

Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 22, Micah

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 22 on the Book of Micah.

All right, I'm ready to begin.

Let's have a word of prayer. Father, we pause to begin another class because we won't get through the next 60 minutes without your enablement. We pray that we will have ears to hear your word.

The words of the professor are not that important. The words of the prophets are. They are eternal.

They ring through all generations. So, help us to hear the voice of the Lord through the prophet Micah. Build into our lives certainties about who we are, how we work in the world, and the things that we desire of your people. Guide and direct us this hour, I pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

All right, a reminder again about the Passover on Wednesday of next week.

We'll be leaving at 4:45 behind Lane. Do any of you have access to a car and are willing to drive or have a friend? Anybody that's going? I need one or two more cars. I have some other students I can ask.

Excuse me? With Kevin? Okay, Kevin, right. You mentioned he's driving. That's good. All right. Okay, Kristen, right. That's terrific.

I wanted to confirm that. You say you can take up to seven if you had to. Okay, terrific. Good.

All right, let's get to Micah. Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries.

There is reason to believe that from the opening verses, which mention Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, who were kings of the north or the south. Southern kingdom. I'll answer it for you.

That's a default question because we've already dealt primarily with the prophets of the north, but Micah has this curious thing where he actually includes prophecies concerning the fall of the northern kingdom, though he was from the southern kingdom. More about that in a moment. He talks about the fall of Samaria, and he also talks about the fall of Jerusalem.

But he and Isaiah were contemporaries living in the southern kingdom. Their language is quite similar. They have some literary parallels, and of course, I hope at the end of this course, if you ever read Isaiah 2 immediately in your mind, you think of Micah 4, because you know there's some kind of literary interdependence on those great passages that speak of the messianic age and the bringing of peace and justice to this earth.

Micah's name is a question. Several of the writers of Scripture make confessions of faith, at least the parents probably did, in naming the child. Micah, who is like God? Micah, who is like Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh? Who is like the Lord? Who is like Yahweh? And there may be a curious kind of play on his name at the very end of the book.

In 7:18, it says, Mi-eh-l-chah-mo-chah. Who is like you, O God? At the very end of the book. Mi-eh-l-chah-mo-chah.

Who is like you? I think that's a play on Micah's own name. It's close to Micah. Micah's name means, Who is like Yahweh? That 7:18 is literally, Who is a God like you? So probably a confession of faith of sorts on the part of the parents.

And if you're familiar with Isaiah, particularly the second part of Isaiah, the incomparability of the God of Israel. Who is like you? in a lot of superlative language. The hometown of Micah is on this map, Tel-Maresha.

Tel-Maresha, as you can see, is in Judah. It's in the Shephelah, capital S-H-E-P-H-E-L-A-H. The Shephelah means the hill country, the rolling hills, the foothills that lead from the coastal plain up to the higher Judean hills.

If you've ever crossed Iowa on the interstate going east and west, you see a lot of those kinds of rolling hills. That sort of reminds me a little bit of the Shephelah as you come in off the plain of Philistia. And there are a number of these towns in Judah, Maresha being one of them.

I think Micah must have straddled the closing years of the northern kingdom when he prophesied. He may have begun prophesying around 735 and continued down at least to 715, which would have taken him into the beginning of Hezekiah's ministry. We certainly know the dates for Isaiah are 740 to 680.

We'll come back to that at the end of the course as we focus our attention on Isaiah. A little bit more about this interesting little town of Tel Maresha. I mentioned it before, but today I want to give an overview of Micah and hit some of the specific interesting emphases.

This one, archaeologically. The book tells us he is from Maresha. This has a number of different names.

In 1:1, Micah of Maresheth. It's 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Many of these names in the Bible changed slightly.

The Jews call Masada Metsuda, which means fortress. But by the time it gets Grecianized, it's Masada—the same word.

Jonah becomes Jonas. And often that ending of an S is what happens. In this particular case, when the Edomians settled in this particular area.

And this area, of course, in the 4th century, late 4th century, and 3rd century B.C., was controlled by the Ptolemies out of Egypt. And they were pushing Greek culture. The name ends up Tel Maresha.

So, it's the same place. It has a number of different names. Maresha, Maresheth-Gath.

It's mentioned again in 1:14. Maresheth hyphen Gath. You remember the giant in the first Samuel 17 narrative is from Gath.

And this is right on the edge of Philistine territory. So, it's in the Shephelah. Apparently originally controlled by the Philistines.

And this town of Micah, we're fast forwarding now a number of centuries because Micah lived here in the late 8th century. But if you visited his hometown today, you would see some of the archaeological finds, particularly because of the Edomians moving in there.

Remember, Idumea is Greek for Edom. Let's go back to our study of Ovidia just briefly. Remember when the Nabataeans came in, and Selah fell? The Edomites were pushed from the east side of the valley over to the southern part of the tribe of Judah.

And that whole area became known as Idumea. John Hyrcanus, in the 2nd century, was a king who supported the movement of the Maccabees, a Hasmonean king; in about 140, he tried to convert the Edomians of the Shephelah to Judaism. What I want to point out here is, Tel Marissa was the capital of Idumea, the 3rd and the 2nd century.

This is about 5 centuries after Micah. It becomes the capital of the Edomians. And as I observed earlier, Herod's family was forced to convert to Judaism under Hyrcanus.

Just a couple of other interesting things about this place. There were some stubborn people in Micah's hometown who didn't want to convert. These Edomians who were living in the Shephelah, including tell Marissa, did not want to convert.

And at tell Marissa, these Edomians had dunked thousands of these caves. The hills are just honeycombed with caves in the Shephelah here. And those of you who have the joy, I almost said obligation because I feel that's so important to understanding the Bible, to go to Israel, and to allow this history to become something visually.

You can touch it, you can see it, you can walk there. So the Edomians at Micah's town had dug thousands of these caves. And before the Edomians fled Hyrcanus, they filled the cave with their possessions from their homes on the top of the tell.

This is one of the fun archaeological digs that I spent a brief time on a number of years ago. And the excavations in these caves. In other words, the Edomians did not want Hyrcanus coming in and just taking over their homes.

They basically destroyed their homes, took their possessions, pottery and other things, and they just filled these caves. So there are hundreds of these caves yet to be excavated at Tel Merissa. In a number of these caves which have been excavated, it was found that there was a large olive oil industry here.

A whole bunch of these olive crushers and pressers were found. In this class, we talked a little bit about the economic and agricultural world at that time. Well, Tel Merissa was standing quite close to Route 95.

You could get right down off of the foothills onto Route 95 and ship this olive oil to Egypt. And that's exactly where a lot of this oil went, as Egypt does not have a lot of olive trees. You know, the delta area is just rich soil, but it lacks the kind of rocky and much more rainy kind of climate that the hills of Judea have.

The other interesting thing in the caves is the columbarium. Thousands of these pigeonholes were found in the caves of Tel Merissa. I call them pigeonholes because, actually, no one knows what they're for.

At first, scholars, you know, in archaeology, you have discovery, you then have description, you then try to analyze what you've found, and then your final step is interpreting the evidence that you've described and analyzed. Well, many scholars thought, since they probably used a lot of the pigeons and doves up at the temple, and since this was a day-and-a-half hike up to Jerusalem, this might have been an area for selling pigeons or doves. You know, the mom of Jesus got involved in this business after Jesus was born.

She had to show up at Jerusalem, and it was a sacrifice. Because the Levitical law said if you were a poor family, you could substitute birds for your Pidyon HaBen ceremony. Pidyon HaBen means literally the redemption of the son, and it was a ceremony that was done a number of weeks after the birth, when the first child was a boy baby.

The problem with that is, even though these were nice little niches, you could see a bird sitting on one of these things dug out of these chalky kind of cliffs, there's no bird poop in any of these places. So that's one of the problems archaeologists have. These are where birds are.

No evidence of that when you try to analyze it chemically. You would think birds would have left some kind of remains in the cave. So even though this looks like this might be a dove coat, a place where these birds might have been kept and captive and sold, interpretation then says, looks like it's a perfect example of this, but you would think there would be more bird mess left around there to support that view.

Right now there's another theory that they have come up with. Perhaps these little holes were used for the dyeing or the weaving business, where perhaps strands of weaving material may have been dyed and then stretched between these little holes in the wall until the material dried and so forth. So no one really knows why all these little holes in the caves of Micah's world.

That's what you will find today. Looking at the overview of Micah's prophecy, just a few comments on that. The prophecy breaks into three main big chunks of material.

And each one starts with the word Shema, here. He gives three messages, each one announced with this Hebrew word Tehir. And chapters one and two are his first message directed to the people.

In one two, it says, hear you people, all of you. So, chapters one and two, the first message to the people, are primarily one of judgment on both Samaria and Judah. The second big chunk of material in this prophecy is chapters three through five.

And three, one says, hear you heads of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. The second message is addressed to the leaders. So, he moves from a critical analysis of society in general, the people, and now goes to the leaders, the rulers of that day.

And while he brings judgment to leaders, including false prophets, he also holds out hope in that traditional way in which Isaiah arranges his whole prophecy. One through thirty-nine, judgment primarily. Forty through sixty-six, hope, redemption.

Even a new heavens and a new earth as Isaiah ends his prophecy. And then chapters six and seven, which is the third message. It's rather weird because it says in 6:1, hear you mountains, whoever preached the sermon to the mountains.

And this third message, chapters six and seven, is delivered to the mountains because God has a controversy with his people. And the mountains here stand for, symbolically, the courtroom. It stands for the court and the judges who are going to hear Yahweh's case that he has about his people.

And perhaps where we say, as old as the hills, where the mountains or the hills represent the enduring, eternal, as it were, standards of God's justice as he sets forth his case against his people. Let me point out a number of points in each of these main sections, then. You notice in verse one that he delivers his message concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

So right off the bat, we know he has a message for both of the communities. And the language is hyperbolic. The Lord is coming from his holy temple, maybe his heavenly temple here, coming forth from his place, coming down and treading upon the high places of the earth.

Maybe that includes the notorious high places of the northern kingdom, not just coming to the mountains. And treading upon the places of the earth. And the mountains will melt unto him, and the valleys will be cleft like wax before fire, like waters poured down a steep place.

It's reminiscent, isn't it, of the theophany in the third chapter of Habakkuk that we looked at. Where God, in this act of judgment, comes down, and he looks at the sins and the transgressions of his people. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria, famous for its idolatry, that we talked about, particularly in Hosea?

It is nature worship, it is Baalism. And is it not also Jerusalem? Both capital cities. Capital city of the north, capital city of the south.

And what's he predicting? I'll make Samaria a heap in the open country. He's predicting 721 here. Hasn't happened yet.

A great archaeological phrase is found in verse 6. I will pour down her rubble or stones into the valley. It's kind of an archaeological picture of what happens. You build on a natural knoll or a hill.

What is called in the Bible a T.E.L. or T.E.L.L. as in Tel Aviv. Which means heap of grain. But a T.E.L.L. is a mound.

A natural area is usually where you, like a layer cake effect, continue to build higher and higher. Some T.E.L.L.s are very, very high where Jesus Christ Superstar was filmed.

Beit She'an down in the Jordan Valley. That's 90 feet high. And when an invader would come in, you would knock down walls and buildings.

And that rubble would flow down into the valley. So that is the picture here. It talks about the images being broken to pieces.

It hints at sacred prostitution. And her hires shall be burned with fire. And her idols I will lay waste.

For from the hire of a harlot she gathered them. And to the hire of a harlot, they shall return. Particularly those words remind us of Hosea's criticism of the Northern Kingdom.

The rest of chapter 1, verses 8 through 16, is a picture of the Assyrian armies rolling over the Shephelah, the Southern Kingdom. And you remember it was only 20 years after the Northern Kingdom fell, 721, that in 701, who was worried about the Assyrian invasion? King Hezekiah, who was checking out his water supply. Because already 46 cities had fallen in Sennacherib's cleanup of the Southern Kingdom.

And now he's headed toward Jerusalem, just 20 years after the Northern Kingdom fell. 721, 701, the time of Hezekiah's coming to Jerusalem. So, this description here in the last of chapter 1, which is more than a picture of Assyrian armies coming into the Southern Kingdom, but the language here is extraordinary.

Actually, what you have here is the longest sustained pun in the whole Old Testament. There's a play on words here going on. In ancient Israel, the wisest man was the punniest.

And to be able to play on words, which you have as early as, of course, the opening chapters of the Bible. God creates Adam from the Adamah. And here, what he does is he mentions a number of places or cities in the Shephelah area, where Micah is from.

And he then makes his pun. Example, verse 10. Tell it not in Gath.

Literally, the Hebrew has, tell it not in tell town. T-E-L-L town. Tell it not in Gath.

In Beth-le-Aphra, roll yourselves in the dust. Literally, in the house of dust, roll yourself in dust. So, he spins out a number of these puns.

Why all the dust? It's more than a pun. This is a sign of mourning. You saw it in Jonah.

Now you see it again. Where does Ash Wednesday get the idea of using ashes? It goes back to this kind of material, to the book of Jonah, to dust. It is a sign of intense mourning.

Where do Job's friends sit? They sat in the dust. Or they cover themselves with dust. It's a sign of mourning.

So, there's a picture here, there. Southern kingdom. Watch out, and the Assyrian juggernaut is coming.

Verse 13. Harness the steeds to the chariots, inhabitants of Lachish, or Lakish, as we anglicize it. Literally, the inhabitants of horsetown.

So, he ends chapter 1 by talking about making yourself bald and cutting off your hair. This is a symbol of intense mourning. Actually, he uses the feminine here in verse 16.

Feminine gender. Make yourselves bald. Women, whose hair was to be their crown and glory, as the New Testament reflects particularly on that, are to be bald.

That's how extreme. Ezra is concerned about all the intermarriage going on in the 5th century. What's he doing? Read the book of Ezra.

He plucks out his beard. He pulls out his hair. And this sign of getting rid of your hair is again in the face of tragedy.

What tragedy? You're going to be bald as an eagle, verse 16 says, because exile is coming. In the second chapter, he begins with the probably most ubiquitous expletive in the Jewish community, especially Yiddish-speaking Jews. Oy! Oy! It starts out woe.

The most powerful expletive in the Hebrew Bible. Oy vey, you've heard. Vey, W-E-H, is German for pain.

So, when you say, oy, vey, it's literally, oh pain. Oh pain. So this, oy to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds.

They covet fields and seize them, houses they take that are not their own. Here we come back to the oppression of the poor theme. They oppress a man in his house and a man in his inheritance.

Now when we come to the second chapter, the end of the second chapter, he talks about this effort to stop the preaching of the prophet. Don't preach. But the word

comes back, is the spirit of the Lord impatient? Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly? Micah will continue his prophetic analysis.

And so social justice is very much part of his message. And when we go into the second main section, delivered to the leadership, chapters three through five, he starts out talking about the rulers and their inability to be just. He talks about Mishpat in 3.1. One of the most powerful metaphors in the Bible from God's point of view on people who oppress the poor.

Verses two and three criticizes the leaders who treat the poor like cannibals. Like cannibals, skinning people alive. Just like a cannibal would take a victim and chop it up.

Now the language is exaggerated. It's hyperbolic. But you who tear the skin off my people and the flesh from off their bones and eat the flesh of my people and flay their skin from off them and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a cauldron.

Those are very, very powerful words. The destruction of the poor. He goes on in chapter three and talks about the false prophets who are leading people astray, bringing darkness to them.

By contrast, one of the best verses you have in all of prophetic literature, what is a prophet and how did a prophet function? Notice in 3.8, Micah says, As for me, I am filled with power, the source of prophetic inspiration in Scripture. These were not talented people who had the right seminary education and had the ability to use spiritual analysis for their generation. It was not an innate gift.

As for me, I am filled with the capital S, Ruach Adonai, the Spirit of the Lord. I am filled with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. In other words, the true prophet speaks what people need to know.

And the source of that message is the living God. He criticizes the leaders of his day for payola. They were taking bribes, verse 11.

And you cannot administer mishpat, justice, when you're taking money on the side. Even Hammurabi's law code, 1700 B.C., which was more than a millennium before that, had very careful instructions. If you are a skipper who runs a barge and a judge comes to get into your boat because you're taking him across the Euphrates or transporting him in one of the many canals they had along the Euphrates, you could not so much as give your hand to the judge to steady him as he stepped into your boat.

That was considered a bribe. There's a long history of influencing people in power. We have it in the modern world.

3:12 is the first place you have in the Bible announcing 586 and what's going to happen. Because of you, Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. Again, the language is poetic of the destruction of Jerusalem given by this prophet of the southern kingdom, 5.86. In the fourth chapter, we have this wonderful passage that talks about God's ultimate plan for His people and on this earth when Zion becomes the highest mountain.

I'll come back to this later when we talk about this passage in Isaiah 2, but to be the highest mountain was a way of saying in the ancient Near East, it was Mount Olympus for the Greeks, it was Mount Saffron for the Canaanites, it was the top of a ziggurat in modern-day Iraq as we can still see these high terraced places where at the top a deity connected with the worshipper. It won't be on a mountain in any of these places, but Jerusalem, which represents the spiritual capital, if you will, the home, the dwelling place of the God of Israel. This will be the highest, and when it says it's raised above all the other hills, it talks about the triumph of revealed religion in the latter days.

The Lord's house, the God of Israel, His house will be the highest of the mountains, spiritual exaltation, and be raised above all the other hills. Whatever this passage has to deal with, which is the further outworking of God's kingdom on this earth, he says this is a day when both Jews and Gentiles are going to come under God's reign and rule. He says many nations will come and say, come, let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways.

So, it anticipates Jews and Gentiles in the kingdom of God. This is a messianic passage. Also you notice it talks about the fact that He will judge between the nations, and He will bring peace as swords are beaten into agricultural implements.

It will be a time of permanent peace because the nation will not learn war anymore. As we all know from the language of the New Testament, that age was inaugurated, but it has not yet been consummated. And so, the language here of Micah, the age of the Messiah, the initial beginnings of its fulfillment, but certainly, where here it talks about universal peace, nations far and wide, and a peace based on true spirituality, walking in the name of the Lord God of Israel forever and ever, verse 5, that precise time has yet to come.

Political or military or humanistic or sociological solutions to the world's problems are only temporary, because treaties, even peace treaties, are made only to be broken. Study the history of humanity. So, this gives a picture of peace, and His co-

prophet Isaiah gives a similar picture under the Messiah when Sar Shalom, the Prince of Peace, eventually brings that vision to earth.

In chapter 5, we have something of the Messianic King, and certainly, 5:2 gets quoted in Matthew's Gospel, And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little among the clans of Judah, from you will come forth one who will be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old. And in this passage dealing with Christ's birth, in Matthew 2:5 and 6, it's quoted by the Magi coming to Jerusalem. What is the work of the Messiah? He's going to be sort of like David.

David was a great shepherd. In 5.4, he will feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they will dwell securely for now. He will be great to the ends of the earth.

He will feed his flock. That language is in Handel's Messiah, which is strongly based on Isaiah's prophecy, and you can see also the echoes here in Micah. When the Messianic age fully comes, the end of chapter 5 indicates, in that day, verse 10, all the negative things in society that keep God's reign from being fully realized will be cut off.

Your horses, your chariots, sorceries, soothsayers, verse 13, pagan images, pillars to which people bow down. I'll root out the Asherim among you. Northern kingdom, remember these wooden poles, which were part of the Baal cult.

These will be destroyed. The last part of the prophecy is this lawsuit theme, and Isaiah talks about Rib. Now, if you make a study in the Hebrew Bible of this word rib, you will find that the word means a case, an accusation.

It's really a covenant lawsuit where it says the Lord has a rib with His people in 6:2. Micah, the prophet here, is the prosecuting attorney for Yahweh. It's addressed to the hills, to the mountains, whom I suggested earlier in this lecture were symbols of God's permanent and unchangeable justice. And as these hills and mountains sit like court and judges to listen to the case, the controversy that God has with His people, He's going to enter into contention.

What is the complaint or the rib? Verses 1-5. God speaks here through the prophet, and basically, He builds His case against Judah upon His past mercies. I didn't treat you terribly.

In fact, exactly the opposite. Check out the mercies of the Lord. I was saying to one of my classes yesterday that the best verse we have in the Hebrew Bible for the reason we as Christians ought to serve the Lord is really found in 1 Samuel 12, where 1 Samuel gives Samuel's last will and testament.

He says You must serve the Lord because you consider what great things He has done for you. That's why you serve Him faithfully. And from generation to generation, we always look back so that we can look forward with confidence because our God is a gracious God.

He's a merciful God. Or, as we'll celebrate Wednesday night, He's a God who, amid wonders and miraculous interventions, He brings a people out of Egypt. And so here, He brings them back to Egypt.

How have I put you off? How have I let you down or wearied you? Indeed, to the contrary, I haven't let you down. I brought you up. And there's a wonderful pun here in Hebrew that I won't take time to point out to you.

But this bringing of Israel up from the land of Egypt was the opposite of letting them down. I redeemed you from the house of bondage. I gave you great leaders.

I gave you three key people from the tribe of Levi, Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam. Miriam was so special. The mother of Jesus was named for her.

We know her as Mary. But in the first century, she was Miriam. She was a sister of Moses, the first woman to exercise a ministry gift.

And the temple where we will be celebrating Passover is named for that great musical masterpiece and dance that happened by the waters of the Yam Suph, the Sea of Reeds. Shirat Hayam, the Song of the Sea that Miriam is associated with. God brought deliverance from Israel when Balak, king of Moab, was hassling Israel.

And God brought them safely through the Moabite territory. These were his saving acts. God blessed them when their enemies would have cursed them.

And so, Balaam speaks blessing, not curse. What's Israel's reply to this? Verses 6 through 8. Israel had a false conception of what God expected of them. The people were wearied in going through all of the liturgy, the ceremony, the misunderstanding.

People ask how God is to be propitiated. How do you get God off your back so He'll act kindly to you? What bone can you throw Him to assuage any personal anger He might have toward you? And so, here, Israel speaks as, let's increase what we're doing in this sacrificial system is the way to do this. And so, notice the progression of five questions.

Each one is bigger. He's moving in a crescendo here with What shall I come before the Lord? How about burnt offerings? How about a calf a year old? How about thousands of rams? How about ten thousand rivers of olive oil? And then he builds to

the climax: how about if I give the fruit of my own womb for the sins of my soul? My firstborn.

This was the Canaanite religion. And then we come, finally, and this will be it today, the ethical John 3.16 of the Hebrew Bible, Micah 6.8. He suggests increasing and intensifying the ceremonial ritual but in a typical prophetic fashion. The prophets speak to the ethical rather than the intensification of the priestly, the ritual, and the ceremony.

He showed you, O good, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? He wants mishpat. He wants fair and just dealings.

Some of this business he's already explained in his prophecy. He wants hesed. He wants loyal love.

He wants constant love. Love which leads to kind and gracious and merciful dealings with other people. And one of the relatively rare words in the Hebrew Bible is this last word.

He wants zeniut. Zeniut is a difficult word to translate. It means to do something with delicacy, with sensitivity.

Not with hubris, not with arrogance, not with pomp. You walk with zeniut, with the Lord. You walk in a humble way.

Zeniut is used in modern Israel, in the Hasidic community. I once saw a banner stretched over the old city of Jerusalem saying, Torah admonishes every woman of Israel to dress with zeniut, modesty, delicacy, and carefulness. And this is what it means.

When we walk with God, that's the imagery of spirituality in the Hebrew Bible, to walk with God in that humble hearing manner. Listening, sensitive to those around us with a heart that is directed toward God. Alright, these are the three things that Micah stresses and they become three of the most important cardinal teachings of Hebrew religion.

Justice, loving-kindness, loyal love, hesed. And finally, walking before God with moral delicacy and sensitivity and humility before the King of the Universe. Alright, that will be it for today.

This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the Prophets. This is session 22 on the Book of Micah.