

**THE HOLY SCRIPTURES  
WITH COMMENTARY:  
MICAHA**

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The Holy Scriptures with Commentary: Micah by Max L. Margolis

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## MICAH

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The Book of Micah occupies the sixth place in the group of the "Twelve Prophets", which, at an early date (Sirach xlix. 10), formed a volume by itself, counting as one book among the twenty-four of Holy Writ. According to the heading (i. 1), the author of the prophecies was Micah of Moresheth (a small town in the Shephelah, the Lowland, or slope, between the high hills of Judæa and the maritime coast of Philistia), a contemporary of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. There is nothing in the utterances of the prophet which points to the stirring events connected with Sennacherib's Palestinian campaign in 701; it may therefore be assumed that his ministry closed at a previous date, thus extending in all over a period of some thirty years (from 735 to 705). The prophetic activity of Isaiah began a little earlier and closed somewhat later.

There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the date given in the heading (i. 1), especially as it is in part corroborated by Jer. xxvi. 18 f., where Micah iii. 12 is quoted in full. The destruction of Samaria, which is spoken of as a future event in i. 5 ff., is placed by many scholars, at variance with II Kings xviii. 10, in the reign of Ahaz, and the reign of Jotham must have been considerably shorter than we are led to believe from II Kings xv. 33. See Kittel, *History of the Hebrews*, § 53 a.

2. The period in which the two prophets lived and worked was that of Assyrian supremacy in the affairs of Western Asia. It was the age of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727), Shalmaneser IV (727-722), Sargon II (722-705), Sennacherib (705-681)—those mighty monarchs under whom the westward advance of Assyria, begun with a steady purpose a century earlier, culminated in the conquest of Syria, the fall of Damascus (in 732) and Samaria (in 722), and the reduction of Judah and other Palestinian principalities to a state of vassalage. The Assyrian colossus, absolute master of the Armenian highlands as well as the countries west of the Euphrates, had humbled recalcitrant Babylon and was at the gate of the Pharaonic empire, both of which had repeatedly instigated the Palestinian princes to foolhardy sedition against their Assyrian masters.

Palestine, from its geographical position and configuration, was at all times in antiquity an object of prey to the two mighty empires in the Nile and in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, and split up into a variety of cantonal principalities resisting fusion and rendering foreign aggression an easy matter. The history of Israel and Judah is therefore, politically speaking, but an episode in the contest of the two great civilizations for supremacy. The Old Babylonian dominion in the fourth millennium before the Christian era was succeeded by the Egyptian conquest under Tahutimes III; the Egyptian supremacy lasted not quite two centuries. From the fourteenth to the tenth century Egypt was too weak to interfere in the affairs of Syria and Palestine; in that interval of time our ancestors settled in Palestine, and were on their way to founding a powerful commonwealth. The successful career of David was unhampered on the one side by Egypt and on the other by Assyria, just then in a period of decline after its rise to power toward the end of the fourteenth



century and its westward movements in the twelfth and eleventh. Solomon's advances were checked by Shishak I who was ambitious to reconquer Palestine, which had been lost to Egypt for two centuries or more. The Pharaoh plotted with Jeroboam against Solomon; in the fifth year of Rehoboam he invaded Palestine, causing great suffering to Israel and Judah. In the eighth century Egyptian influence again began to manifest itself in Palestine. Egypt had her emissaries at the petty Palestinian courts, sowing discord and craftily inciting the princes to resistance against the Assyrian advance. Though always unreliable ("a bruised reed," II Kings xviii. 21), and rarely making good her promises of help, she was the cause of all the trouble in Palestine, beginning with 721, for a whole century. The flames of rebellion were fanned from the opposite quarter by an ambitious Chaldæan prince, Merodach-baladan II, who twice, on the accession of Sargon as well as on that of Sennacherib, sought to involve Syria and Palestine in an uprising against Assyria. See Paton, *Early History of Syria and Palestine*, 1901, chapters I-XII.

3. Between Egypt and Assyria, Israel acted, to use the language of Hosea (vii. 11), "like a silly dove, without understanding." In its coquetry with the great powers, it was fast losing its individuality. "Ephraim, he mixeth himself among the peoples," the same prophet complains (vii. 8). The whole aim of the Mosaic Law had been to safeguard Israel's vocation as a holy nation. On the soil of Palestine, Israel was to create an unique order of things grounded in equity and justice and rooted in the love of God. But Israel soon forgot the teachings of its greatest prophet. Once the Israelites had crossed the Jordan, they succumbed to the allurements of a superior civilization. The native population proved too powerful for wholesale extermination, and so they made peace with the

Canaanites and intermarried with them, "they mingled themselves with the nations and learned their deeds" (Ps. cvi. 36). The Lord was worshipped after the same manner and with the same impure rites as the Baals of the native population. Under Ahab, of the house of Omri, the cult of the Phœnician Baal was introduced. The worship of the "host of heaven" was particularly in vogue in the time with which we are concerned. Child sacrifices were customary; of Ahaz it is reported (II Kings xvi. 3) that he offered his own son by fire. The Temple at Jerusalem did not escape defilement. All over the land, "upon every high hill, and under every leafy tree," high places were erected. Moreover, law and justice were trampled under foot by a rapacious aristocracy. Through usury and all manner of exaction, the poor were fleeced, robbed of all their possessions. Samaria and Jerusalem vied with Nineveh and Babylon and Memphis. "For Israel forgot his Maker, and builded palaces; and Judah multiplied fortified cities" (Hosea viii. 14).

4. Unlike Isaiah, who took an active interest in the political questions of the day, frequently confronting kings and high dignitaries in person, Micah preferred the part of a distant, but nevertheless keen observer. He looks upon the military ambitions of Judah as the root of all evil, its "chiefest sin" (i. 13); together with the superstitions and the idolatrous practices of the two capitals, they con-

stitute the reprehensible present order of things, which must pass away (v. 9 ff.). The main subject of his denunciations, however, is the maladministration of justice and the exploitation of the poor on the part of the ruling classes. With the fearlessness of an Amos, whose home was in the neighboring wilderness of Tekoa, he declaims against the general corruption. The princes and the judges are in league with the unscrupulous rich (vii. 3), whose houses are full of the proceeds of violence (vi. 12). The traders are deceitful with their wicked balances and their scant measure (vi. 10f.). The most intimate relations of friendship and domestic life are disrupted (vii. 5 f.). Jerusalem appears to the prophet as a city built with the blood of her poor (iii. 10; comp. ii. 1 f.; 8 f.; iii. 1-3).

5. The ruin of Samaria seemed to the prophet to involve the fate of the southern kingdom (i. 9; comp. verse 6). He boldly announced the destruction of Jerusalem which he believed to be imminent (iii. 12). He conceived it as a divine punishment in return for the sins of her leading classes. His stern rebukes and his prophecy of evil naturally made him unpopular. He was antagonized by a class of easy-going, optimistic prophets, who kept assuring the people that no evil would befall the city. Against them, no less than against the rapacious rich, the corrupt judges, and the venal priests, the prophet directs his biting invective (iii. 5 f.; 11). The popular prophet is the man bent on falsehood and