

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Micah, Prophet Outside the Beltway

Session 1, Introduction

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Phillips, Micah, Session 1, Introduction, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture series introduces the Book of Micah, focusing on its historical, geographical, and literary contexts within the eighth-century BC Near East. Dr. Phillips emphasizes Micah's prophetic pronouncements against social injustice and religious corruption within Judah and Israel, highlighting the interplay between divine judgment and hope for a remnant. The lecture explores Micah's literary style, characterized by lament and powerful imagery, and examines different approaches to structuring the book's oracles. Finally, it considers the relevance of Micah's message for contemporary society, particularly concerning corrupt leadership and the enduring themes of God's sovereignty and hope.

2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Phillips, Micah, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Minor Prophets → Micah).



**Phillips_Micah_Sess
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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Phillips_Micah_EN_Session01.pdf":

Briefing Document: Introduction to the Prophet Micah

Purpose: This document provides a summary of the key themes, ideas, and facts presented in Dr. Elaine Phillips' first lecture on the Book of Micah, focusing on its historical, geographical, and theological contexts. This will serve as a foundation for understanding the subsequent lectures.

I. Canonical Context

- **Micah as part of the "Book of the Twelve":** Dr. Phillips prefers this term to "minor prophets," emphasizing the significance of these prophetic books. She notes that Micah is one of the 8th-century prophets.
- "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."
- **Contemporaries:** Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Jonah. There are significant connections between Isaiah and Micah.
- "...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."
- **Dead Sea Scrolls:** A fragment of Micah (chapter 5) was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, showcasing the text's antiquity and importance.
- "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."

II. Geographical Context

- **"Physical Theology":** Biblical messages are always situated in a geographical context with a physical "place focus".
- "Every biblical message is given within a context that has place focus to it. There's a physical theology going on..."

- **The Eastern Mediterranean:** The broader context includes major power centers like Assyria (Mesopotamia) and Egypt, with the land of Israel as the "land between", vulnerable due to geopolitical pressures.
- "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."
- **Topography of Israel:** The land is characterized by a central, rugged hill country (home to Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim), the Shephelah (lowlands/foothills), and the coastal plain.
- "...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."
- **The Shephelah:** This is a critical buffer zone between the hill country and the coastal plain, and is traversed by invasion routes. Micah's hometown, Moresheth Gath (or Moresheth) was located in this vulnerable area on the "front lines"
- "...our major threats are going to come from the hill country. And that Shephelah area is critical for our understanding... here is where Moresheth Gath is located... Micah's hometown right on the front lines in this war-torn area..."
- **Jerusalem:** Located in the protected hill country, it is naturally fortified, but accessible via east-west valleys in the Shephelah.
- "...the valley system, the hills, all those steep V-shaped valleys, provide a natural barrier, a natural fortification for Jerusalem."
- **Micah's Identity as a "Moreshti":** Micah is identified by his hometown, likely because he preached in Jerusalem, and was thus "outside the beltway."
- "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."

III. Historical Context

- **United Monarchy & Division:** The united monarchy under David and Solomon was followed by a split into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and Southern Kingdom (Judah) in 931 BC.

- **Northern Kingdom:** Under the Omri dynasty (Ahab), Baal worship became prevalent. Samaria became the capital, which was more open to foreign influence. It eventually fell to Assyria in 722 BC.
- "...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..."
- **Southern Kingdom:** Jerusalem was its capital. Key rulers included Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.
- **Assyrian Expansion:** Tiglath-Pileser III: Around 740 BC, he absorbed Syria and the Northern kingdom and marched through Philistia (734BC).
- "...about 740 BC...you have Tiglath-Pileser on the move. He absorbs both Syria. He gets to the Northern kingdom."
- Sargon II: Conquered Samaria in 722 BC and took Ashdod and Gath, suggesting inland raids.
- "...he's the one who ended up taking Samaria... But not only does Sargon take Samaria, but he also gobbles up Ashdod and Gath..."
- Sennacherib: Subdued 46 towns in Judah, took Lachish, and attempted to conquer Jerusalem.
- "He mentions in some of his texts having subdued 46 towns in Judah... He then talks about Ashkelon and Ekron...He takes Lachish and attempts to take Jerusalem as well..."
- **Kings of Judah in Micah's Time:** **Uzziah:** Successful but with a subtext of potential societal problems.
- "...Uzziah was a very successful King...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."
- **Jotham:** A good king, but the people continued to do evil.
- "...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..."

- **Ahaz:** Wicked king, practicing idolatry, closing the temple, and sacrificing his children. He suffered attacks during the Syro-Ephraimite war (combined attack by the Northern Kingdom and Syria) and also from Edom and the Philistines. He appealed to Tiglath-Pileser for help.
- "...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... around that time, about two years in there, Ahaz will endure attacks from a combined alliance, if you will, of the Northern kingdom and Syria."
- **Hezekiah:** Instituted reforms and had to deal with Sennacherib's attacks.
- "...Hezekiah is going to recognize the horror that has resulted because of Ahaz and his apostasy. Hezekiah will effect a reform."
- **Micah's Ministry:** Micah prophesied during a tumultuous time, witnessing attacks from various enemies, and spoke against the evils of Ahaz and into the reform of Hezekiah. His words were memorable even later in the time of Jeremiah.
- "...Micah was called to be a prophetic voice in the exceedingly tumultuous time, exceedingly tumultuous time. And we can only begin to imagine... what kinds of things might've been part of his experience... He obviously was a memorable voice."

IV. Literary and Theological Issues

- **Structure:** The book is comprised of multiple oracles. There is a debate on how these oracles are grouped. Two possible structures were presented:
- **Three-Unit Structure:** (1-3), (4-5), (6-7). Chapters 1-3 focus on judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem, Chapters 4-5 focus on the future of Mount Zion and a coming ruler from Bethlehem, and Chapters 6-7 are a covenant dispute, lament, and restoration.
- **Four-Unit Structure:** This pattern is based on a recurring cycle of judgment followed by salvation or hope within each section. (1-2), (3-4), (4-5), (6-7).
- **Lament:** Lament is prominent, especially in Chapters 1 and 7, expressing agony over people's sins using broken language, visual imagery (weeping, writhing, nakedness) and the cry of horror, "alilah."

- "It's turbulent poetry. It's raw. It's rugged... 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."
- **Interwoven Voices:** Micah's voice interfaces with the Lord's voice, using dialogue, shifting pronouns, sound patterns, and powerful figures of speech. He does not use the standard word for prophesy, but uses the word that is translated 'drip' when describing false prophets.
- "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.... the word for prophesy...is not used by Micah. He uses a different Hebrew word, and it's the word that is translated drip."
- **Theological Themes:Yahweh's Presence:** Micah's name means "Who is like Yahweh?" The book begins with a declaration of God's overwhelming presence and ends with the question, "Who is like you, O God?".
- "So his name itself is asking a profound question.... The book starts with that. Who is like the Lord and ends with who is like you."
- **Covenant:** The covenant was a binding agreement that the people repeatedly broke. God used prophets as "covenant enforcement mediators" to remind them of their obligations and to call them to repentance.
- "...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... labeled covenant enforcement mediators."
- **Consequences of Disobedience:** Disobedience brought curses, such as foreign invasion and socioeconomic hardships. However, these judgments were designed to bring the people back to God.
- "These judgments that were brought to their memory by virtue of the prophets don't come out of the blue in the Pentateuch... those curses that are pronounced upon the people because of disobedience, first of all, are designed to bring them back."
- **Hope and Remnant:** Judgment oracles are always followed by expressions of hope, and Micah uses the term "remnant" multiple times.

- "These judgment oracles are always followed by expressions of hope... And as far as Micah is concerned, he will use the term remnant multiple times."
- **21st Century Applications:** The need to acknowledge God's sovereignty
- Micah's messages are relevant to the modern world because he spoke out against injustice, corruption, and moral decay and for a proper relationship with God and His law.
- The prophecy of a future ruler from Bethlehem (5:2) is significant, having been cited in the New Testament when the Magi sought the King of the Jews.
- "...we also have this remarkable promise that there was going to be a ruler whose origins were from of old, Bethlehem Ephrata... 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."

V. Conclusion

Dr. Phillips' introductory lecture lays a comprehensive foundation for studying the Book of Micah. By exploring its canonical, geographical, historical, literary, and theological contexts, it highlights the complexity and relevance of Micah's prophetic message. This provides a strong framework for interpreting the book and understanding its application to the modern world.

4. Phillips, Micah, Session 1, Introduction

Micah: Prophet Outside the Beltway - Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why does Dr. Phillips prefer the term "Book of the 12" over "minor prophets" when referring to Micah and his contemporaries?
2. Describe the geographical significance of the "land between" in the context of Micah's prophecies.
3. What is the Shephelah, and how did its topography impact the region of Judah?
4. Why is Moresheth Gath's location significant to understanding Micah's message?
5. What key event occurred in 931 BC that significantly altered the political landscape of Israel and Judah?
6. Describe the Omri dynasty and why it is relevant to understanding the context of Micah's prophecies?
7. How did the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser III impact the region of Israel and Judah during Micah's time?
8. What was the Syro-Ephraimite War, and why was it significant in the political and social contexts of Micah's time?
9. How did Micah's prophetic voice influence Jeremiah centuries later?
10. Explain the structural significance of the question "Who is like the Lord?" in the book of Micah.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Phillips prefers "Book of the 12" because the term "minor prophets" can imply that these prophets are less important than major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, which is not the case. These prophets are significant in their own right.
2. The "land between," situated between Assyria and Egypt, was a geopolitical hot spot characterized by frequent military traffic. This created instability and affected the region of Israel and Judah, including Micah's hometown.

3. The Shephelah is a region of lowlands or foothills west of the central hill country. Its east-west valleys served as invasion routes into the interior, making it a critical area for military movement and conflict.
4. Moresheth Gath's location on the front lines of a war-torn area in the Shephelah meant that Micah would have lived under the constant threat of invasion. This context likely shaped his message regarding God's judgement.
5. The kingdom split in 931 BC after Solomon's death, resulting in a northern kingdom of Israel and a southern kingdom of Judah. This division led to political and religious tensions.
6. The Omri dynasty, particularly under Ahab, moved its capital to Samaria and embraced Baal worship, which was significant because it highlights the foreign influence and idolatry that Micah would speak against.
7. Tiglath-Pileser III's Assyrian expansion impacted the region by subjugating areas in the land between. His movement through the region led to tribute payments and the subjugation of Ahaz, who ruled Jerusalem.
8. The Syro-Ephraimite War was a conflict between the northern kingdom (Israel) and Syria against the southern kingdom (Judah). It resulted in many deaths, captivities, and underscored the severity of God's judgment.
9. Micah's prophecy about the destruction of the temple was referenced by elders when Jeremiah was on the cusp of being killed for a similar message. It shows the impact of Micah's message.
10. The book begins with Micah's name, which translates to the question, "Who is like the Lord?" and ends with the similar question, "Who is like you, O God?". This framing emphasizes the unique character and sovereignty of Yahweh.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the geographical and historical contexts that shaped Micah's message, explaining how the political instability, location of his home, and surrounding influences led to his prophetic declarations.
2. Discuss the literary devices, such as lament, dialogue, and wordplay, that are used throughout the book of Micah, illustrating how these devices impact the reader's understanding of the text.
3. Compare and contrast the structural approaches to the book of Micah, examining the arguments for three versus four distinct units, and explain how differing structures impact interpretations of the book's message.
4. Explore the theological themes of covenant, judgment, and hope as they appear in the book of Micah, including specific examples from the text, and how the concepts intersect with each other.
5. Reflect on the relevance of Micah's message to the 21st-century church and society, considering the social, political, and religious parallels that can be drawn between ancient Israel and contemporary life.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Book of the 12:** A term referring to the twelve minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible, preferred by Dr. Phillips to avoid the implication that these books are less important.
- **Land Between:** The geographical area between Mesopotamia (Assyria) and Egypt, known for its geopolitical significance and frequent military conflicts.
- **Shephelah:** A Hebrew term for "lowlands" or "foothills," describing the area west of the central hill country in Israel.
- **Moresbeth Gath:** Micah's hometown located in the Shephelah, a strategically vulnerable area prone to invasion and a place of personal significance to the prophet's message.
- **Omri Dynasty:** A dynasty in the Northern Kingdom of Israel that embraced Baal worship and moved the capital to Samaria.
- **Tiglath-Pileser III:** An Assyrian ruler whose expansion greatly impacted the region of Israel and Judah, bringing about subjugation and tribute.
- **Syro-Ephraimite War:** A war involving an alliance between Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel against the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
- **Remnant:** The group of people who would be left after destruction; a concept that holds a key position within the theological message of Micah.
- **Covenant:** A binding agreement or treaty, central to the relationship between God and his people in the Hebrew Bible.
- **Lament:** A passionate expression of grief or sorrow, a common feature in the prophetic literature and evident in Micah.
- **Merashti/Moreshtite:** The term used to identify Micah by his hometown of Moresbeth, indicating his origins from the Shephelah rather than by familial lineage.
- **Assyria:** A major power in the ancient Near East, whose influence greatly affected the kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the time of Micah.
- **Sennacherib:** An Assyrian king who attempted to capture Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign, recorded in biblical and extra-biblical texts.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Micah, Session 1, Introduction, Biblelearning.org (BeL)

Micah: A Prophet "Outside the Beltway" - FAQ

- **What does it mean that Micah is considered a prophet "outside the beltway," and why is that significant?**
- Micah is referred to as "outside the beltway" because he was likely from a small town called Moresheth-Gath in the Shephelah region, an area that was a buffer zone often in the path of military conflict and political maneuvering, and he is identified by his hometown rather than his family name, suggesting he may have been an outsider to Jerusalem's power structures. This is significant because it highlights that he was a prophet who wasn't part of the elite religious or political establishment of Jerusalem but still had a crucial message for them. The fact that he was from this area also means he was very familiar with the threat of invasion and the suffering this caused, influencing the tone and content of his message.
- **How does the geographical context of Micah's time impact his prophetic message?**
- The geographical context greatly impacted Micah's message. The region was a geopolitical crossroads between major powers like Assyria and Egypt. The Shephelah, Micah's home region, served as a buffer zone, experiencing frequent military incursions. Micah's message is also geographically focused, beginning with judgment of Samaria and then moving to Jerusalem, alluding to specific locations within the Shephelah and areas that were subject to attacks. The rugged terrain surrounding Jerusalem provided natural defense, but the coastal plains and invasion routes through the Shephelah made the region vulnerable to outside forces and also a target for political leaders trying to control the area.

- **What are the major historical events that shaped the context of Micah's prophecies?**
- Several key historical events shaped Micah's context. The split of the united monarchy into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (931 BC) set the stage for internal conflicts. The rise of the Assyrian Empire, particularly under Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II, brought external pressures on both kingdoms, especially with the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC. The Syro-Ephraimite War in 734 BC, and later Sennacherib's campaigns against Judah, further destabilized the region. Additionally, internal issues in both kingdoms like idolatry and social injustice also contributed to the circumstances of Micah's time. He lived through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, witnessing both spiritual and political turmoil.
- **How does Micah fit into the larger group of eighth-century prophets, and why are they significant?**
- Micah is one of the eighth-century prophets, alongside contemporaries like Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. These prophets are significant because they addressed the major social, political, and religious issues of their time. They often critiqued the corrupt leadership, idolatry, and injustices prevailing in Israel and Judah. They were sent as "covenant enforcement mediators" to remind the people of their obligations under God's covenant and warn them of impending judgment if they failed to follow God's commands, and they also offered messages of hope. They all lived during a period of intense upheaval caused by the rise of Assyria.
- **What are some of the key literary features of the Book of Micah, and how do they enhance its message?**
- Micah uses several key literary features including: lament, a sense of raw, turbulent, broken poetry. The language in places is almost incomprehensible due to Micah's deep grief. There are shifts in pronouns and direct address. There are also dialogue and wordplays used to emphasize key ideas. Puns and sound patterns such as "sheker" and "shekar" highlight connections and contradictions within the text. Additionally, the shifting tone between lament and hope adds to the book's complexity. These literary elements enhance the power of Micah's message by conveying both the devastation of judgment and the longing for restoration.

- **What are the main theological themes found in the Book of Micah?**
- The book of Micah highlights several theological themes. God's sovereignty and presence is paramount, starting with "Who is like the Lord" (Micah) and ending with "Who is like you, O God." The covenant relationship between God and His people, and the consequences of breaking that covenant. It also stresses God's role as a judge, which includes a call for justice, condemning corrupt leadership, social injustice, and idolatry. God's compassion and mercy are shown through the promise of restoration and the remnant and the coming ruler from Bethlehem. The concept of the remnant and the messianic hope are also central to his message, offering the prospect of future salvation.
- **How is the structure of the Book of Micah debated, and what are the main positions?**
- There are debates on how the oracles of Micah hang together with two common structures: The first structure sees the book as having three main units: chapters 1-3 (judgement on Samaria and Jerusalem), chapters 4-5 (future of Mt Zion and coming ruler), and chapters 6-7 (covenant dispute and final restoration). The other structure sees four units: chapters 1-2 (judgement then rescue), chapters 3-4 (judgement of the leadership and restoration of Jerusalem), 4:9-5 (waves of trauma interspersed with triumph), and 6-7 (covenant dispute, hope in the darkness). Both structures recognize the themes of judgement and salvation. Some scholars believe that the text has little structure and is a collection of oracles that range in time from Micah to the post-exilic era.
- **What are some relevant applications of Micah's message to the contemporary Western church?**
- Micah's message has several relevant applications. It calls for recognition of God's sovereignty, even in turbulent times. It also underscores the need for justice in societies and the church. Micah's condemnation of corrupt leadership serves as a reminder of accountability for those in authority. The critique of falsehood and deception calls for truthfulness and honesty in all aspects of life. The book also reminds of the need to understand and practice the Torah (God's word) and to be grounded in scripture, and that even when things seem hopeless, there is a promise for the future based on God's mercy. Finally, there is a strong messianic prophecy that was later understood to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.