

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Micah, Prophet Outside the Beltway, Session 1 Introduction

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Hello, I'm Elaine Phillips. My husband Perry and I are going to be devoting the next eight lectures to the minor prophet or the member of the Book of the 12, Micah. We'll talk about why he's "Outside the beltway."

You can see that on the screen there. We're also going to spend this introductory lecture talking about a variety of contexts that need to be focused on before we actually get into the text itself. So, we'll talk about its place in the canon, particularly as one of the prophets.

We'll talk about geographical and historical contexts and how they work together. And then, finally, at the end of this lecture, we'll focus on literary and theological issues. So that's the direction in terms of where we're going in the next 40 minutes or so.

In terms of the canonical context, Micah is one of the eighth century prophets. And we'll talk more about the history that's part of that eighth century context shortly. I prefer to use the term book of the 12 rather than minor prophets because sometimes people hear the term minor and they tend to think it's less important than Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

And that's really not the case at all. These are very significant prophets. So, we are going to focus on his place within the Book of the 12 and the other members of the Book of the 12 who are eighth-century prophets.

Again, we'll get into the history of that shortly. But Hosea, Amos, and Jonah are part of that picture as well. I've got here just a quick picture of one of the scrolls found in the area of the Dead Sea.

It's found in a place called Nahal-Hever and you can see just a tiny slice of part of Micah chapter five in that context. As I mentioned a moment ago, just to bring together the picture of our eighth century prophets, eighth century BC, by the way, obviously he is a contemporary of Isaiah. And as we're going to see as we work our way through these eight lectures, there will be some wonderful interface between what Isaiah had to say and what Micah had to say.

So that's in brief a canonical context. I need to focus a little bit on geographical context as well. This is always important.

Every biblical message is given within a context that has place focus to it. There's a physical theology going on to steal a term from one of my colleagues, John Monson. So we're going to spend a little time looking at the ancient Near East, particularly the area of the Eastern Mediterranean.

And on the map, we're going to see, first of all, the significant power circles that are part of this Eastern Mediterranean area. The first one, of course, is Assyria, which is a significant power center, especially in the area of Mesopotamia. We're also going to know or recognize the fact that even though Egypt doesn't show up as much in the text of Micah, that's always there because Mesopotamia, dominated by Assyria in the eighth century, and Egypt will be what we call the land between.

And, of course, the land between is between in a number of ways, but as far as we're talking right now, it's in between geopolitically. And therefore there's all sorts of traffic, oftentimes military traffic, that is going through on the routes that traverse this. We're going to come back to that in a moment.

This is just the big picture. Between the land between and Assyria proper is often called a buffer zone at Syria, or another name for that is Aram. That will be a picture of some of our background history as well.

So that's our big context. Let's zero in a little bit on this land of Israel or our land between. The idea now is to just get an overview of the broader contours of this land.

We're going to focus in on Micah's territory fairly soon, but here's a map which helps us a little bit in terms of seeing topography. And we really need to notice topographical features when we think about Micah's hometown in relationship to some of the other areas around it. So with regard to this land, it has a spine, if you will, central hill country.

On the map, you can see that as elevation, and it is significantly elevated that it's rugged to get into and therefore, it's protected, isolated. Lots more we can say about that if we were focusing solely on geography. But for our purposes, the point is to recognize that when God gave the inheritance to his people, significant tribes were given inheritances in this central hill country, more protected.

And I'll name three for now. There are others as well. But Judah, which then is going to be a very important tribe, Benjamin just north of Judah and Ephraim just north of that.

All three of those have territory in this hill country. And, of course, Jerusalem is going to be strategically located between Judah and Benjamin. But it is, as with every little settlement in this area, protected.

To the west of our central hill country, we have, first of all, what's called the Shephelah. That's a Hebrew word, which means to be low or bowed down, if you will. And so often, this is translated low lands or foothills, depending on what translation you're reading.

And so those are the slopes or the foothills of this central spine. And then, right out there at the coast, we have the coastal plain dominated by the Philistines in this particular area. But because it's flat and easily traversed, this is the route or the location that the route internationally took.

So, if we were talking about Egypt trying to go northwards towards Mesopotamia, you'd have them going through this area or vice versa. When Assyria tries to and successfully is aggressive down towards Egypt, they're going to be traversing through here. So keep that in mind because what happens out on the coastal plain doesn't stay there.

It's often going to make its way through the Shephelah. And we'll say more about that momentarily. On the east side of our mountain spine, just for the record, we won't do much with this, but just notice that we have the wilderness and then the Rift Valley.

The Rift Valley in this area has the Dead Sea or the Sea of Salt, the Jordan Valley, and the Sea of Galilee. The wilderness area between our central hill country and the Rift Valley is barren. It's about 12 miles from the top of that hill country spine to the Rift Valley.

It's in the rain shadow, so it doesn't get a whole lot of rain. That's our overview. But obviously, now we need to focus on Judea and Shephelah because this is where Micah is from.

I'll say more about Micah's being from this area and probably preaching in Jerusalem a little bit later on. But here again, another map that we want to focus on, kind of zeroing in on that foothills area there. As I intimated a moment ago, our major threats when we have military traffic going through here and not only going through here but working at invading the hill country as well because some of those threats throughout history, not just in the eighth century BC, we're intent on getting into the hill country and the major power centers or maybe I should say political religious centers like Jerusalem.

So, our major threats are going to come from the hill country. And that Shephelah area is critical for our understanding. There are east-west valleys that cut through these low foothills, right? And so, they turn out to be the invasion routes into the land. There are five of them.

I'm not going to name them from north to south. If we were doing geography focused on this, we would spend more time with it. But our lower two, the last two that I noted there with those arrows, are going to be coming into areas that were particularly significant for where Micah was from.

These are the invasion routes into the interior of the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem already suggested this. Now we can see where it is.

It's in the protected hill country area. If you look at this map, just briefly, you'll see between that indicator of Jerusalem's location and our blue arrows that it's rugged. And to all intents and purposes, the valley system, the hills, all those steep V-shaped valleys, provide a natural barrier, a natural fortification for Jerusalem.

The Zorich Valley especially is important there. So, to get to Jerusalem, if someone were trying to attack it, for example, you have to find your way in through those valleys and make your way up to the hill country. This is what the attackers have done throughout the centuries, but it will particularly happen in Micah's day.

And when Perry deals with chapter one in the next lecture, you're going to see some of those things unfold. At any rate, geographers have often thought of this Shephelah area as a buffer zone. When the people are trying to invade from the coastal plain into the hill country, they go through that.

When Judah is a little stronger, they may push back through it out towards the West. And we're actually going to see some instances of that as we look through the historical context in the eighth century. Well, at any rate, here is where Moresheth Gath is located.

There's a little bit of a difference of opinion in terms of where exactly Micah's hometown was located because chapter one mentions both Moresheth Gath and Moresheth Gath, but they're close enough to each other approximately within about two and a half to three miles. And we'll just notice that there, that location is there's Micah's hometown right on the front lines in this war-torn area or potentially war torn area. So somebody living there would know the threat of invasion.

And that's something we really, really have to keep in mind as we move forward into the history. And then into the text itself. Well, with that said, let me just make one more comment about Moresheth Gath or Moresheth Gath because chapter one, verse one calls Micah a Moreshti.

He's from Moresh. The idea is that he's labeled that as opposed to saying Micah son of X or Micah son of whatever, because he's preaching maybe in Jerusalem and therefore he's identified by his hometown and not by his father's name or his family

name. So now we've got this prophet from "outside the beltway" again, probably going into Jerusalem to issue his messages, which are challenging messages, but we'll get to those a little bit later on.

That's geography in a nutshell. Just for some historical backdrop, and this is a very, very, very abbreviated timeline, but it's here to help us kind of get a sense of what unfolded in the centuries before Micah's time. And then obviously what's going to follow afterwards because he's a prophet and therefore he's going to talk ahead a little bit as well.

Just to review, we have a united monarchy, David, followed by Solomon. It doesn't last long, obviously. After Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam makes some rather foolish mistakes.

The kingdom splits between the northern tribes and the southern tribe of Judah, which has Simeon embedded in it and maybe some Benjamin affiliations as well. But in 931 BC the kingdom will split. Now, on this chart, you certainly don't see everybody who's ruling at all, but I've noted some key things, such as the key person's names as far as the text of Micah goes.

So, under that indication of 860 to 50, you'll see the name Ahab. Major figure in terms of the Omri dynasty. We'll get into that later on, but Omri starts a significant dynasty.

He moves his capital to a place that is much more open to foreign influence and Ahab, his son will follow in Omri's footsteps and embrace Baal worship and all those other things. This is important for what's going to happen with Micah and the text of Micah and particularly some things that he will say in chapter six. So we have to hang on to that.

Obviously, we'll come back to it later on. Moving forward, I mentioned some of our eighth-century prophets, Hosea and Amos, and by the way, Jonah fits in there as well, are important as contemporaries. In 722 BC, we have the Northern Kingdom falling, and Hosea and Amos have prophesied this.

Isn't it interesting that in God's tender mercy and compassion, even as the Northern Kingdom has been awash in all kinds of horrible things that they've done, idolatry, et cetera, the Lord still sends them the prophetic voices of Hosea and Amos? And, of course, Jonah will fit in there as well. Fall of the North in 722 BC, Micah and Isaiah, who prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, as you can see, are living through a very, very unsettled time.

Again, this timeline is extremely abbreviated. I simply want us to see Micah's position vis-a-vis some important kings and some important events. And then, continuing to

the end of the timeline, Micah will have just a little bit to say about the prospect of Babylon.

Of course, that will involve the exile as well. So here we have it as far as a very abbreviated timeline. Just one more map for the moment because we want to get some of these kingdom issues unfolded in their map context.

I mentioned the split in the kingdom. Eventually Samaria becomes the capital of the larger Northern kingdom. Originally, when Rehoboam, Solomon's son, took his marbles and went home, Jeroboam, son of Nebat, established a capital at Shechem, but it will move and will be moved by the man that I mentioned a moment ago, Omri, who moved the capital to Samaria.

In a moment, I'm almost going to focus on that orange arrow there, but for the time being, let's at least get Jerusalem on here as well. This is the capital of the Southern kingdom. If you even take the briefest of looks at the topography as represented on those maps, you see something.

And you see that that orange arrow representing Samaria is even more open by its location, slightly more open to the West and to the forces that might be coming in from the West. Now, there's lots more that we could say about the impact of what's going on with Baal worship, with Phoenicia, et cetera. But I just want you to notice that.

It's not a surprise then that when the Assyrians are invading, they are able to subjugate and take over Samaria. But Jerusalem manages to withstand that. So that's enough for now in terms of the focused map.

We need to do just a little bit with Assyrian expansion because Assyria is way off there in the Northeast. Here, we have a map of the Assyrian empire, which grew over time. Even if you can't see the little legend on the bottom right-hand side of this map, here's what we need to notice.

Because under an Assyrian ruler named Tiglath-Pileser III, in that red ellipse is the area that was paying tribute to him and, to all intents and purposes was subjugated to him. And, of course, we're seeing significant parts of the land between that are there. Not only Samaria but also you have Ahaz, who's going to be a ruler in Jerusalem, who pretty much kowtows to Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrian expansion.

So, there's all kinds of geopolitical stuff going on here. But for our purposes, we just need to see his impact there. Well, let me put into print some of the things, or text I should say, some of the things that I've just tried to place on the map.

During the century or half-century before Micah's time, in fact, it was just about when Jonah was prophesying, right? A generation, a prophetic generation, before Micah gets on the scene. Assyria had been in a state of internal disarray. There were all kinds of things that were bothering them internally.

We don't need to get into them. Our point is they weren't paying too much attention to what was going on outside their internal disputes and their fractious boundaries. That changes.

And when it changes, their attention turns westward again. I mentioned the name Tiglath-Pileser III a moment ago. And so, here's what we need to know about him in terms of the backdrop for Micah, especially Micah's chapters one through three.

Because about 740 BC, remembering that map we've just looked at, you have Tiglath-Pileser on the move. He absorbs both Syria. He gets to the Northern kingdom.

There's some alliance between the North and between Syria and the North, and that will figure into what's going on as well. But in 734, a key date, Tiglath-Pileser marches through Philistia, and he gets as far as a kind of a boundary, a natural boundary. It's called the Book of Egypt, which means he has swept through the entire Philistine plain.

According to some archeological evidence that shows up in some of these destroyed cities in the Western Shephelah, there seem to have been some incursions that affected them at this point as well. Our next ruler to keep in mind is a man named Sargon II. In each of these cases, there's much more to say about these, but for our purposes, he's the one who ended up taking Samaria.

You remember our timeline. We have 722 BC and the fall of the Northern kingdom. But not only does Sargon take Samaria, but he also gobbles up Ashdod and Gath, and there are enough extra-biblical texts.

We don't have this in the biblical text, but there's enough extra-biblical evidence to indicate that as he took Ashdod, there was a major operation on the part of Sargon II. This is a big deal for him. And so, the suggestion is, as people are trying to parse out the background for Micah, that perhaps there were some raids inland from Ashdod.

Ashdod is located very close to the Mediterranean Sea. It's one of the major Philistine cities, but perhaps he made some raids inland as well. In addition, during Sargon's time, some folks will say that the indication that we have at the end of Isaiah chapter 10, is very interesting four verses there because in Isaiah chapter 10 at the end, it describes the approach of Assyria and describes little town by little town by little town coming from the North towards Jerusalem, actually mentioning a pass

at Michmash, actually mentioning Rama, actually mentioning Nob, some of those places that were on the attack route coming to Jerusalem from the North.

And so, the suggestion is that during the time of Sargon, maybe what we've got is pressure from the West and then pressure from the North as well. And then keeping in mind that the Northern capital Samaria has already fallen. So, Jerusalem already feeling in a pinchers at this point.

Probably our best-known Assyrian ruler from the eighth century into the seventh century is Sennacherib. Upon Sargon's death in 705, Sennacherib took over. Whenever a major ruler dies, there's a certain amount of upheaval and tumult, and so you had some of these local rulers round about Judah attempting to rebel a little bit. Sennacherib engaged in campaigns, not just one, but multiple campaigns.

He mentions in some of his texts having subdued 46 towns in Judah. Well again, we just need to parse that out and think about a little bit. If he had subdued 46 towns in Judah, they would have suffered major kinds of incursions.

He then talks about Ashkelon and Ekron. Those two were traditional long-term Philistine cities that were still existing. And then we have probably our most significant because it's recorded so many times as evidence of his attack on Jerusalem or attempt to attack Jerusalem.

He takes Lachish and attempts to take Jerusalem as well, having sent messengers up there. This is the best known because, of course, we have it recorded in Kings. We have it recorded in Isaiah as well, but I'm mentioning these others to keep in mind or help us keep in mind that probably what Mike is living through is a whole series of military incursions and unsettling kinds of circumstances.

So, this is a very important time for us to just focus a little bit from the perspective of Israel and Judah. Let's look at how this might have affected them through the lenses of the people who were ruling at that point. By the time we get to this time period, the Northern Kingdom has been under the rule of Jeroboam the second, that's Jeroboam the son of Joash.

He died in the middle of the eighth century. He's sort of a contemporary of Uzziah—Uzziah down South, Jeroboam the second, Jeroboam the son of Joash up North.

When he's off the scene, when you read 2 Kings 15, you pretty much see the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom. One assassination after another and complete fracturing. By the way, just a reminder that Jonah is in this context as well, but we're not studying Jonah right now.

Down South, as I mentioned a moment ago, Uzziah was a contemporary of Jeroboam, son of Joash. Uzziah has reigned 52 years. Of course, part of that is co-reigning with his son Jotham because as we read the temerity to go into the temple to offer incense smitten with leprosy and therefore, he is going to have to co-reign with his son.

Now, Uzziah was a very successful King. When you read through the narratives, he has war machines. He loves the soil.

He does all these things and he expands the cities Westward. This is economically a good time, but there might be a subtext here and I'm going to come back to that subtext a little bit later on. So just hang on to that.

Sometimes, good economies spawn some other kinds of things that may not be as good, and that might be part of systemic problems that are going on already. They're evidenced in just a quick half a verse, quick half a verse. Second Chronicles 27.2, Jotham Uzziah's son takes over completely from Uzziah, and it said he was a good king, but quote, the people continued to do evil, which means they've already been set in a pattern to do that sort of thing and they just seem to continue on, and that will be important for our cultural, religious, political backdrop for Micah.

Well Ahaz comes along and we know Ahaz for being truly wicked, truly wicked, all kinds of idolatry, closes the doors of the temple, imports foreign altars and even to the point of passing his children, his sons through the fire. That's a datum we also need to return to later on. But in terms of the consequences for him and for the little kingdom Judah that he's ruling, we have the following and I'll just note them.

734—remember that's the date when Tiglath-Pileser went through. He swept all the way down to the Brook of Egypt, and he seems to have been doing things. So around that time, about two years in there, Ahaz, and this is punishment from the Lord God Almighty because of Ahaz's apostasy, Ahaz will endure attacks from a combined alliance, if you will, of the Northern kingdom and Syria. By the way, Isaiah 7 is going to allude to this.

All right. But this is called the Syro-Ephraimite war, and we have to be careful not to let a verse or two or three or four just escape us without reading them carefully. There were a lot of people killed.

There were a lot of people taken captive in that. This is Northern Kingdom folks against Southern Kingdom folks. This is brother against brother.

This is a terrible context when we unpack it just a little bit, and we need to keep that in mind again as a backdrop for Micah and some of the events. Later on in that very

same chapter, again, God's judgment against Ahaz for his apostasy. Attacked from the Southeast by Edom.

Attacked from the West by the Philistines. They make incursions into his land as well. In the midst of this, he needs help, and so he appeals to Tiglath-Pileser. This, of course, is a huge mistake because it brings the power and the might of the Assyrians down on him more heavily.

So already, in that early time period, a couple of decades before Sennacherib, we've got Assyrian heavy-handedness, which is very much there. Ahaz will feel it. Of course, Hezekiah is going to continue to feel it.

Well, we have Hezekiah beginning to reign in 716. For those who are all into dates, there's some difference of opinion in terms of this 716 accession date, but we're going to leave it there for now because we're mostly concerned with the fact that Hezekiah is going to recognize the horror that has resulted because of Ahaz and his apostasy. Hezekiah will effect a reform.

He will also have to deal with Sennacherib's move towards Jerusalem from Lachish and sending all his messengers up there. So, he sets up a remarkable set of defenses, including walls and making sure the water supply was there. But those are kind of ancillary to where we want to focus on Micah.

Well, how does Micah the Merashti or the Merashtite fit into this? Let's make some suggestions. I've already alluded to some of them, but we'll try and flesh them out just a little bit. I've already suggested that Micah was called to be a prophetic voice in the exceedingly tumultuous time, exceedingly tumultuous time.

And we can only begin to imagine, again, with that little bit of background I've given us, what kinds of things might've been part of his experience. All the way from living on the front lines in the buffer zone, seeing wave after wave of attacks, maybe from Assyrians, maybe from Philistines, who knows? He has to prophesy in that context. He obviously was a memorable voice.

And I mentioned this because about a hundred years later when Jeremiah is giving a sermon, it's called one of his temple sermons. One of them is in Jeremiah 7, and the other is in Jeremiah 26. And in Jeremiah 26, what he has to say about the forthcoming destruction of the temple gets him in real hot water.

The people are ready to kill him. Everybody's, he's accused of treason, and he's on the cusp of the death sentence until some of the elders say, now, wait a minute. We had Micah the Merashti in that context.

He's called Micaiah, but it's the same person. And they quote him. They quote what Micah has said in chapter three, verse 12.

They quote it. And this is a reprieve for Jeremiah. They're saying if Micah has said this in the days of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah repented of that, how is it that we are thinking of killing off Jeremiah for saying the same kind of thing in these circumstances? So at any rate, you've got that.

Closing suggestion then, not closing, but at least a suggestion at this point, as Micah is living through these truly tumultuous decades, Uzziah dies. There's enough unsettlement, even when he dies after 52 years of reigning. Micah is living, prophesying, called to speak through the evils of Ahaz and even into the reform of Hezekiah.

The words that we are going to study, the words we're going to study in these next seven lectures, they can be mined for all the unsettlement that was going on there. There were social problems, religious problems, and political problems, and they all came together in pronouncements that he was delivering. When I start talking about the literary structure of this book, one of the things we're going to see is that there are multiple oracles, and sometimes they don't always seem completely connected with one another, but nevertheless, they have a constant focus of God's judgment, also tempered at intervals by God's reprieve.

But we'll come to those momentarily. The first thing has to do with structure. As I mentioned a moment ago, we are dealing with some people, say, up to 21; I don't think it's necessarily that many, but more than a dozen distinct oracles.

The question will be, how do these hang together? The second question is, can we attribute particular historical timeframes to these? Now, there are some scholars who say they range all the way from Micah's time through to post-exilic. I'm not going to go in that direction. You just need to be aware that that's part of the issue.

What I'm going to suggest, or let's say, put it this way, is present two possible ways of looking at how these oracles might hang together. The first one, as you notice, has three basic units, acknowledging that not everybody agrees. Chapters one through three are often seen to be very much together because Samaria and Jerusalem are mentioned right away in chapter one, verses five through seven, and then Jerusalem in 3:12.

And so, there are those who say, all right, that hangs together. There's a judgmental focus on these two significant capitals, with Samaria very quickly off the scene, but there is still a focus on them. There are those who then see a break between that unit, a little bit unwieldy, but that unit, and then what goes on in chapters four and five.

Because in chapters four and five, we have very much of a focus, at least in chapter four, on Mount Zion. And it gets a little fuzzier, but there's a sense that the focus on the future for Mount Zion, and there's a number of different futures in chapter four, are going to be followed up in chapter five by not only our ruler from Bethlehem but then a final cutting off of all the horrible things that have been part of Judah's experience at the end of chapter five. As I said, that gets a little more rugged in terms of how those two hang together.

Chapters six and seven are viewed as starting out with a very much of a covenant dispute and what happens as a result of that. Chapter seven is initially a lament, multiple parts of that lament, and the final restoration. So that's one way of looking at it.

One way of addressing how each section might be addressed is taken in sequence. There are those who see four units as opposed to three. I'm going to run through this relatively quickly, calling for unity and a perception of unity around the themes of judgment followed by salvation.

Again, this is easier to see in the first units than it is in the others, but let's see how they work. Chapters one and two are put together, not one through three, as we saw a moment ago, but one and two are put together, and they start off, as I note for you, with oracles against Samaria. Then, the whole zeroing in on the Shephelah area and the Jerusalem approaches.

Chapter two is still judgment, still judgment, but this time judgment against more social sins. And then those who are lying prophets falsely representing the realities. That judgmental sequence, in all of chapter one and most of chapter two, has a happy ending, if you will, in verses 12 and 13 of chapter two because there will be a remnant that will be rescued.

And so then, according to this schema, we have just the first two chapters, judgment, and salvation. The second unit starts out with chapter three. And you have, again, serious, severe judgment pronounced against people who are utterly vicious, completely corrupt, absolutely false in terms of the prophets.

And the culmination of that, of course, is the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem. And that happens, as we've seen already in chapter three, verse 12. But that judgment sequence is followed by this shift to exaltation, the restoration of that ruined Jerusalem that we saw at the end of chapter three.

And then the remnant again shows up as we move into the first part of chapter four. So our second unit then runs from chapter three, verse one through chapter four,

verse eight. The third unit and the fourth are a little bit more tumultuous because they reflect the tumult of going, what's, what's going on.

So, you have in this third unit waves of trauma. Chapter four, starting in verse nine, some awful things that are going to happen, but then some triumph of God's people interspersed with each other. In chapter five, starting in verse one, the promise of this shepherd king, the one who is going forth are of old, who will deliver the remnant of Jacob.

But then, of course, there's kind of a tag on. It's a bit multifaceted. Chapter five ends with both a promise, but it's also a warning that God's going to cut off everything that's idolatrous.

Then, a little less specificity in moving from judgment to promise. Instead, it's interspersed. We see that same thing happening in chapters six and seven, which are viewed as the last of these four units.

Chapter six is that famous covenant dispute, which is probably best known because of chapter six, verse eight: what does the Lord require of you, O Adam? And then we'll deal with that wonderful answer that comes. Woven into that, you have not only consequences of the broken covenant, which again, is a little bit judgmental, but hope that's going to show up through the darkness, triumph over enemies, and then God's pledge at the end of chapter seven, how he will cast all their sins into the sea. Those are two ways of thinking about the structure that at least allows how there's probably some kind of structure.

As I said a moment ago, there are those who say, ah, we'll give up on the structure entirely, but I think I don't want to quite go that direction. One of the key features of Micah and this prophetic activity is what's prominent. It's not the only part, but lament is prominent in Micah, especially in chapter one and also in chapter seven.

And what's going on here is agonizing over the people's sins. Why do we spend time with this? Because the language, not just by virtue of choice of words but by virtue of the structure of the language itself, conveys lament. At some points in the Hebrew, it just plain breaks down.

Now, I'll read you the characterizations I've given to this, although there's probably much more that should be said. It's turbulent poetry.

It's raw. It's rugged. Chapter one, short phrases and abbreviated sentences, capture the real confusion of assault, battle, fleeing, and fear.

And there have been scholars who have actually said those last seven verses of chapter one must represent the loss of part of the manuscript. The right side column

of the manuscript has just been lost because they see it as being so incomprehensible. But I don't think we need to go that way in terms of the text.

Instead, we see that the poetry represents the horror, the dissolution, and the sense of complete incoherence and lack because Micah is broken over this, but what he's describing are broken people as well as broken communities. So, all of what follows in the chapter are those of his howling; as I've said, he howls out his grief. All of what follows is broken both in terms of the language and in terms of what's happening on the ground, as it were.

Related to that then, we have to use our visual imagination as well as hearing. We hear, we should hear weeping. We should hear woe.

At one point, this is later on in chapter seven, the expression *alilah* is used. It's almost, untranslatable, cry of horror. So, it's weeping loud cries mourning, but then we're also supposed to see some of the things that are going on because writhing is described.

And to understand that, we have to sense that someone is in such agony that they're just twisting and turning and can't get out of it. Writhing and agony. Nakedness is part of the picture, and that is shameful.

And it's supposed to be presented that way. Shaving hair. They're all visceral responses to the utter tragedy.

And if we miss this, we're missing the power of Micah's message. At the same time, he says in chapter three, verse eight, I am filled with the spirit of the Lord. Micah's voice and the Lord's voice interface.

Sometimes, we're not sure who's speaking. He's speaking for the Lord. This is the word of the Lord.

And both of them are very much involved. Just a couple more literary features that we want to make a note of as we move along. There's dialogue embedded in this material.

Chapter two is one classic example. It's certainly not the only one, but when we study chapter two, we're going to have to pause and say, now, wait a minute, who's saying what? Because we're not entirely sure. The Lord is speaking, but then the Lord quotes somebody who quotes somebody else.

It makes life a little bit difficult because these things juxtapose; they use the term collide, and they collide against each other. And it takes a little bit of time to sort that out. Add to that, the pronouns, as is often the case in Hebrew poetry, shift.

So, they might be the third person, and then it'll shift to a direct address of the second person. And that's got to be part of our understanding as well. There are interesting sound patterns.

Oftentimes, we think of puns, but it might be a little bit more elegant to simply say word plays. There are repetitions; there are connections. Some people call it terracing between some of these different segments.

I'll just give you one example of a wordplay that's absolutely fascinating. In chapter two, you have Micah accusing the false prophets of lying and deception. Sheker is the word.

And then in the very next verse, they're talking about a fee, possibly for prophesying that includes wine and a strong drink. And the word for strong drink is Sheker. So Sheker, Shechar, we're supposed to see that, we're supposed to hear it.

And obviously, Micah's audience would hear it as well. There are incredibly powerful figures of speech, and we'll point those out as we go along.

One of the ones that's particularly interesting, and there are clearly differences of opinion in how to understand the raw, and I'm using that on purpose, cannibalism that's described in chapter three. Is it simply a figure of speech, or is there something else going on? Or is it a little bit of both? Those are very interesting figures of speech. And then for now, here is just one more literary feature that we want to make a note of.

This is a very specific one, but when we read chapter two, we'll notice that the word for prophesy—there's a standard word for prophetic activity and prophesying—is not used by Micah. He uses a different Hebrew word, and it's the word that is translated drip.

And this is in the exchange. It's actually as Micah's speaking the word of the Lord. It's the drippers, the people who are dripping and prophesying.

Now, when we get to chapter two, we're going to unpack that a little more, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to say, Ooh, maybe there's a subtle message going on. If these prophets are dripping, they're being viewed with a good deal of sarcasm, dripping with sarcasm, if you will. I know that was a very, very bad wordplay.

I just want to say a couple of things about the, well, it's obviously important theological lessons through this, but the ones that are going to be most important for us as we move into these initial chapters of the book. First of all, Micah's name isn't just Micah. It means something.

It's a very, very compact form of the word. Of the question, who is like the Lord? Me is the Hebrew word for who that little letter that we're translating with a C is a very short form of the particle like. So, who is like, and then the very end of it, Ah is the short form of the Lord's divine name.

The one we try to avoid pronouncing, but Micah-Yahu, the Yahu would be representing the divine, the tetragrammaton. So his name itself is asking a profound question. And obviously the people who have been adopted by the Lord using his covenant name have been consistently breaking that covenant from their end.

It's interesting that the book, as I note for you, begins with Micah's name and immediately the declaration of his presence, his presence in the heavenly realms, his presence as he comes down and treads; his presence is overwhelming to them. It is his holy presence. Interestingly enough, in terms of structure, the book ends with, who is like you, O God? Starting with chapter seven, verse 18, who is like you? And then it talks about the Lord who has hurled the Egyptians into the sea, hurling, chapter seven, verse 15.

And then, finally, in the end, we'll hurl Israel's iniquities into the sea. Who is like you? The book starts with that. Who is like the Lord and ends with who is like you.

So, the very presence of Yahweh and who that, what that all means, is embedded in this whole book. I mentioned this already, but it's important in terms of our understanding of the relationship of the covenant Lord with his people. We'll talk a lot more about covenant, especially when we get to chapter six, but it's important to keep in mind that this was a binding agreement and they will be breaking that covenant over and over again.

And when they did break faith, the Lord will call them back. He will call them back by virtue of using his prophets, who Doug Stewart years ago in how to read the Bible for all it's worth, labeled covenant enforcement mediators. As mentioned in chapter six a moment ago, when the dispute unfolds in Micah chapter six, one of the things the Lord calls these people to do is remember, remember, remember, because they've obviously been forgetting and disobedient as well.

So, covenant enforcement mediators, how does that work? Well, the Lord and his mercy, even when these people were utterly disobedient, severe apostasy, the Lord sends prophets. He sends the prophets to remind the people in these times of severe apostasy and these historical circumstances were just awful. The prophets are there to remind the people of who God is, what he required, what would happen if they were disobedient? And that was the role of these people, summon them back to obedience.

And therefore, especially in chapter six, we're going to see the terms here. Listen, plead your case. The Lord has an indictment along with the remember that I mentioned a moment ago.

These judgments that were brought to their memory by virtue of the prophets don't come out of the blue in the Pentateuch, particularly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, and other places as well. We learn that those curses that are pronounced upon the people because of disobedience, first of all, are designed to bring them back. Leviticus 26, at the end of the chapter, makes it very clear that this was all designed to restore God's people into obedience.

But for our purposes, we're seeing that each one of these is lodged in, well, it's lodged in the land between and all the things that we want to note about the land between because one of the chastisements was foreign enemies will overtake you. Foreign enemies will overtake you. If they were obedient, they would chase the enemies away.

But when they were disobedient, the Lord said the enemies he will use to bring judgment upon them. And I just note for you, Isaiah 10 calls Assyria that eighth century enemy, God's rod. These chastisements also had socioeconomic implications.

We're going to see throughout that when they were disobedient, the vine wouldn't produce. They wouldn't tread the grapes. They would not be able to survive on the kinds of things that the land normally would produce because it wouldn't rain, and therefore, they wouldn't have the product produced.

Just one more thing that needs to be said in this regard. These judgment oracles are always followed by expressions of hope. This is true in Micah.

It's true in the other prophetic pronouncements as well. There's always hope built into this. And as far as Micah is concerned, he will use the term remnant multiple times.

Well, just to kind of close down our introductory material on canonical and historical geographical and literary theological backgrounds, we would be remiss if in considering all these things, we were not concerned to figure out how we think about them in the 21st century. So, I'm going to suggest a couple of possible applications, or maybe I should say areas for considering applications for the church, particularly the Western church, at this point. There's always a need to consider the implications of God's sovereignty.

I know that rolls off the tongue very easily. It is much harder to keep ourselves focused on that. It's more difficult to focus on hope when things are dark and gloomy.

Micah's main message is dark and gloomy, but he also draws the people back to hope. Micah's targets resonate with our context because he is talking against injustice and strongly against falsehood on the part of the leadership.

All the heads of the society are engaged in some kind of deception. He's talking about corrupt leadership. He's talking about moral corruption.

And, of course, when they no longer teach the Torah properly, there's no longer an anchor, and that is absolutely devastating. Of course, as we look at each one of those, we can't help but say, my goodness, things haven't changed much in 3000 years. So Micah is a very, very timely prophet.

Having said that, however, even though it may be difficult to do, we also have this remarkable promise that there was going to be a ruler whose origins were from of old, Bethlehem Ephrata. Even though you are small among the clans of Judah, one from you, one will come forth who will rule. This is the passage that when the Magi came to Jerusalem to ask, where is he who was born King of the Jews? Herod had the wisdom to consult the leadership, and they cited this passage.

Interestingly enough, we do not have evidence that they followed the Magi to actually kneel at the foot of that baby born in Bethlehem, but they knew this passage from Micah. So not only do we have Micah's prophecies resonating through to the time of Hezekiah, we also have them resonating through the subsequent centuries until the first century. Well, that stops our introduction for now.

We will move on shortly to chapter one.