



**Andersen, Francis I., and David Noel Freedman**

***Micah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary***

Anchor Bible 24E

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The commentary on Micah is, like the previous volumes in the Anchor Bible series by the same authors, a traditional philological enterprise. A fairly short introduction discussing the text and the ancient translations (3–5), the place of the book in the corpus of the twelve minor prophets (6–7), the literary units of the book (7–14), the paragraph markers in the Hebrew manuscripts (14–16), and the organization of the materials in the book (16–29), is followed by a painstaking literary and linguistic analysis of the individual units of the book (101–601). The commentary is complemented by an extensive bibliography (31–99) and some indices (603–37).

Andersen and Freedman deliberately focus on the present text of the book of Micah, since that is the only form of the book known to us (16–17, 21–22). According to them the oracles have been arranged in three books: Mic 1–3: The Book of Doom; Mic 4–5: The Book of Visions; and Mic 6–7: The Book of Contention and Conciliation. The long-standing discussion on the composition of the book of Micah thus seems to have come full circle, as their arrangement matches the traditional threefold division of the materials in the book: doom (Mic 1–3), hope (Mic 4–5), and doom and hope (Mic 6–7), challenged by J. T. Willis, L. C. Allen, and others in the past three or four decades. The repetitious

summons to hear in 1:2; 3:1; 6:1 and the awkward position of the oracle of salvation in 2:12–13 occasioned these scholars to divide the book of Micah in three sections each composed of oracles of doom (1:2–2:11; 3:1–12; 6:1–7:6) and oracles of hope (2:12–13; 4:1–5:14; 7:7–20). Andersen and Freedman readily accept the presence of these and similar structural features in the text but are inclined to attach more weight to the long-range inclusions they perceive in the oracles against Samaria (1:6–7) and Jerusalem (3:12) in the Book of Doom, the oracles focusing on disarmament that open and close the Book of Visions in 4:1–5 and 5:9–14, and the resolution of the covenant dispute in the Book of Contention and Conciliation (23–24). The random selection of a few inclusions out of many, however, may hardly do justice to the multitude of structural features in the present text of the book. Andersen and Freedman may well be right in asserting that the numerous links and patterns that may be perceived cannot be reconciled with one single outline or plan, but they turn as a matter of principle a blind eye to the possibility that these sometimes conflicting structural features may hint at different layouts for the book in the various stages of its composition history.

Their rigorous concentration on the present form of the book is equally questionable with regard to the dates they attach to the oracles. To be sure, they explicitly refrain from dating the individual texts: “It cannot be done” (26). In fact, however, they uncritically date the bulk of the materials in accordance with the superscription “the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah” to the decades immediately before the fall of Samaria, as the book betrays no knowledge of this incident (185–86, 386–87, 390–91). Again, Andersen and Freedman readily acknowledge that the book contains materials from the Neo-Babylonian era, although they find no evidence that hints at a date later than the fifth century (20). In view of the acclaimed focus on the present form of the book, however, it may come as a surprise that they stop well short of dealing with the book of Micah as a product from the exilic or early exilic period. Once put to the test: “To the extent that chapters 4–5 are a distinct ‘book’, we almost have a case of ‘all or nothing’. The main act of composition must have been performed during or shortly after Micah’s lifetime, or else during the Exile” (495), they discuss most of the materials “whatever the mix of eighth century originals and sixth century additions” against the background of the late eighth century (494–99). The failure to make a distinction between eighth-century prophecy and sixth-century interpretation has detrimental consequences for the exegesis of individual texts. The prophetic judgment oracle recorded in Mic 3:9–12 is admittedly interpreted in Jer 26:16–19 as a conditional threat averted by the repentance of King Hezekiah of Judah. This tenet may well be true in the theological discussion of the early sixth century, but it hardly allows for the conclusion that this shows that “such prophecies, even when made without qualification, were implicitly conditional” (128, 386–87). The qualification of the unconditional punishment announced by the late eighth-century prophets cannot be

maintained on the basis of the interpretation of the prophetic judgment oracles as such but can only be accepted as a sixth-century theological development. Any attempt to establish the meaning of an oracle in flat contradiction with the text at hand would ultimately imply that we lose all control over its interpretation.

The interpretation of the individual units likewise suffers from a relentless focus on the final form of the text. The translation offered by Andersen and Freedman is “as literal as English can endure, sometimes painfully literal in the interest of exactitude” (5), but more often than not so literal as to be of no help in establishing the proposed interpretation of the text. Moreover, the acclaimed exactitude tends to obscure the fact that the Hebrew text can often not be interpreted comprehensively at all. Andersen and Freedman argue that an assessment of the shape of the text and the usual emendations should await the compositional analysis of the text. A firm grasp of the poetical patterns and rhetorical structures are said to shed a different light on text-critical and form-critical issues (29). In their meticulous description of the poetical patterns, however, they have to admit time and again that the individual colons are quite diverse in length, ranging from four to twelve syllables (133–34, 258), that oracular poetry is not as regular and uniform as cultic compositions (258), that quite a number of lines exhibit all the characteristics of prose but can nevertheless be accepted as part of the entire poem (258, 361, 379–80), and, last but not least, that the really incomprehensible passages are due to a studied incoherence in Micah’s compositional style (299–300). Herewith we are of course far removed from the use of poetical patterns as a method for the analysis of texts and are merely presented with a description of the many consistencies and inconsistencies of a text judged to be “a very subtle and sophisticated composition.” And the fruits of form criticism are sacrificed for such an analysis of poetical patterns.

One example may suffice. The text of the poetic judgment oracle in Mic 3:1–4 seems to be in some disarray. The third-person masculine plural suffixes in 3:2b seem to lack an antecedent, and the repetition of “they tear their skin off of them” in 3:2aa by “they flay their skin from off them” in 3:3ab seems to be superfluous in an already repetitive text. Andersen and Freedman dismiss beforehand all attempts to remedy the situation by textual emendations and find a concentric structure of nine colons symmetrically arranged around 3:3aa “you eat the flesh of my people,” providing the antecedent for all the third-person masculine plural suffixes in 3:2–3 instead (351–52). In the course of the subsequent discussion on the nature of the gruesome imagery used by the prophet, their initial classification of the text as a prophetic judgment oracle composed of an accusation in 3:1b–3 and an announcement of judgment in 3:4 (348) eventually gives way to the conviction that 3:2–3 portray the practice of human sacrifice, which is followed by the observation that God did not respond favorably to such cultic acts in 3:4 (352–57). Andersen and Freedman are certainly right in assuming that the traditional interpretation

leaves much room for questions, as clear-cut reasons for the oppressors to cry out for divine help are obviously lacking in the present text: “When they shall cry to the Lord...,” but why should they? A consistent form-critical approach of the text, however, might yield a much better solution for the many inconsistencies presented by this text. In addition to the grammatical and literary inconsistencies and the conspicuous omission of the messenger formula that usually marks the transition from indictment to announcement of judgment, the lack of correspondence between crime and punishment characteristic for a prophetic judgment oracle presents a major problem. As soon as 3:2b is transferred to a position immediately after 3:3, the text would fit the scheme of a prophetic judgment oracle without further ado. The balance between crime and punishment is now restored, as the heinous deeds of the leaders (“you who eat the flesh of my people—flay their skin from off them—and break their bones”) are punished by the arrival of an anonymous enemy who “will tear their skin off of them and their flesh from their bones.” The stray *kh ’mr yhwh* formula that seems to be ill at place at the beginning of the next prophetic judgment oracle in Mic 3:5–8 may well be the dislocated messenger formula that originally indicated the transition from the indictment in 3:2a + 3 to announcement of judgment in 3:2b + 4 but lost its place in the course of the transmission of the text. Moreover, the rearrangement of the text would also solve the grammatical and literary problems. The “people” in 3:3aa would present the proper antecedent for the third-person masculine plural suffixes in 3:2b. As 3:3 and 3:2b would now belong to different parts of the prophetic judgment oracle, the repetition of “they flay their skin from off them” in 3:3ab by “they tear their skin off of them” in 3:2aa no longer poses a problem but on the contrary positively contributes to the reversal of fortunes supposed by the genre in question. In fact, the punishment expected by the prophet may well have inspired him to voice his accusations in such gruesome language. The imagery may not so much refer to human sacrifice but rather be prompted by the contemporary Neo-Assyrian custom of flaying the leadership of rebellious cities, as attested in several royal inscriptions and pictured on the reliefs of palace walls.

Finally, it is really a pity that the preparation of the present commentary from the completion of the manuscript in the early 1990s until its publication in 2000 has taken such a long time. As a consequence, the publications from the mid-1990s are only superficially discussed, and literature published after 1995 is not even mentioned at all. All in all, this volume seems to have lost a lot of its usefulness already at the date of its publication.