

MICAH and the mountain of the Lord

Our next prophet, **Micah**, was a contemporary of Isaiah, in the reigns of bad King Ahaz and good King Hezekiah. He came from **Moreseth-Gath**, a town near the Philistines to the west of Judah. His opening chapter warns that the Ten Tribe Kingdom in the north is about to collapse because of God's judgments on their sins. Sadly, he protests, their evil ways have already infected Judah in the south. But he puts over his message in an amazing series of **puns** that would have riveted the original Hebrew readers. For example, in chapter 1 he lists the towns of Judah that would fall into the hands of the invaders. In v10 he says "*Don't tell the news in Gath!*" English readers would not realise that the word for Gath in Hebrew sounds like "**tell**". "*In Beth Leaphrah roll yourselves in the dust*", he continues. Beth Leaphrah means – guess what – "**house of dust**". "*The inhabitants of Zaanan do not come out*". Zaanan sounds like "**come out**" in Hebrew. "*The houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel*" – Achzib means "**dried up**", like a stream that has no water when you badly need to drink. And so on.

The next chapter condemns those who lay awake at night planning how they could grab land and houses from the poor. They did not want to hear prophets like Micah. "*Do not preach of trouble and disgrace*", they cried (chapter 2:6). Their favourite sermons, Micah concluded wryly (v11), were about wine and beer! Micah's rivals, he said, "*cry 'Peace' when they have something to eat, but declare war against him who puts nothing into their mouths*", chapter 3:5. It is a familiar story. Church leaders who seek to be popular weaken their message and leave the country without moral guidance. Micah predicted that princes and priests who were motivated by the love of money would leave Jerusalem ploughed like a field. This judgment fell on

the avaricious religious leaders of Jesus' generation centuries later, when the Roman army under **Hadrian** ploughed up the ruins of the city and changed its name to **Aelia Capitolina**.

In contrast, Micah continues in chapter four with a recitation from Isaiah (his contemporary) about the last days, when a restored Jerusalem would become the centre of worship for all nations. In a remarkable word-play on the return of their fore-father Jacob from his exile with Uncle Laban in the north, he saw the nation of Israel brought back, limping, (v6), and in travail like Rachel their matriarch, (v10). Like her they would weep for sorrow, but be comforted by the birth of a son at Bethlehem (chapter 5:2, 3 – the place where Rachel died in childbirth) who would be ruler in Israel. We know this remarkable prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus was born in that very same town. And Jesus, born to be the judge of Israel, (5:1), was indeed "smitten with a rod upon his cheek" during his trial - rejected by the very people he came to deliver. Yet in due course he would deliver them from their enemies, and rule to the ends of the earth – the Kingdom of God. The prophet concludes his work with a vision of a latter-day Exodus for the Jewish people. Their sins would be washed away in the waters of the sea by a merciful God, chapter 7:19, and God would fulfil His promise to Abraham to give him and his people the Land of Israel for ever. How remarkable it is that Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans, is still there today, and God's people, limping like Jacob in their rejection of their Saviour, have been returning from the lands of their dispersion, ready for him to save them from their enemies and their sins.

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