughter of Zion* is a reference to Jerusalem (Zephaniah 3:13; Lamentations 2:13).

There is no biblical record of what this involved, but one suggestion is that the *horses* mentioned here had been given to the sun god and thus were offerings to idols (see 2 Kings 23:11). This practice must have spread to other places in Judah, polluting the whole land with pagan worship.

Lachish would not escape God’s judgment. *Because in you were found The rebellious acts of Israel.* Perhaps *Lachish* trusted in their horses and military strength. But because of their *rebellious acts* against their Suzerain/ruler Yahweh, violating their covenant/treaty with Him, they will be judged, according to the terms of the treaty.

- *Therefore you will give parting gifts* (v. 14). The word *you* in this phrase probably refers to Jerusalem. The phrase *parting gifts* is related to the word for “dowry,” gifts given to newlyweds at their wedding. When they departed the ceremony, they took the gifts with them. Here, gifts were given *on behalf of Moresheth-gath*, Micah’s home town.

This is probably the meaning: because *Moresheth* is somewhat similar to the Hebrew word for “bride” (Heb. “me’orasa”), the picture given here might be that the leaders of Judah were forced to give a “dowry” (i.e., a tribute) and a bride (the town of *Moresheth-gath*) to the conquering Assyrians.

- *The houses of Achzib will become a deception* (v 14). The name *Achzib* means “deceit,” making the pun read “the houses of deceit will become a deception.” The *houses* might refer to places of business and commerce. If this is true, the *deception* might be that *the kings of Israel* expected to share in the prosperity of the businesses in *Achzib*, but there would be no prosperity because the *houses of Achzib* would be destroyed by the enemy.
 - *Moreover, I will bring on you The one who takes possession* (a conqueror), *O inhabitant of Mareshah* (v. 15). The word *Moreover* is better translated “Besides.” It indicates further consequences of the LORD’s judgment, *Who will bring on you the one who takes possession* (a conqueror).
- - Taking *possession* implies the action of a conqueror. Here, he is usually identified as Sennacherib, king of Assyria. He took possession of all the towns of Judah prior to surrounding Jerusalem around 700 BC (2 Kings 18:13).

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- The wordplay can be seen in the name of *Mareshah*, which sounds like the Hebrew word for “conqueror.” That which is a “possession” (*Mareshah*) will become the *possession* of the conqueror.
- *The glory of Israel will enter Adullam.* The reference to *Adullam* (a Canaanite town) probably points to an event in the life of David. Saul was pursuing David, and David was forced to hide in a cave at *Adullam* (1 Samuel 22:1). This was during the darkest days of David’s life. He was a fugitive trying to escape the wrath of Saul instead of rightfully ruling Israel as king.

Here, this could mean that *The glory of Israel* (the king) would enter very dark days because they were pursued by enemies and would be displaced from ruling the LORD’s people. This came to pass for most of Judah during an invasion by Assyria (2 Kings 18:13). It ultimately came to pass when Judah was exiled to Babylon (1 Chronicles 9:1).

Micah then called on the people of Judah to *make yourself bald and cut off your hair* (v. 16) as a demonstration of their grief. They were to do this *because of the children of your delight*, referring to their beloved offspring. Micah predicted that something tragic was about to happen to their *children*.

In parallel to the first phrase, he told them to *extend your baldness like the eagle*. To *extend* (Heb. “harhibî,” “multiply,” or “enlarge”) could mean to remain bald for a long time, or it could mean that the baldness was to extend to their whole head, including the beard. Either way, shaving one’s head was an expression of deep mourning (Job 1:20; Isaiah 15:2; Ezekiel 27:31; Amos 8:10). Micah exhorts Judah to mourn deeply because of the massive destruction that will come upon the people of Judah.

The reason for this mourning was that the LORD was about to cause *the children of your delight to go from you into exile* (v 16). The Assyrians already had taken the children of the northern tribes into exile, and they now had conquered some towns in Judah. This was to demonstrate to Judah that, because they were just as wicked as Israel, a conqueror would take their children as well. This would diminish Judah’s future population and jeopardize any hope of restoration of the nation. The Assyrians might or might not have taken children from the towns of Judah which they conquered before 701 BC. But we know this did occur beginning in 605 BC when the Babylonians exiled the people of Judah to Babylon (2 Kings 25:21; Daniel 1:3).

Biblical Text

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I must go barefoot and naked;
I must make a lament like the jackals
And a mourning like the ostriches.**

**⁹ For her wound is incurable,
For it has come to Judah;
It has reached the gate of my people,
*Even to Jerusalem.***

¹⁰ Tell it not in Gath,
Weep not at all.
At Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself in the dust.
¹¹ Go on your way, inhabitant of Shaphir, in shameful nakedness.
The inhabitant of Zaanan does not escape.
The lamentation of Beth-ezel:
"He will take from you its support."
¹² For the inhabitant of Maroth
Becomes weak waiting for good,
Because a calamity has come down from the LORD
To the gate of Jerusalem.
¹³ Harness the chariot to the team of horses, O inhabitant of Lachish—
She was the beginning of sin
To the daughter of Zion—
Because in you were found
The rebellious acts of Israel.
¹⁴ Therefore you will give parting gifts
On behalf of Moresheth-gath;
The houses of Achzib *will* become a deception
To the kings of Israel.
¹⁵ Moreover, I will bring on you
The one who takes possession, O inhabitant of Mareshah.
The glory of Israel will enter Adullam.
¹⁶ Make yourself bald and cut off your hair,
Because of the children of your delight;
Extend your baldness like the eagle,
For they will go from you into exile.