Micah's Surprising Role and Message

A Discourse Analysis Study of the 12 Minor Prophets

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Preface to this Edition

This article started out life as a Bible School course, prepared for students in the French Territory of New Caledonia. It then spread its wings and began to fly, as a shorter version written in French, for the *European Journal of Theology.* Now, with their kind permission, this longer, more detailed version has been produced in English for the benefit of a wider, anglophone readership.

Since this article concentrates on the discourse organisation of the 12 Minor Prophets as a complete collection, this could not be accomplished without taking account of the discourse organisation of each of the twelve prophets in turn. Consequently, this article is only the first in a series.

At the same time, it is still a work in progress, for each of the twelve prophets is being processed in turn, and a description of their internal, structural organisation will be produced in due course. These descriptions will be made available on www.academia.edu when they have been completed.

In addition to all that, this work on the Minor Prophets was undertaken with a bigger goal in view. That goal was to provide a complete structural description of another prophetic book, the book of *Revelation*, in the New Testament. Since *Revelation* is, by its is very nature, rather complicated in its organisation, and because it has also provoked considerable discussion, if not dispute, it was felt wise to practice on some smaller prophetic books first.

This turned out to be an unexpected blessing in disguise. Because of all the work expended to analyse these prophets, as well as *the Song of Solomon,* I learned a lot about the characteristics of Hebrew discourses – especially prophetic and poetic ones.

Then later on, when it came to *Revelation,* that study, naturally enough, was based on the Greek text and was no longer dealing directly with the Hebrew language. Yet, nonetheless, as the study progressed, I could not help but noticing that all the characteristics of *Revelation* were the same as the ones which I had found in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. At the time, I assumed that, because John was a native speaker of Hebrew, then presumably his style and his method of expressing himself, was a Hebraic one, even though, as I thought, he had written his book in Greek.

So it was then, talking of surprises, that I was very surprised, much later on, to find out that *Revelation,* quite probably, was originally written in Hebrew, and was only later translated into Greek ! If this is at all of interest to you, I have written a whole book about all these fascinating topics, which is entitled *The Timeless Texture of the Book of Revelation, A Holistic Discourse Analysis.* This should become available in the course of 2025, and information about it will appear in www.academia.edu in due course.

Meanwhile, I wish you well as you embark on this study of the Minor Prophets, and pray that you will be blessed by it, as well as being enlightened and informed about God's great plan of salvation.

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Brisbane, Australia,
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1. Introduction

The study of the biblical text has been enhanced in recent years by the development of a certain number of analytical methodologies, known collectively as Discourse Analysis.[1] The pioneers of these linguistics based methods were for the most part Bible translators, such as Beekman, Callow J, Callow K, Grimes, Levinsohn, Longacre, and others. Yet within a short time theologians and Bible scholars such as Cotterell, Turner, Dorsey and Porter were making these methods known in their academic circle as well.

Discourse Analysis, as with all methodologies, is founded on a number of presuppositions. The first is, that a text as it has been handed down to us through the generations, is the point of departure for all modern studies. In previous decades scholars felt that it was their task to cut the text into pieces and then put it back together again according to their particular criteria. In reaction to this reductionist methodology, the current generation of linguistically trained scholars no longer call into question the integrity of the text, nor of its authors. It is also assumed that the author had a clear purpose in preparing his discourse and that he succeeded, at least in the era in which he lived, in transmitting a comprehensible message to his listeners or readers.

Therefore, it is assumed that it is possible in principle to reconstruct this message by taking account of the indicators which were embedded in his discourse by the author himself. This process of discovery is only limited for the analyst by his knowledge of the original language, his knowledge of the customs and conventions of the period from which the discourse emanated, and his ability to correctly apply the linguistic tools, which make this process of discovery possible.

All these assumption have ethnological roots. A linguist who embarks on the study of a non-Indo-European language must, of necessity, try and consciously take account of his natural world-view bias. This requires recognising that the Cartesian way of thinking, which organises almost everything according to a linear or chronological logic, is not the only way of viewing or describing the natural world around us. In actual fact, looked at from a world-wide point of view, the Cartesian system is not the dominant system because many non-western people groups still live according to the seasons and, consequently, tend to view life's flow as a series of cycles. It is not surprising therefore, to discover that such cultures also tend to express this cyclic view of life in their literature, both written and oral.

The Bible student who is aware of these differences will not then automatically impose his linear preferences on a discourse, which was not produced from within his Cartesian cultural context. Rather, he will make an effort to put himself in the place of the author, in order to recognise and appreciate his preferences, knowing that they are not likely to be either western or Cartesian.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of such linguistic research as it has been applied to the Minor Prophets as a group. Firstly, the group of twelve will be studied, and then the role of *Micah,* which is positioned at the centre of the group, will be examined.

2. The Thematic Organisation of the Minor Prophets
2.1 General Observations

This process of research, and the discoveries which it produced, were the result of two observations. Firstly, for the people of the Old Testament period, the twelve Minor Prophets were considered to constitute a single book – that is, they were viewed as a single discourse. At a certain moment in time, the writings of these twelve men were compiled and collected together into a single document. For students of today, that represents a fairly radical shift in mind-set. The modern mindset is to divide this collection into units, and then to study them as individual discourses, without consideration for the literary influence of the other

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[1] The original version of this article was first published in French in 1998 in the *European Journal of Theology* VII:1., pp.27-36.

works in the collection. Nonetheless, this tradition is modern, and does not take account of the actual historical realities.

In addition, if these twelve documents have been put in a collection, there are two possibilities for the reason behind this decision. Firstly, it could be purely practical, to do, for example, with the average size of the rolls of parchment which were available. In which case this compilation project would have been accomplished with no other agenda or motive in mind. Otherwise, the other possibility is that there *was* a deeper reason and a conscious motive for making this decision.

If there was no particular reason for compiling the collection, then it would be reasonable to suppose that the prophets would have been put in chronological order, in order to record the order, and the progression of their thought over the course of the four centuries during which they were written. That would be logical, at least in the context of a western mind-set.

However, one of the remarkable things about the collection of the Minor Prophets is that they are *not* in chronological order, and, since the reason for this order is not obvious, it has been an enigma for commentators for centuries. So, this gives pause for thought, and provokes the question as to whether or not it is still possible to deduce the likely reason for this particular order.

The first goal of this article then, is to demonstrate, on the basis of linguistic criteria, what the reason for this particular order may have been. The reason which will be proposed is that the goal of the compilers was to create a thematic pattern, which would enhance and broaden the total message which the Minor Prophets have brought to us. It is a question of synergy, such that the total message becomes more meaningful than just the sum of the individual parts.

2.2 Specific Observations

In our modern age we have many different means at our disposal to facilitate our reading experience and, thereby, to more easily and completely ensure that the desired message is communicated. There are so many such aids that nowadays reading is an automatic skill, and demands very little mental effort. It needs to be remembered, as we consciously take account of differences in world-view, that it has not always been like that, and was certainly not like that when these documents were first written.

For us today, it is possible to get the gist of a book by simply reading the titles and sub-titles which have been provided. If we do more than just skim the book, then we are helped and guided by the commas and full-stops, by the blank space between words and the blank line between paragraphs, by capital and small letters, by bolded type, italics and underlining, not to mention numbers and a), b), c)'s. The list is very long, and, oh yes, I forgot, some kinds of documents even have colour coding and pictures.

It is really quite astonishing therefore, to reflect for a moment, and realise that the ancient authors whom we are discussing, had *none* of those practical helps at all at their disposal in order to build a bridge to their audience. In their time, the writing was hand-written, it was usually all in capitals, with no punctuation, and no spaces between words or paragraphs, and, in the case of Hebrew, for many centuries there were not even any vowels.[2]

So, how then, we may well ask, did they manage at all to communicate their message ? On the one hand, reading required a great deal more skill and effort and so they had to rely on the good will and the perseverance of their readers. On the other hand, the only other means that they had at their disposal to make their message come alive, was to encode message-markers, and sign-posts of various kinds, within the internal structure of the message as it appeared on the page.   So, considering that those codes and those hidden messages had to be somewhere within the text (they could not be anywhere else), then it is certainly theoretically possible to find them again and deduce their significance.

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[2] In addition, most scholars are agreed that biblical Hebrew did not overtly encode tenses either. This means that it is timeless and so the writer could not specifically indicate if the action being described was past, present or future, just by means of the verb form alone.

In the context of this article it is not possible to articulate all of the methods that they used to enhance the words on the page, and to make their message come alive as best they could. So some generalities will be laid out, and then a number of examples will be demonstrated by means of the analyses which will be presented in the following sections.

The basic method which all the biblical writers used was the method of repetition.[3] On reflection it can be recognised that repetition as a literary or linguistic feature is so useful, that it is still used today in all cultures across the world. Even in our western society, it is recognised to be a useful and efficient pedagogical tool which facilitates memorization, and assimilation of whatever message is being communicated. Then, in oral cultures and with oral genres of communication, it is also an indispensable part of the communicator's tool-kit.

Aside from aiding memorization, repetition can also be used to indicate when one part of the message is more important than other parts. By this means the author can create some peaks and valleys in his text and thus avoid the boredom of a monotonous and monochrome discourse.

All kinds of repetition are to be found in the Minor Prophets. The simplest form is just the repetition of key words or concepts. Then there can be the repetition of certain grammatical forms, such as, for example, imperatives, or rhetorical questions. However, the form which is the most developed and the most far-reaching in its effects is the repetition which is embedded in whole paragraphs, and even in larger units of text. By means of skilfully entwining various forms of repetition at different levels, and in different segments of a text, an author can make a key concept, or a key theme, permeate a whole section of a text. This section of text can then be intentionally placed in relationship with any other segments of text, which share the same kinds of repetition, and the same themes. Repetition, therefore, becomes a crucial method for organising the text in coherent patterns at every linguistic level, from the word and sentence level, right up to the discourse, or book level.

Having mastered the concept of repetition, it is necessary to go a step further. Once something is repeated more than once, a pattern is created, which is called parallelism. If a straight line is repeated and placed next to the first straight line, then a set of parallel lines is created. The same phenomenon occurs when there is repetition of a word or a unit of text: a lexical or a textual parallel is created. As more repetitions are added to the system, more parallels are created and then these can be organised into various patterns in order to create mountains and valleys, as mentioned previously, or in order to communicate different aspects of the overall message. The minimum number of repetitions needed to create a basic parallel is two, and these structures, which are very common, have by convention been called doublets. After that, in theory, the maximum number is only limited by the author's creativity. However, in practice it is rare to find more than about fifteen units in a set, and in biblical Hebrew the most common number is seven units, followed closely by three and five units. There can be an even number of units in a set, and these are called symmetric or concentric structures, while those sets which have an uneven number of units are called chiasms.[4]

Various forms of repetition therefore can be found in all of the Minor Prophets but crucially here, it will be seen that the group of twelve is also organised according to a parallel arrangement. So once this parallelism is discerned, it becomes indisputable that the arrangement must have been intentional for such a phenomenon on such a scale could not happen by chance. Once this arrangement is accepted, it then becomes possible to also discern the extra meaning hidden in this pattern, and to delineate what this adds to the overall message of these prophetic books.

2.3 A Detailed Analysis of the Complete Set of the 12 Minor Prophets

Table 1 below presents a proposal for the thematic organisation of the twelve prophets. Perusal of the table will reveal that the Minor Prophets are indeed organised according to a complex parallel structure composed

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[3] See R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York : Basic Books, 1981), pp.95-113 for an explanation of repetition in the Bible.
[4] For a more complete explanation of all these structural issues and more see D. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament,* (Grand Rapids : Baker Books, 1999), pp.15-44.

of eleven constituents.[5] The parallelism is posited on the basis of the repetitions which are to be found interwoven into the fabric of all of these prophetic books.

Since it was decided in the course of the analytical process that the structure was composed of an uneven number of constituents, then the parallel structure creates a chiasm. This, in turn, means that *Micah*, which is situated at the centre of the structure, carries the most important part of the total message, being, in technical terms, the most prominent part of the whole collection. The second most important parts of the total collection are to be found at the extremities of the two branches at the beginning and the end, namely in constituents A. and A', which are the introduction and the conclusion of the collection, respectively.[6]

Table 1. The Thematic Structural Organisation of the Minor Prophets

A. Hosea – Love : God calls His Unfaithful People Back to their First Love

    B. Joel – Judgment and Salvation : Judgment Prepares the Way for Salvation

        C. Amos – Judgment : Judgment is Universal

            D. Obadiah – Judgment : Judgment is Certain

                E. Jonah – Love : God Offers Salvation Even to His Enemies, The Nations

      F. Micah – Salvation and Judgment : God has a Plan for His People whereby
              Salvation will Appear in a Surprising Manner out of a Context of **Judgment**

                E' Nahum – Love : God Judges the Nations and thereby He Destroys the Enemies of His People – This in Turn Reveals His **Love** for His People

            D' Habakkuk – Judgment : Judgment is Certain

        C' Zephaniah – Judgment : Judgment is Universal

    B' Haggai and Zechariah – Salvation and Judgment : Salvation Wins Out Over Judgment

A' Malachi – Love : God calls His Unfaithful People Back to their First Love

It can be seen then from this visual representation of the twelve prophets that there are only three principal themes in the whole collection, namely, God's Love, His Warnings regarding Judgment, and His Promises for Salvation. But the greatest of these is Love. These three themes appear, in some form or another, in all the twelve books in the collection and are woven together in a remarkably intricate and coherent fashion. As with all discourses which are close to being works of art, there are some unexpected twists and turns in the logical progression of the themes, designed, no doubt, to make the reader sit back and think a bit about what is going on.

2.4 An Explanation of the Analysis

Before being able to organise the twelve prophets into a coherent system it was necessary to analyse each individual book to discover its own themes and organisation.[7] The same linguistic methods as described in the Introduction above were used to accomplish this task.

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[5] The reason why the 12 became 11 will be explained below.

[6]   It can be noted that if the structure were to have seven constituents, which is the most common type of chiasm, and if it were represented visually on a horizontal plane across the page then it would be identical to a Jewish menorah or lampstand. It is the opinion of this author that that similarity, or parallelism, is probably not a coincidence. For practical purposes, nonetheless, chiasms are usually represented visually along a vertical plane, as in this case.

[7]   It is planned to make the results of this part of the research available on www.academia.edu at some time in the future. Or contact the author.

With that accomplished, it was then not difficult to discern the repetitions and the consequent parallels. However, as often happens in such circumstances, the process of research had to be adapted to harmonise with what had just been discovered. In practice, one starts with assumptions about what one would expect to find hidden in documents like these. In particular, with Old Testament books, one would expect to find repetition and parallelism.[8] Then, on the basis of what is found, it is necessary to review the process and methodology.

So, two examples will be given here of what happened in the course of this research to illustrate how this interactive type approach worked out in practice, and led to more satisfactory results than previously anticipated. The first is a structural example, and the other is a thematic example.

Firstly, the process described above revealed that there were definitely some clear parallels which linked all the books of the Minor Prophets together. However, they did not immediately create a neat set of matching pairs. The twelve constituents could have created a symmetrical pattern with an even number of constituents, but they did not. The point being, that when clear parallels are present, they can be found and observed, but, when they are not present, it is not possible to make them magically appear out of nowhere.

So the question which consequently arose was whether there was an alternative solution which would bring together into harmony, the obvious presence of parallels, and, the methodological necessity of having a set of neatly matching pairs. The solution which emerged from this process of reflection and perseverance, was to group *Haggai* and *Zechariah* together as a single constituent in the larger structure.[9] This was done on the basis of the fact that *Haggai* and *Zechariah* were composed at the same time and place, and spoke to the same issues of that period. Thematically they also create a matching pair which functions very naturally as a single unit.[10] The message of *Haggai* is that the blessings of God win out over His curses of judgment, and the message of *Zechariah* is that the grace (or love) of God wins out over His justice.

With *Haggai* and *Zechariah* grouped together as a single constituent, the immediate result was an uneven number of constituents which created a satisfactory set of parallels, which in turn formed a menorah-shaped chiasm, as can be seen in the table above. This solution will stand or fall on the basis of whether the central constituent, which results from this re-organisation, can truly be seen to be an appropriate candidate for the most important unit of the set. The evidence for this will be set out below.

Meanwhile, the second example concerns the principal themes, which serve as threads which link the whole collection together. In general terms, it is normal to consider that the theme of Judgment is predominant in the OT prophets. At least, that is what we have been led to believe on the basis of traditional exegesis of these books. It is true, that in terms of quantity, there are more references to judgment than any other subject. But does might make right, does greater quantity automatically imply greater importance, or is this a world-view based assumption ? The only way to adequately answer that question is to consider as objectively as possible the data bequeathed to us by the compilers.

So, in studying the outline which has been formulated so far it is obvious that the first book, *Hosea* (A.)*,* which is the first in line, is obviously talking about the love of God for His people. This is not just any kind of love, but it is an exceptional kind of love, which continues to work for their good even though they have been systematically, and consistently, unfaithful to their marriage covenant with Him. This theme is repeated again in its matching pair at the end, which is *Malachi* (A').

But then, as we look at the book of *Micah* (F.), which is in pole position at the centre of the chiasm, we discover that the central theme of the whole collection informs us that God's plan of Salvation will be revealed and established, even if it seems to come about in a surprising way, out of a context of Judgment. This shows us that Salvation is more important than Judgment – and this is confirmed by other members of

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[8] If you do not find any obvious parallels then you have to think again. This happened to me in my study of the book of *Revelation* (2004).
[9] Critics may find this solution unsatisfactory but the point being made here is that it is the analyst's task to follow *all* the clues which the authors, or the compilers in this case, left behind to help us understand what they were endeavouring to do with the material, which they had at their disposal. This solution is the one which best handles all the data, and if a better one is eventually found, that is fine.
[10] It is to be remembered that doublets are very common in OT literature and are the stock in trade units for authors of that period.

the set. Then, to go a step further, it is self-evident that God's plan of Salvation must emanate from His Love. For without this love, which persevered in the face of manifest rejection, and even contempt, it would be impossible otherwise to explain why He went to such lengths to bring to fruition this plan of Salvation. Clearly Love and Salvation work hand in hand, and are the primary ingredients of the overall message of this collection of prophetic writings.

We have looked at these particular constituents (A., A', and F.) first because, as mentioned before, the most prominent parts of the chiasm would normally be found in those positions. What is most important in a discourse, is not discovered by assessing the quantity of any particular ingredient, but rather, what is most important depends on its prominence within the discourse. This prominence is assigned by the author, using various devices, and is not dependent on the readers' intuitions.

So it is then, that the most important elements of the collection have been discerned by firstly observing the clues placed within its members by the individual authors. Then, secondly, by observing the clues placed by the compilers with regards to the whole collection. As we now look at the next level of prominence and importance, we can see that *Joel* (B.) and *Haggai* and *Zechariah* (B') continue with the interplay between the Judgment and Salvation themes, so that supports and confirms the message of *Micah*.

Next in line are *Jonah* (E.) and *Nahum* (E'), being in a direct supportive role to *Micah*. For *Jonah* there is no problem as it clearly reveals that God's love is so great, that He can even offer salvation to the enemies of Himself and of His people. But *Nahum* on the other hand, would seem to contradict the growing hypothesis, for it should synchronize with *Jonah,* and it does not seem to do that. When this happens, as mentioned previously, it is the analyst who has to do a re-think, and revise his assumptions and his proposals in the light of all that the authors and compilers have provided for us.

On the face of it *Nahum* is all about judgment. Traditionally, because it has always been the practice to study the book in isolation, one would be justified in saying that, that is its principal and only message. However, now that we are being forced to review our traditional view in the light of its context within the twelve, another viewpoint comes to light. No-one would deny that *Nahum* informs us that God condemns and plans to bring judgment on those who have brought grief to His people. But in the light of this last remark, and in the light of many things said and implied in the other eleven prophets, it becomes clear that when God brings judgment on the enemies of His people, then that is the equivalent of bringing salvation to those same members of His family. This then becomes good news, and, in turn, becomes another expression of His love and care for His people.[11] This is why it is being proposed here that the main theme of *Nahum* is actually the Love of God for His people. The hypothesis is therefore maintained and confirmed, but this could not have happened without re-considering the message of *Nahum* in the light of the literary context provided by the other eleven prophets.

2.5 The Theme of the Collection of the Minor Prophets

Once the hypothesis of a chiastic structure for the collection as a whole had been established, it became possible to delineate in a more objective manner the message and the themes of the whole collection.

Firstly, it became possible to discern a linear movement in the logic of the themes of the individual books. At the beginning, the message focuses on the Judgment theme. For example in *Joel* (B.) the theme is *Judgment and Salvation* in that order of importance. However in *Haggai* and *Zechariah* (B'), the themes are presented in the opposite order. The goal here is to indicate that at this point near the end of the series, the Salvation theme is being emphasised as more important than the Judgment theme.

A similar linear movement can be discerned if *Jonah* (E.) is compared with its matching parallel *Nahum* (E'). In *Jonah,* God demonstrates His love by offering salvation even to His enemies – which offer,

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[11] There are actually four clues scattered through the book of *Nahum* which confirm this viewpoint from within the book. These clues are situated at 1:7, 1:15, 2:2, and 3:19b and they are certainly not in a majority position. But as we have been learning, quantity is not what counts in this system. Because this difference in world-view has not been appreciated, these tiny bits of text have traditionally been overlooked but now they reveal to us that there is more to *Nahum* than meets the eye. It is up to the analyst to figure that out and to take it into account.

interestingly enough, they accept. On the other hand, however, in *Nahum* it is made clear that God's patience does not last for ever, and so He demonstrates His love for His people by promising to completely destroy their enemies instead of sparing them as He had done before.

This leaves the four remaining prophets to consider, namely *Amos* (C.)*, Obadiah* (D.)*, Habakkuk* (C') and *Zephaniah* (D'). These four are all solidly rooted in the Judgment camp, but this does not pose any problem for our understanding of the organisation of the system which we are studying. The parallel pairs all match, right down to the fine detail, so there is no difficulty there. The fact that they talk mainly about Judgment is not a problem either, since Judgment is definitely one of the themes of the Minor Prophets, and this fact, in and of itself, is not being called into question.

What is in the process of being called into question is that the traditional view, or assumption, has been that the Minor Prophets' *main* theme is Judgment. The point is being developed here that this is not the case, but it is the Love of God which is the main theme of this collection of books. It is a love which is robust and realistic. This is the kind of love which does not tolerate rebellion or evil in any form, but will punish, rebuke, and correct, rebellious family members, just as well as it will punish, and even totally destroy, those who dare to raise themselves up in arrogant resistance of Him and His people. As we are told from within this compendium of prophesies, God's blessings and grace will always win out over His anger and His justice, and His salvation will always win out over His judgment (*Haggai* and *Zechariah*). Furthermore, *Joel* and *Micah* also tell us that in some mysterious way, He will even use the processes of judgment in some way, to prepare the way for, and even to birth, His ultimate plan of salvation.

Secondly, the book of *Micah* occupies the most prominent position in the collection, being at the centre of the chiasm. For this reason its message will be presented in more detail in the next part of this article. Nonetheless, it is possible to propose a synthesis of the message of the collection on the basis of the three principal themes which have been described so far, which are: the Love of God, the Judgment of God and the Salvation of God.

The resulting synthesis could be expressed something like this: *'God so loved the world that He made sure to warn all the nations that His judgment would surely fall on everyone, including His people. However, His love is such that salvation will always triumph over judgment, and so He offers His salvation to everyone, including to His enemies. At the same time, He indicates that this so great salvation will be birthed in some way, in and through the process of judgment'.*

So, a careful study of all that the writers have put in these books for our enlightenment, reveal that the Minor Prophets are not primarily about God's plans for the judgment of evil. Even though He still reserves the right to justly impose judgment on those who merit it, the most important part of His plans are expressions of His love for all humankind, and His promises of salvation, even for those who do not merit it.

3. The Role of *Micah* in the Collection of the Minor Prophets

As has already been pointed out, *Micah* is situated at the centre of a chiasm and so it is therefore the most prominent constituent, and therefore, the most important book, of the whole collection.

It is not possible within the limits of this article to lay out all the aspects of *Micah's* message. However, the aim is to provide sufficient information for the reader to appreciate how the structure of the book contributes to an understanding of its message. Then from there, to perceive how that message, in turn, contributes to an understanding of the message of the collection as a whole.

3.1 The Structure of the Book of *Micah* as a Whole

The structure of the book as a whole is presented in Table 2 below.

It can be seen that the book is organised according to a seven part parallel arrangement, complemented by an Introduction and a Conclusion. The structure is not a chiasm but it does have, nonetheless, an isolated

central unit as a chiasm does. So it will be this prominent unit in the middle (4:1-5:14) which will carry the most important part of the message, along with the Conclusion, in a supporting role.

From any point of view, this is a very difficult passage to understand and to explain. Commentators have not been able to come to terms with it with any consistency, and readers tend to just skip over it because it is too difficult to understand. So to do better than that, it is necessary to be patient and to proceed slowly. In all such cases, it is necessary to face the difficulties honestly. So it can be stated with some conviction, that the linear flow of the author's logic is not at all clear, which is a problem, if linear flow is the only method available for getting insight into the text. As a consequence, the resulting impression is that the text is choppy and turbulent. The reader feels as if he is being thrown from one extreme to another, from despair, to hope, back to despair and back to hope again.

All that in the space of 10 verses, but, nonetheless, it does all end on a hopeful note, which is significant.

Table 2. The Thematic Structural Organisation of *Micah*

INTRODUCTION 1:1
A Play on Words based on Micah's name which means : **Who is like God**.

    A. God Comes to lay out his Case against his People and Warns of Judgment 1:2-7

      B. The Prophet's Lamentation 1:8-16

        C. The Condemnation of the People 2:1-3:12
        But with Promises of Salvation Interspersed

D. The Salvation of the People will Appear in an Unexpected Manner
    from within a Context of Judgment as God's Plan is Worked Out. 4:1-5:14

    A' God Continues His Case Against His People and Continues to Warn of Judgment 6:1-16

      B' The Prophet's Lamentation 7:1-10

        C' The Condemnation of the Nations 7:11-17
        But with Promises of Salvation Interspersed

CONCLUSION 7:18-20
A Play on Words based on Micah's name which means : **Who is like God ?**

So, just by looking at the surface structure it is possible to observe that the subject of the verb (along with its accompanying verb and action) changes ten times, in the space of about 26 lines of text. In addition, there are no overt markers to make any clear connections between all these new sub-topics. So we can observe that there is turbulence, but what is it all supposed to mean ? Was the author having a bad day, or was he really trying to communicate a coherent message ? If so, what was it ?

If the surface structure is the only linguistic data which is analysed then the end result can only be confusion and uncertainty in a case like this. But as the underlying meanings, both overt and implied (the semantics of the text), are considered, and especially when the parallels are noted then more progress can be made.

The central section D. (4:1-5:14) was also found, upon analysis,[12] to have a central constituent which is located between 4:9 and 5:5a. So this is the centre of the centre, or the peak of the peak, whichever you

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[12] The full analysis of this central part of the book will be made available later. See www.academia.edu or contact the author.

prefer. This sliver of text then, is extremely prominent, and so it can be anticipated that it will be communicating a particularly important part of the author's message. So this particular constituent needs to be studied with special care.

The first, overview plan, of this central passage can be found in Table 3 below.

3.2 The Primary Message of *Micah*
Having established an outline of the structure of the book, it is now possible to go into more depth into these underlying meanings of each constituent but particularly of the most prominent units which carry the most important parts of the message. This will be accomplished using Table 3 below as a guide.

The goal of Table 3 is to work directly with the surface structure as it is most conveniently represented in English[13], in order to find the overtly marked parallels. Various fonts have been used so that it is easier to locate the parallels, and thereby to see that they are truly present and not just inventions of the analyst. However, as the parallels are scrutinized, it can be seen that some which are present in the Table, are not present in your Bible, even though they are implied by the context. These implied pieces of information have also been included in the Table because they are actually important, and should not be overlooked, for authors very often leave some work for the reader to do himself, because this is all part of the pedagogical process.

Table 3. The Thematic Structural Organisation of the Peak of the Book 4:9-5:5a

INTRODUCTION 4:9-10
The King is Gone and Jerusalem Writhes in Agony like a Woman in Labour

A. NOW the Nations are ASSEMBLED – *They gloat over her and contemplate her destruction* 4:11

  B. BUT… (UO 1.)* *They have no clue about (YHWH's)[14], the ETERNAL God's Plan* 4:12

    C. *Jerusalem*, who had been despised, will **RISE UP** to be used as an instrument of JUDGMENT and to bring the riches of the Nations to the ETERNAL God (YHWH), the Lord of the Whole Earth 4:13

A' NOW the Troops are ASSEMBLED, (5:1a) *because Jerusalem is going to defeat her Enemies*
                                                              (implied since 4:13)

  B' BUT… (Implied) (UO 2.)* *They have no clue about God's Plan* (implied since 4:12-13).
                          She is besieged and **Israel's Ruler** is Struck in the Face 5:1b-c

    C' BUT… (UO 3.)* *Bethlehem*, who was small (and therefore despised), will **RISE UP** (implied by context) from among the towns of Judah to be used as an instrument of SALVATION (implied since 4:12-13 and confirmed in 5:4-5a) by producing **a Ruler for Israel**, who is ETERNAL[15] 5:2

CONCLUSION 5:3-5a
The King is Birthed and the whole Earth is Shepherded in Strength and Security

* (UO stands for Unexpected Outcome, which, in technical terms, is a semantic Contra-Expectation.[16])

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[13] An English translation has been intentionally used to make this study more accessible to more readers.
[14] In most English translations God's personal name (YHWH) is represented as 'the LORD' in capitals. However, God's name has a meaning which can be translated as 'He exists', or 'The Eternal One'. So, in this passage there is a repetition and a play on words, based on His name, just as there is also a play on words on Micah's name in the book. See also the following note.
[15] YWM 'day/time/everlasting' is the underlying Hebrew which is in parallel to YHWH, the name of God, 'the Eternal/Everlasting One'.
[16] See K. Callow, *Man and Message,* (Lanham/Oxford : University Press of America, 1998), pp.264-5. The unexpected element is prominent.

The advantages of taking the time to do a semantic analysis of this nature are multiple. It demonstrates that this section is a complete textual unit, and not a humanly contrived discourse fragment. By wrestling with the meanings, both the obvious ones and the more subtle ones, it becomes clear that the whole unit is composed around the semantic category known as Concession/Contra-Expectation. See note 16. This insight immediately explains, and clarifies, the choppy nature of the text as it is transmitted to us.[17] We understand, therefore, that it was intentional on the part of the author to create choppiness and turbulence, because unexpected outcomes in a discourse will automatically disturb the readers' equilibrium and create elements of surprise.

From this insight we can deduce that perhaps there are other surprises, which have not yet been discovered. But, what is most important, is that we can also deduce that the unexpected outcomes are elements which are prominent and are, therefore, important for our understanding of the whole. See note 16 again. This deduction about prominence is further confirmed by the fact that the parallel arrangement as a whole, is linear in nature rather than chiastic. This means that the end point(s) which create conclusions (sections C. and C' along with the Conclusion) are also prominent. This fact is emphasised even more, by the fact that the last two parallel units are two Unexpected Outcomes in a row, which are strongly in parallel since the contra-expectation feature, translated as 'BUT', is overtly, or implicitly, present at the beginning of each sub-unit.

Furthermore, by drawing on previous research by pioneers in the discovery of Hebrew discourse structures, it is possible to state with some degree of confidence that zones of turbulence are intentionally created by authors of a discourse, to indicate where the peak of their discourse lies. A peak is a point of particular prominence, which is crucial for a correct understanding of the message of the discourse.

It was Robert Longacre who proposed the different literary devices which mark the peak of a discourse.[18] In addition to the zone of turbulence idea, he also noticed that an author will tend to put many, if not all, of the relevant participants on stage at the same time, in the peak of a discourse. This appears to be the case here in *Micah* as well, for in this short section of ten verses, we find that the following 'participants' in this judicial drama being described, are all present and actively involved. These are God Himself, who is presented as the one who is eternally present, the nations who are presented as the enemies of God's people, Israel, Jerusalem (presented as 'Daughter of Zion'), Bethlehem, a/the woman who is in labour and gives birth, and the Ruler of Israel, at a minimum.[19]

There is one final advantage which has been produced by this particular semantic analysis. The discovery of the Unexpected Outcomes has brought to our attention the fact that the author seems to want to intentionally surprise his reader. It is judicious, therefore, to dig a bit deeper, and search a bit further afield, to see if there are any other surprises that have been overlooked.

Even though the above analysis is perfectly valid, and well buttressed with supporting data, it nonetheless brought to light the fact that there were a number of gaps, where the reader had to make an effort to supply the implied information. This also is a technique used at points of prominence, and naturally enough it happens particularly at places where the author is using the Concession/Contra-Expectation semantic relationship. It turns out, therefore, that by exploring the eventuality of a coherent set of Unexpected Outcomes it was possible to produce a different, yet complementary, overview of this same central, peak constituent of the discourse. This process also required taking account of the context of this passage, which is always a wise procedure.

So then, the wider context of the passage in question can be analysed as indicated in Table 4 which follows.

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[17] In the course of 9 verses the sub-topic of the message changes at least 7 times.
[18] See R. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse,* (New York : Plenum Press, 1983), pp.20-41 and other works cited in the bibliography.
[19] Depending on how you define and count active participants, it could be argued that there are seven of them.

Table 4. The Peak of the Book of *Micah* Situated in its Immediate Context

A. 14 Promises of Salvation   4:1-8

B. SEVEN SURPRISES   4:9-5:5a

A' 14 Promises of Salvation   5:5b-15

The general context of the prophecy is that it is an oracle of judgment. In it God reveals Himself as the Judge of His people, and He summons them to court so that they can give an account of their ungodly conduct. The evidence presented is not good, and the verdict is handed down that they are guilty as charged. As a consequence, they can expect the judgment to fall on them sooner or later, and the consequences, which the Judge has warned them about since the time of Moses, will inevitably come upon them.

However, against that backdrop, Micah has incorporated, not just one peak, but five peaks into his discourse - five being the number of grace. Each peak is characterized by something unexpected (one or more surprises or a mysteries) which occurs. These peaks are the most important parts of the book and taken together reveal the most important elements of the prophet's message.

These peaks are to be found at 2:12-13, 3:8, 4:1-5:14, 7:7-10 and 7:14-15. The five peaks are organised in the form of a chiasm A.B.C.B'A'. There are two close together near the beginning of the discourse, then a long one in the middle which is the major peak of the whole series, and then two more near the end. They are in stark contrast to all that surrounds them, for they are all unexpected promises of hope, deliverance and salvation, which shine like bright rays of light through the darkness of the rest of the vision. They are not randomly scattered within the book, but are organised according to a definite plan. Nonetheless, they are not clearly connected to, or integrated into, the Court Room scenario which dominates the rest of the book.

So, the one which has been presented in Table 4, is the centre one in a chiasm, and it is also the largest of them by far, which continues to confirm that this is the main peak and, therefore, the most important part of the book. So it can be seen then, that the small, central unit, which is under consideration, is also a chiasm. In the outer wings (A. and A') there are 28 positive promises (14 + 14), which is quite remarkable in itself, in a book with such a strong emphasis on the Judgment theme, and in the centre there are **seven** surprises.

So, in Table 5 which is presented below then, these seven surprises will be revealed.

In summary, it can be seen quite clearly that the Concession/Contra-Expectation motif dominates the whole section. This confirms and clarifies the emotional turbulence caused by the series of seemingly contradictory surprises, which most people feel on reading this passage. But the fact that it turns out that there are seven of them, confirms that this was an intentional ploy on the part of the author. This can now hardly be denied, when it is laid out like this.

It can be seen also that there is a clear linear development in the midst of all the repetitions, which is something which regularly happens in Old Testament discourses. It is probably safe to say that this linear development is always positive. In this case, for example, in section A. the woman was writhing in pain, but in A', she has successfully given birth. In B. the people were going to go into exile, but in A' again, there are those who return from exile. In C. Jerusalem is surrounded by enemies, and her destruction is in view, while in C', she is still surrounded by enemies, but this time it is her victory which is in view. Finally, last but not least, in A. her king has gone and she has no more counselors, but in A' her king has surprisingly re-appeared to look after her as one would expect.

Since all the five peaks of prominence are positive in nature and develop the Salvation theme, and since this central one moves in a positive direction and ends clearly on a positive note, then we can safely say that the author intended to communicate that the Salvation theme is more important than the Judgment theme. The

number five also of course points in a positive direction. Then, as was pointed out in the discussion on *Nahum* above, whenever the text affirms the eventual victory of God's people over their enemies, then in all this it is possible to discern God's love at work. He is always at work accomplishing positive outcomes, surprising though they may appear to be, in and through all the trials and tribulations of His people.

Table 5. The Seven Surprises of Positive Peak 3 4:9-5:5a

The Backdrop is a Context of Judgment (Chs. 1-3).
Then in the immediate context (4:1-8), there are 14 promises which dramatically raise the level of hope, in complete contrast to all that has gone before. The last promise is that kingship will be restored to Jerusalem.
AND THEN all of a sudden the scene changes again:

A. Surprise 1.
    The king has gone 4:9
    Jerusalem is writhing in agony like a woman in labour 4:10a
    She (the people) must leave and go into exile (which is the judgment promised previously) 4:10b

  B. BUT… Surprise 2.
    THERE in exile in Babylon (surrounded by enemies) the LORD will redeem them. 4:10c-d

    C. BUT… Surprise 3.
    NOW many nations gather round her to gloat over her destruction 4:11

      D. BUT… Surprise 4.   All this is the LORD's Plan 4:12

    C' BUT… Surprise 5.
    In the midst of all these enemies Jerusalem will rise up and be victorious 4:13-5:1a

  B' BUT… Surprise 6.
    Jerusalem is under siege again (surrounded by enemies) and her ruler is struck in the face 5:1b-c

A' BUT… Surprise 7.
    The King is re-birthed 5:2-3 (implicit) and re-appears 5:4-5a
    The woman who is in labour gives birth 4:3b
    The birth occurs in a context of abandonment, yet inexplicably some will return from exile 5:3a & c
    The King will Stand and Shepherd His People with Strength and Peace 5:4-5a

This comment then leads naturally into the last point, and an important one it is, which can be made about this peak. This process of laying out the various surprises revealed another surprise and that is embedded in 4:12 which was overlooked during the previous processes. This surprise is different to the others which is possibly why it gets overlooked.

This peak is then followed by another lengthy section containing another 14 promises 5:5b-15. The first set of 14 promises (4:1-8) were all positive declarations of hope. This second set focuses more on being delivered from enemies and from evil. Both sets of promises are divided into two approximately equal halves separated by the phrase 'In that (same) day' 4:6 and 5:10. AND THEN all of a sudden the scene changes again, and it is back to the Court Room Judgment scenario in 6:1.

In summary then, we have taken the time to lay out the full context of this central peak, which includes the preceding context of Chapters 1-3, and the following context in 5:5b-15. This has been done in order to prepare the way for an important insight into the message of the book.

For there is yet another observation which can be made, and that is, that the most important detail of the whole book (and, therefore, of the whole of the Minor Prophets Collection) is to be found here in 4:12. This states that God has a plan. It may well be the that the various participants do not understand His plan,

because it is, by definition, surprising, as has been explained previously, yet, nonetheless, He has a plan and it will be accomplished.

In previous seasons, using traditional methods of exegesis, it would not have been at all possible to make such a statement about such a short segment of text. Such a proposal that one small sub-topic which is not repeated, and, therefore, has no supporting parallels anywhere in the book, is the main point of the book, would have been rejected on the grounds of insufficient supporting evidence. However, as a result of the painstaking detective work which has been undertaken, it is now possible to state with confidence that this short verse is to be found at the tip of the highest peak of prominence in the book. This is because it is located alone, and therefore in a prominent position, at the peak of a chiasm, which is, itself, at the peak of the book. This fact alone demonstrates how and why a thorough linguistic, or semantic, analysis of a discourse is crucial to discovering the true message which the author wished to communicate. By using an objective, repeatable method in this way, the elucidation of the message is not dependent on the intuitions of the commentator, but on the data provided by the author himself.

So then, all this information together reveals to us that the back and forth between judgment and salvation, between despair and hope, is not haphazard nor random. Although the path may seem like a zig-zag to those who lived through it and also to those who read about it, yet, nonetheless, it is leading in a coherent and meaningful fashion towards a pre-set goal. That goal is to accomplish God's eternal plan for this world, and it will culminate in salvation and eternal joy for His people. This is one of the best surprises of them all; it is at the centre of a chiasm and so is intended to be seen as the most important of them all.

3.3 Supplementary Evidence for the Unexpected Aspects of the Message of *Micah*

The key features of the central section of *Micah* which have been studied are the unexpected outcomes, which are surprises in themselves, but which also reveal the fact that God has a plan. However, there are other antithetical, unexpected outcomes in other parts of the book, which support the notion that an element of surprise is a particular characteristic of this book. These all occur in the five peaks mentioned above, since it is this element of surprise caused by an unexpected outcome which creates the positive peak. Briefly, the other four which have not been previously discussed are as follows.

3.3.1 Positive Peak 1 2:12-13

The context is a context of judicial darkness (2:3-11). The court case has come to an end and this is the Judge's final speech. This is how it begins: *Therefore, the Lord says : 'I am planning a disaster against this people from which you cannot save yourselves'.*[20]

Then all of a sudden, without any transitional link, this positive promise is what follows:
I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob,... One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. The king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.

There is no doubt that this passage unexpectedly provides a vision of hope and a future for the nation.

3.3.2 Positive Peak 2 3:8

The context is a context of prophetic darkness (3:5-7). It is a forthright condemnation of the prophets.
This is what the LORD says: As for the prophets, who lead my people astray... the sun will set for the prophets, and the day will go dark for them. The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced.

Then once again, suddenly, without any transitional link, this positive declaration, made presumably by another kind of prophet, is what follows : ***But as for me*** *: I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.*

In this case, the peak is only one long sentence in length, yet it is clearly a positive statement, which brings truth and light to a context which is otherwise full of doom and gloom.

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[20] Here is one other place in the book where it refers to the fact that God has a plan. In this case it is not positive but is a plan to bring disaster.

3.3.3 Positive Peak 4 7:7-10
This peak falls right at the end as the conclusion to the penultimate section of the prophecy. In it "someone" (it is unclear whether it is the prophet or someone else), goes through a series of contradictory circumstances, similar to those noted in the central Peak 3.

The context is again a context of prophetic darkness, of misery and lamentation. BUT all of a sudden there is a ray of hope as the prophet declares : ***But as for me***, (the same as in Peak 2)*, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior, my God will hear me. (7:7)*

     - But in the next verse it says that he has fallen and is sitting in darkness 7:8
BUT in the midst of this apparent defeat he says that he knows that he will rise, and that the LORD will be his light. 7:8
     - But then he says that he has sinned, and that he must bear God's judgment, as the consequence of his sin 7:9a
BUT in the midst of this judicial darkness he declares that God (the Judge), will vindicate him and that he will live to see the condemnation of his enemies. 7:9b-10.

The next verse (7:11) continues the turbulence previously described, with another unannounced change of grammatical subject and of sub-topic, with the implications of the first statement being positive. However, the rest of the section (7:12-13) moves into negativity and ends with the desolation of the whole earth.

Because of the clear change of sub-topic with the prophet's lament having ended, and because the prominent message of this short section is universal judgment, it is analysed as being an intervening judgment section, thereby separating Peak 4 from Peak 5. If verse 7 is counted as the first one, there are 7 unexpected outcomes (contra-expectations) in this section 4:7-13. The eighth one (4:14) then starts a new series, which is the beginning of Peak 5.

3.3.4 Positive Peak 5 7:14-15
This peak is at the centre of the last major part of the prophecy (C') and runs on to include the conclusion as well. It is a positive promise of salvation which is found following on from words of universal desolation, condemnation and defeat, and begins like this: *Shepherd your people ... like a flock... I will show them my wonders.*

The four smaller peaks all communicate the same message as the central peak. They all suggest in one way or another, that out of a situation of hopelessness, darkness, and judgment, salvation, hope, and life will ultimately arise.

This reversal of fortunes is the least obvious in the last peak. This would seem to be for the following reasons :
- The salvation theme gets stronger at the end of the prophecy, as in other of the Minor Prophets.
- The salvation and judgment themes are intertwined and difficult to separate. In this prophecy in particular, we are learning that judgment comes first and, right out of the situation of judgment, salvation arises. This is what is happening here.
- The main topic of the passage from verse 10 onwards would seem to be judgment, even though it is the judgment of God's (or the prophet's) enemies which is in view. See v.10b, v.13, and vv.16-17.
- From within this rather dark context of judgment, verses 14-15 arise suddenly like a ray of hope, with no clear connection at all with what precedes, or what follows. Verse 16 could connect with and follow verse 13, just as well or better than with verse 15.
- The overall impression is given once again that salvation, and hope, can, and will, suddenly and surprisingly, appear from within a context of hopelessness and judgment.
- The judgment of God's enemies is still a dark and gloomy affair even if it results eventually in salvation for His people. This is the message here and, interestingly, this same message is taken up again in Nahum's prophecy, which follows on after *Micah*.

In conclusion then, the five positive peaks together ensure that the whole book is impregnated with the hope that God's salvation for His people will come about, in due course, according to His plan. However, at the beginning, information regarding this hope is sparse and brief, but at the end it becomes dominant and almost completely fills the last seven verses of the book, thereby ensuring that the whole book ends on a positive note.

3.3.5   One More Positive Antithesis to Complete the Series

There is one more very significant antithesis in the book which needs to be mentioned to complete this study of the unexpected outcomes described in it. It appears in the central peak, Peak 3, but its significance was not discussed in the section above on this topic. This is the antithesis inherent in the comparison between Bethlehem in 5:2, and the 12 cities of Judah, including Jerusalem, listed in the prophet's lament in 1:8-16.

These twelve were obviously listed because they must have been the most important and the most populated cities of the time. Bethlehem, however, although close to Jerusalem, did not figure in that list because it was obviously too small, and too insignificant. This is what is actually stated in 5:2, and so the comparison with the other 12 is made clear, even if only implicitly.

However, the point is this, the important 12 cities were slated for destruction due to their disobedience. But Bethlehem, despite its size and insignificance, was chosen, by God's grace, to survive and to become the birthplace of the future King.

So this was another surprising and unexpected turn of events, but it was also always part of God's plan. Once again the thematic logic is expressed in this example. It starts out with great and graphic detail about the coming judgment (1:8-16), but moves on to end the sequence on a positive, hopeful note.

This is an example of the 7 + 1 principle, which is discussed in more detail in my book about *Revelation*, which is mentioned in the Preface above.

4.   The Role of *Micah* in the Thematic Organisation of the Minor Prophets

Having discovered what the most important parts of Micah's message are, it is now possible to return to a study of the Minor Prophets as a whole, to see how this information needs to be allowed to influence our understanding of all the individual prophets. To recap, *Micah* is the most prominent and, therefore the most important, of all the Minor Prophets, being at the centre of a chiasm. As a consequence, Micah's message must, of necessity, inform and influence the message of the whole collection.

The first thing to be said then is that an understanding of *Micah* confirms the hypothesis that the love of God is clearly the most important theme of the whole collection. Ultimately, when all is said and done, it is the foundation of everything, for it is the only thing which explains everything else which happens, and everything else which is described, or is promised. It explains all the elements of Judgment and, obviously, it also explains all the blessings of Salvation. This theme is not as prominent in *Micah* as in some of the other books, but it is clear enough to confirm how important this theme is.

Secondly, *Micah* confirms that the Salvation theme is more important than the Judgment theme. This is demonstrated by the linear logic which occurs within the cyclic format. This linear movement shows that the salvation element always wins out over the judgement elements, however numerous they may appear to be, and that the salvation message always has the last word. It is also demonstrated by the five peaks in *Micah* which together show that the Salvation theme is definitely more prominent and, therefore, more important than the Judgment theme.

So now that all this linguistic evidence has been accumulated, which shows that even in the prophets the love of God is the underlying foundation of everything, and that salvation is more imprgnant in His view than judgment, it is time to repudiate and replace the long-standing view-point that the main message of the Minor Prophets is all about judgment. More than that, it is necessary to stop saying, as some have in the past, that the Old Testament reveals a God of wrath and of judgment, while it is only the New Testament

which reveals a God of love. This is just not true. It is the same God and He does not change. The Old Testament reveals that He is a God of love, just as much as the New Testament does. It is just that all of us, from scholars down to the average reader, need to make the effort, and take the time, to listen properly to what the biblical authors have actually been saying to us the whole time.

Thirdly, because of the constantly changing sub-topic, which is the primary cause of the textual turbulence which has been observed, along with the series of unexpected outcomes which occur in this section of the book, it can be proposed that an element of surprise is a major characteristic of the message of *Micah*. The surprise is that, even though judgment has been promised, and even though judgment does actually occur in no uncertain terms, nonetheless, in and through all that process of judgment, God still brings His promised salvation out of it to full accomplishment.

With hindsight then, and of course everything is easier with hindsight, it can be seen that Jesus the Messiah, by His birth, death, resurrection, and ascension fulfilled all the prophecies which *Micah* provides for us, as well as all the prophecies in the other prophets as well.

So He was born in Bethlehem (5:2) and was filled with the power of the Spirit of the Lord and declared to Israel their sin (3:8). He was constantly surrounded by His enemies especially at the end (4:10-11), and was even hit in the face (5:1). He could not even rely on His friends to remain loyal (7:5), and, subsequently, He bore God's judgment, which had been promised for His people (7:9). Although He sat in darkness for a while, yet He waited for His God, and was vindicated to rise again (7:7-9). In a most surprising way, for even His closest friends did not understand God's plan (4:12), He broke out of the grave (2:13) and at the same time completely defeated and destroyed all His enemies (4:13, 5:10-15, 7:16-17). Quite literally from a situation of the greatest darkness and despair ever known, when the promised judgment of God finally fell on mankind, the greatest source of hope, joy and salvation for all of humanity, also emerged in the form of a risen Saviour.

But this was to be a new beginning and, from that Day on, He would stand in a place of authority in the Heavenly Throne Room to shepherd His flock in peace (2:12, 5:4-5a). From there He would also rule over the nations, even as He gathered the poor and the wounded of His people to Himself (4:6-8, 5:4). As a result of this great work, the Eternal God could now legitimately pardon sin, forgive transgression, and not stay angry for ever (7:18-20). This, in turn, would result in great peace, prosperity and prodigious wonders (5:5a, 7:14-15), and even the nations would turn to Him to be forgiven and saved (4:1-5, 7:12 &16-17). This would happen, in part, because God's people would be scattered among the nations to be a blessing to them, and to continue the plan to eliminate evil from the earth (5:5b-9), not forgetting that this last part is also a blessing, as has been learned from *Nahum*.

It is not surprising then, that at the end of his message, as he reached his conclusion, Micah declared in amazement *"Who is a God like you ?"* (7:18).

5. Conclusion
The principal purpose of this article has been to increase our understanding of the message of the Minor Prophets as a whole, and also of the message of *Micah,* in particular. Then, in the process, the aim has been to show how the two messages interact with, and inform, each other. This is an important goal, in and of itself.

However, there was also a second purpose in mind, and that was to demonstrate directly on a set of biblical texts, the usefulness of applying more recently developed linguistic tools to an understanding of the Scriptures. Within the domain of linguistics and Bible translation, research began in the 1970's on complete discourses, rather than on words and sentences, as had been done previously. As a consequence, the term Discourse Analysis was coined and this has since been developed and taken in several directions, with varying results. The approach used in this study is the one which respects the integrity of the authors and compilers of ancient times, in studying the whole work (or collection) as it has been preserved and handed down to us today. From that point of view then, an attempt is made to discover and consider all the

linguistic clues which the authors themselves have placed in their text, or in their organisation of the texts, in order to permit their viewpoint and their worldview to influence and inform our understanding and interpretation of their intended messages in this modern era.

It has been noted in passing that the Hebraic view of what a complete and coherent discourse is like, should be taken into account, and any temptation to impose a foreign, western viewpoint on their texts should be avoided with as much rigour as is humanly possible. Then secondly, an attempt was made to demonstrate that even though there is no 'one-size-fits-all' methodology when dealing with intricate works of art like these, it has been found in practice that a cyclical method is the most productive.

This method is a top-down and bottom-up approach. This means that an overview of the book is permitted to influence the analysis of the details, and then as a study of the details provides more information, then this information should be consciously allowed to influence and modify the shape of the overview. This process then continues in a cyclic manner until the work is complete. It is complete when there is harmony and unity between the surface structure of the words on the page, and the overview plan of the whole book, and then also with all the linguistic levels in between the two. The proof of this is that there will be no bits left over which have not been satisfactorily accounted for, and integrated appropriately, into the overall plan and purpose of the discourse.

In this particular case, this has meant that the top-down overview had to be at the level of the whole collection of the Minor Prophets. Then, after that, the detail of the individual books, but especially of *Micah,* needed in turn, to influence our understanding of the shape and of the purpose of the whole collection.

These linguistic tools have admirably served their purpose because some surprising things have been discovered, not least that the message of these 12 prophets is inherently surprising. This insight immediately, and of necessity, challenges our pre-suppositions, and hopefully will prompt us to honestly re-appraise them and adapt them to the realities of Hebraic discourses such as these.

Then, last but not least, this methodology enabled us to discover a treasure that had been hidden for millennia. Namely, that the most important part of Micah's message, and, therefore, of the whole collection, is that everything else which is described in these books is working out because God has a plan. It does not matter if we do not understand the plan, it is so surprising that it is likely that we will not understand it, but in spite of all that, the plan is there, and it will be accomplished sooner or later by one means or another.

These results are not intangible, unverifiable opinions, but are concrete results produced by a coherent and systematic method of study based on observable data. The advantages of a linguistic approach is that linguistics is a scientific discipline, which is based on decades of research and practical testing, and which has progressed through several generations of scrutiny and development. As a consequence of this, the results of this study can be tested and verified by others. If the same methods are applied to the same texts using the same pre-suppositions but by different people, then similar results should be produced. If not, then the differences can be studied further to see where the flaws are and so to correct them.

It is to be hoped that this present attempt to better understand God's Word to us through His prophets, will be received in that same positive spirit, so that, together, we can continue to build a consensus about what God's plan of salvation is all about, and how it can impact us and improve us all.

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