

CHAPTER VII

MICAH

THE STRUCTURE OF MICAH

- A. The Coming Destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem—
Chs. 1-3.
 - 1—Ch. 1. God's Anger against Samaria and Judah.
 - 2—Chs. 2, 3. The Sins of Judah.
- B. The Messianic Period—Chs. 4, 5.
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 - 2—Ch. 5. The Messianic King.
- C. The Controversy of Jehovah with Jerusalem—Chs. 6, 7.

The Author and His Book.

MICAH, or Micaiah (Jer. 26: 18, R.V.), was a native of Moresheth-gath (1: 1, 14), a small country town in the Shephelah, the low hills on the edge of the Philistine plain, near Gath.¹ While Isaiah depicts the social crimes of his time from the standpoint of the townsman in the capital, Micah shows us them from the standpoint of the suffering countryman. Nothing is known of him apart from his prophecies and the reference in Jer. 26: 18.

In the closing section of the book (chs. 6, 7) Micah's denunciations pass from the leaders to the people as a whole, and the general tone is much more gloomy than in chs. 1-3. There is a general tendency on the part of those who do not restrict (as some do quite unnecessarily) Micah's work to the first three chapters of the book to place the closing section in the dark days of Manasseh. This is quite probable, for the structure of the book suggests that these chapters are considerably later than 3: 12, which Jer. 26: 18 places in the reign of Hezekiah. In addition the picture given seems rather too dark for the reign of Hezekiah.

If this is so, it confirms the general impression created by the prophecy that Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, outliving him in his public ministry. Micah contains numerous reminiscences of Isaiah,² though the most striking, 4: 1-5 (Isa. 2: 2-5), is probably due to common quotation from an earlier prophet.

If we have interpreted the evidence correctly, then we

¹ For a description of the neighbourhood see G. A. Smith I, p. 376ff.

² There are also reminiscences of Amos.

must look on the heading (1: 1) as only approximately correct, Micah's work beginning at the very end of Jotham's reign, but going on beyond the time of Hezekiah.¹

We get the impression that we have only a small portion of his prophecies preserved for us, and that sometimes we have the gist of his message rather than the original words in full. The transition of thought is often violent, and in many cases the only connexion between sections will be that of later juxtaposition because of spiritual connexion. In places the thought is made even more difficult by the possibility of dislocation in the order of verses in transmission.

God's Anger against Samaria and Judah (Ch. 1).

The opening section (vers. 2-7) deals mainly with Samaria. It is purely a message of inevitable doom, and therefore beyond her idolatry Samaria's sins are not specified. As it now stands the prophecy serves rather as an introduction to the judgment on Judah, for Micah sees the Assyrian armies rolling south over Judah and especially over the Shephelah, which he knew so well, after Samaria's fall; so he raises his lament in vers. 8-16. This contains the longest sustained play upon words in the Old Testament, the names of the places, probably all in or near the Shephelah being chosen for that purpose.² If we are right in assigning this section to the reign of Ahaz, these verbal fireworks probably reflect the prophet's unpopularity, which forced him to such methods of gaining a hearing. There is no indication in the rest of the book that Micah was addicted to puns.

The Sins of Judah (Chs. 2, 3).

Two groups of sins are particularly mentioned:

(a) The greedy landowners who covet their poor neighbours' fields (2: 1-5) supported by cruel and venal judges and rulers (3: 1-4), cf. Isa. 5: 8-24.

(b) False prophets (2: 6f; 3: 5-8) who support the rich in their injustice and who use their position for their own gain.

The section closes with a drastic prophecy of the complete destruction of Jerusalem (3: 9-12), which according to Jer. 26: 18f was the cause of Hezekiah's repentance, otherwise unspecified, unless perhaps in II Chron. 32: 26. It can hardly refer to Hezekiah's reformation (II Kings 18: 4).

Though there is no reason for denying 2: 12f to Micah, the verses break the connexion of thought very violently, and it is likely that they have been misplaced in transmission.

¹ This is the attitude of ISBE, article Micah. For the argument that only chs. 1-3 are the work of Micah see in moderate form Driver, LOT, pp. 325-334, and more strongly HDB, article Micah.

² For details see Moffatt's translation.

The Establishment of God's Kingdom (Ch. 4).

There is no link logical or spiritual expressed as in Isaiah between judgment and the coming deliverance—even the “but” of 4: 1 is “and” in Hebrew. But there will not have been the need for his contemporaries. Though these chapters probably synchronize with chs. 1–3 rather than follow them, they are later in time than Isaiah’s Messianic prophecies linked with Immanuel. The older prophet had struck the note which the younger could develop without the spiritual links of Isaiah’s message.

The two prophets employ the earlier prophecy they use in common in similar but contrasting ways. Isa. 2: 2–5 is used as a contrast to the grim reality in Judah, Mic. 4: 1–5 as a contrast with the heathen world (read R.V. mg., R.S.V. in 4: 5).

The following section is divided into three unconnected prophecies of deliverance and restoration, *viz.* ver. 6f; ver. 8ff; ver. 11ff. The mention of Babylon in ver. 10 has made difficulties for many, for why should Babylon be mentioned, when the enemy to be feared in Micah’s day was Assyria? It is probably best explained by the element of dependence in Micah on Isaiah. The prophecy in Isa. 39: 6 was probably not uttered to Hezekiah alone, and a knowledge of it would explain the reference here. It is possible to explain it as a later scribal adaptation of the prophecy even as Stephen (Acts 7: 43) adapted Amos 5: 27; we do not, however, consider it likely.

The Messianic King (Ch. 5).

There is considerable difference of opinion as to whether ver. 1 should be taken with the previous chapter or with ver. 2 of the present chapter. The Hebrew includes it in ch. 4, but the general tendency is to preserve the present English chapter division (so R.S.V., N.E.B.) as against the R.V., which follows the Hebrew in its paragraphing. Cheyne (C. B.) is probably correct in regarding this verse as a separate prophecy acting as a transition from Ch. 4 to the thought of the Messianic king.

Apart from ver. 1 this chapter falls into a number of short unconnected prophecies, *viz.* vers. 2–5a (. . . this man shall be our peace); ver. 5b (When the Assyrian . . .)—6; ver. 7ff; vers. 10–15. The last of these, as not infrequently, pictures the Messianic age by the removal of the evils, social and religious, of the prophet’s own time; ver. 10f implies the social evils that have arisen from increasing wealth and luxury.

The Controversy of Jehovah with Jerusalem (Chs. 6, 7).

The changes of thought here are even more violent than before. Any attempt to try and discover a connexion between

the various sections other than a general spiritual one is doomed to disappointment.

6: 1-8 introduces us to Jehovah's controversy with Judah, based this time not so much on the sins of the people as on their false conception of what He expects from them. The people are "wearied" by His service, an expression used in two other passages of the demands of the sacrificial worship on the people, *viz.* Isa. 43: 22ff, Mal. 1: 13. It is only our neglect of the legal portions of the Pentateuch and our failure to get a comprehensive picture of the demands of the sacrificial system as a whole against the economic background of the time that hinders us from realizing what a burden the system was, especially on the poorer man. In the days of Micah the tendency was to expand rather than cut down the ritual.

An appeal is first made to the time of the Exodus and the Conquest (ver. 4f), when the grace of God was supremely realized by Israel, but during which sacrifices and the ritual must have been cut to a minimum. "From Shittim to Gilgal" refers to the crossing of the Jordan; some part of the text has been accidentally dropped.

The misunderstanding people then ask how God is to be propitiated, suggesting an intensification of its sacrificial system (ver. 6f). The reference to human sacrifice is one ground for thinking of the reign of Manasseh (cf. II Kings 21: 6; Jer. 7: 31). Micah sums up the requirements of true religion in a famous verse (ver. 8), which virtually combines the teaching of his three great predecessors:

to do justly—Amos.

to love mercy, *i.e.* *chesed* (see p. 39)—Hosea.

to walk humbly with thy God, *i.e.* as befits His holiness—Isaiah.

In 6: 9-16 we have a second denunciation of Judah, but this time the stress is on social sin rather than false conceptions of religion. Israel answers God (7: 1-6, though this need not originally have been a unity with the preceding). In 7: 7-10 Israel still speaks, but it is now Israel of the future, on whom the judgments have fallen. Then the prophet answers her (7: 11ff), though the grammar suggests that the connexion is merely one of juxtaposition. The prophecy ends with a prayer (7: 14-17) and a doxology (7: 18ff).

With these notes of confidence the voice of recorded prophecy becomes silent for the rest of the long reign of Manasseh. God had spoken to Judah, but she would not hear. Now she had to sow the bitter seed that would yield a yet bitterer harvest.