

**LIBERATION AND SALVATION IN THE BOOK OF MICAH: A SOUTH AFRICAN
PERSPECTIVE**

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DECLARATION

“I hereby declare that the mini-dissertation submitted for the Masters degree to the Rand Afrikaans University, apart from the help recognised, is my own work and has not been formerly submitted to another university for a degree.”

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SUMMARY

The hypothesis of this study is that in order for a society in conflict to become peaceful, real salvation must be obtained after real liberation. The relationship in the book of Micah between *liberation*, which is the setting free of people from oppression and exploitation, and *salvation*, which is the setting free of people from guilt and sin, is examined in order to apply the principles to our present-day society. In both eighth century Judah and contemporary South African society, people were excluded from political and economic power and this resulted in class conflict. The *historical-materialistic approach* has been implemented to analyse the eighth century background of the time of the prophet Micah and the text of Micah, as well as that of the contemporary South African situation. By means of this method a careful analysis of the social classes, such as the ruling, middle and exploited classes was made. An exploration of the background of the book of Micah exposes injustices on various levels of society. On the socio-economic level wealthy landowners deprived poor landowners of their birthright because land was an economic resource linked to cultural and religious values. Political leaders as exploiters of the poor maintained the *status quo*, while religious leaders did not protect the interests of the people, which led to their deprivation of religious education. Social injustices such as oppression and exploitation practised by the king and his officials deprived people of a meaningful life.

God replied to the injustices practised by authorities in Judah by imposing judgement on the nation. A remnant, however, was to be brought back. Liberation, therefore, comes through judgement. The purpose of God in allowing Israel to be oppressed and to experience disaster in exile was to put his people in a new relationship with him. In the exile situation liberation and salvation coincide when, on the grounds of setting his people free from sin and guilt, God also liberates them from the burden of the exile. A total change of the attitude of Israel, however, is a prerequisite. The outcome of this process of change is the rebuilding of the country and the nation.

As in eighth century Israel, liberation and salvation in the South African situation is a difficult process demanding tremendous effort from everybody involved. On the basis of the principles found in the book of Micah, new direction can be given to this process in order to develop a new relationship between God and his people in South Africa. Christians should take the lead in this process, but should also co-operate with other religious groups and with the government to bring about peaceful change. An attitude of mutual liberation and indulgence (salvation) amongst the people of South Africa, based on the Word of God, is what, in principle, God wants from all South Africans in order to bring about a peaceful society.

OPSOMMING

Die hipotese van hierdie studie is: "vir 'n konflikbelaaide samelewing om vreedsaam te verander, moet werklike verlossing verkry word nadat werklike bevryding bewerkstellig is." Die verhouding tussen *bevryding*, wat die opheffing van die laste van onderdrukte en uitgebuite mense is, en *verlossing*, wat die kwytstelling van skuld en sonde is, word in die boek Miga ondersoek. Die beginsels wat hieruit verkry word, word op die hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse situasie toegepas. Die *histories-materialistiese metode* word gebruik om sowel die agste eeuse Judese agtergrond waartydens die profeet Miga opgetree het, as die eietydse Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing te analiseer. In beide die agste eeuse Juda en die huidige Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing is mense uitgesluit van politieke en ekonomiese mag, wat op klassestryd uitgeloop het. Drie sosiale klasse word blootgelê, naamlik die heersersklas, die middelklas en die uitgebuite klas. 'n Ondersoek van die agtergrond van die boek Miga dui op wanpraktyke op verskillende samelewingsterreine. Op sosio-ekonomiese gebied het ryk grondbesitters arm boere van hul geboortereg ontnem, gesien vanuit die oogpunt dat grondbesit as ekonomiese bate ook kulturele en godsdienstige implikasies het. Politieke leiers wou die *status quo* handhaaf deur mense uit te buit, terwyl godsdienstige leiers geld vir hul dienste gevra het, wat die armes van godsdienstige opvoeding ontnem het. Die onderdrukking deur die koning en sy amptenare het die armes van 'n sinvolle lewe ontnem.

God het hierdie onregverdigde optrede van die hoëlui gestraf deur die volk in ballingskap te stuur. 'n Oorblyfsel sou egter gered word. Bevryding geskied dus deur oordeel heen. God se doel met Israel se onderdrukking en die ervaring van die ballingskap was om die volk tot 'n nuwe verhouding met hom te bring. Gedurende die ballingskap val verlossing en bevryding saam wanneer God die volk verlos van hul skuld en sonde en Hy hulle uit ballingskap bevry. 'n Volkome gesindheidsverandering by Israel is egter God se voorwaarde. Die uiteinde van hierdie proses van verandering is die heropbou van die land en die volk.

Soos gedurende die agste eeuse Israel, is bevryding en verlossing ook in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks 'n moeilike proses wat baie van al die betrokkenes verg. Gegronde op die beginsels in die boek Miga kan nuwe rigting gegee word aan hierdie proses om so 'n nuwe verhouding tussen God en sy volk in Suid-Afrika te bewerkstellig. Christene behoort leiding te neem in hierdie proses, maar moet ook met ander godsdienstige groepe asook met die regering saamwerk om vreedsame verandering teweeg te bring. 'n Gesindheid van onderlinge bevryding en vergifnis (verlossing), gebaseer op die Bybel, is wat God in beginsel van alle Suid-Afrikaners verlang om 'n vredeliewende samelewing daar te stel.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIC	=	African Independent Churches
AIDS	=	Acquired Immunity Defect Syndrome
ANC	=	African National Congress
NP	=	National Party
RDP	=	Reconstruction and Development Programme
TRC	=	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
WAAIC	=	Women's Association of African Independent Churches.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis that I wish to pose is that in order for a society in conflict to become peaceful, real salvation must be obtained, and this is only possible after real liberation. This hypothesis relates to the problem of class conflict in the time of the prophet Micah in the Old Testament as well as to the current South African situation.

To clarify the terminology of the hypothesis I wish to start this investigation with a brief discussion of the concepts *liberation*, *salvation* and *class conflict*.

1.1.1 Liberation

Gutierrez (1974:36) sees liberation to have three levels of meaning, namely that:

- (a) liberation expresses the aspirations of the poor and oppressed who struggle for freedom in the economic, social and political process.
- (b) The word liberation concentrates on establishing the material conditions necessary for subsistence and a dignified livelihood.
- (c) At a deeper level liberation can be applied to an understanding of history. This understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes.

Martey (1993:113) explicitly expresses liberation in four different areas: 1) liberation from race oppression, 2) liberation from gender oppression, 3) liberation from class oppression and 4) liberation from cultural oppression. Agreeing with Gutierrez and Martey, I can say that liberation is the setting free of people from the injustices of oppression and exploitation.

According to Tutu (1974:74) the liberation of the black man is the other side of the coin of the liberation of the white man - so that it is concerned with human liberation in a broader sense. This is true because liberation is not meant for a specific group only but for all humanity. On the South African problem of class, wealth and poverty, the wealthy should not oppress and exploit the poor.

Instead they must help to liberate the poor from their poverty. This will help to bring socio-political and economic change in the South African situation.

1.1.2 Salvation

The concept *salvation* has a wide range of meanings. According to Maimela (1987:94) salvation is understood as an unburdening of individual sins or as a moral upliftment of the individual who has found peace with God. Nolan (1988:108) sees salvation as including the forgiveness of sin, thus liberation from guilt. According to Gutierrez (1974:157) salvation is a cure for sin in this life, meaning that man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others. Westermann (1982:45) maintains that the word "salvation" (das Heil) is a concept of condition or state, corresponding to Latin *sales* and Hebrew *šalom*. According to Parratt (1987:49) salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without liberation as a socio-political concept. I agree with Parratt concerning this problem and this is my point of departure in this study. People cannot be saved unless they are first of all liberated. I believe that God is realised by people who are free. In my opinion, therefore, salvation is the setting free of people from sin and guilt by God. This is usually accompanied by forgiveness.



1.1.3 The Problem of class conflict

In order to elucidate the hypothesis, the problem of class conflict in our present-day society will briefly receive attention. This problem arises from the fact that there is inequality in the distribution of political power and wealth amongst the citizens of our country.

1.1.3.1 Exclusion from political power

As far as the South African society is concerned, the majority of the people were in the past excluded from representing their people in the parliament. This was the core of the political conflict. But things have changed when the democratically elected government came into being and all people were given the right to vote in 1994 and participated in decision-making in our society. Liberation movements, including religious associations, are still busy fighting to destroy the divided society which was created by the Apartheid system. They want to replace it with a fully democratic society. The new democratic society should allow all its citizens to enjoy basic human rights in all aspects of

life. People must be given rights, for example, to equal education, which is one of the fundamental problems in our country. If people are excluded from taking part in possible solutions to South African problems, the result will be continuing conflict among the people. This will exacerbate an unstable and corrupt society.

1.1.3.2 Exclusion from wealth (poverty)

This problem area results from exclusion from power. Poverty on the side of the powerless as a result of unjust conduct of the powerful is a prominent phenomenon that we come across in our current society in South Africa. The capitalist economy in the contemporary South Africa is challenged by the redistribution of wealth.

In the Old Testament the book of Micah is a beautiful example of prophetic reflection on these problems. In Micah there is hope for those who lost their material possessions, for they will receive them back and experience a peaceful and a just society. There is also hope among people today for transformation, reconstruction and nation-building which can result in the birth of a peaceful and a just society. The key to this hope lies in the relationship between liberation and salvation. Unless real liberation and real salvation are experienced, the possibility is that South Africa, like Judah, will experience continuing class divisions and conflict and the socio-political and socio-economic situation will not be normalised.

1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this mini-dissertation is to investigate the relationship between *liberation*, which is the setting free of people from the injustices of oppression and exploitation, and *salvation*, the setting free of people from sin and guilt by God, which goes hand in hand with complete forgiveness. The book of Micah will be taken as the point of departure in order to formulate principles that can be used to help to bring about a peaceful and just society in South Africa. Liberation and salvation helps mankind to participate in the creation of a just society.

In exploring the book of Micah attention will be paid to the different social classes in Israel during Micah's time. They were the ruling, middle and exploited classes respectively. Parallels with the South African situation will be drawn. The relationship between the ruling class and the exploited class during the reign of the previous South African government will receive particular attention.

In investigating the Book of Micah I am going to make use of the New International Version translation.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

I have chosen certain aspects of the historical-materialistic approach to investigate the context of the class struggle in the book of Micah. The method examines the society as a whole and all its aspects. Following this method, Chesnokov (1969:11) provides a materialistic interpretation of all aspects of reality such as the religious, political and economic systems of society. The method emphasises that there is conflict between classes in all societies, thus the historical-materialistic approach has the ability to analyse class conflict.

The tributary mode of production or redistribution system of exchange in 8th-century Palestine was a form of economic exchange which was only practised by the ruling group. The use of the concept "class" is highly important in this study because Palestine was a stratified society, that is, it was composed of different classes, of which some were inferior and others superior. The latter were those which controlled the means and relations of production. This applies to the Palestinian situation as well as to the current South African situation. Chesnokov (1969:79) states that the means of production are concentrated in the hands of a small group of persons who use their ownership of them to compel others in the society to do as they bid.

The following reveals how the historical-materialistic approach works:

- * the method exposes fundamental relationships existing between Biblical text and political power;
- * it seeks to raise the question of struggle in the text and recognises the struggle of opposing forces;
- * it explains old traditions in terms of the new;
- * the method undertakes to analyse cultural, racial and gender relationships;
- * it employs analytical concepts in order to get to the bottom of real events;

- * this approach recognises that religious texts are productions and records of historical and social class struggle;
- * the method seeks to explain the myth of the inherent universality of the “word of God”;
- * this method accommodates historical and sociological methods which can bare dynamics in Biblical contexts;
- * it analyses social classes and fractions of classes;
- * it also seeks to deal with the ideological perspective of the text (Ideologiekritik).

This method accommodates unity or dialectical unity of a society in that it harmonises the world and makes it possible for people to enter into definite relations with one another. While the historical-materialistic approach sees the Bible as the product and record of class struggles, it allows people to understand and read the Old Testament from the perspective of the poor and oppressed in a particular society. This is important, because according to Wittenberg (1994:168) God is depicted as the God of the lowly. God lived with the poor oppressed and brought them out of Egypt and Babylonia. Since the Bible is the product of class struggle there is a direct relationship between political power and the Biblical text.

By means of the historical-materialistic approach, ideological structures that prevent man from discovering the importance of the poor are demolished. “Ideologiekritik” is a tool being used to distinguish opposing groups in a particular text. Conflict we see in different texts emanates from a social system. This approach, therefore, is an important tool in recognising the struggles between opposing groups (the upper class and the exploited class) in the book of Micah and in contemporary South African society.

Mosala (1989:117), in his analysis of Israelite monarchical social classes, points out the following classes:

- * ruling class groups: The Israelite royal houses, priestly sectors who were dependent on taxes from the peasant communities;
- * middle layers: Craftsmen, functionaries and lower clergy dependent on beneficiaries which do not provide income sufficient to maintain an aristocratic style of life;
- * exploited classes: Two principal kinds of peasantry: Peasants protected by redistributive land tenure and tenant farmers.

I agree with Mosala's classification. The historical-materialistic approach takes account of these characteristic classes in the history of Judah and South Africa.

The following aspects from the background of the book of Micah will receive attention in chapter 2:

- * socio-economic background;
- * political background;
- * religious circumstances.

Chapter 3, which deals with the content of the book of Micah, includes a study of:

- * social injustice in Micah;
- * judgement as punishment;
- * liberation within the context of judgement;
- * salvation in the book of Micah.



CHAPTER 2

EXPLORATION OF THE BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF MICAH

2.1 INTRODUCTION

My concern here is to explore the background of Micah and his times, looking at the period in which the prophet operated as well as his situation. An analysis will also be made on the socio-economic, political and religious background of Judah in Micah's time.

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

In this study I take the point of view of Harrison (1969:925) that, "apart from possible minor redactions, the prophecy of Micah was a genuine product of the eighth century B.C." and that most of it came from Micah himself. Micah came from a town called Moresheth, which is usually identified with Moresheth-gath in the lowlands of Judah (Harrison 1969:919). He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham (740/39-732/31 B.C.), Ahaz (732/31-716/15 B.C.), and Hezekiah of Judah (716/15-687/86 B.C.). His prophecies began at least a decade before the fall of Samaria (Harrison 1969:919).

Prophet Micah's eyes were open to the social problems of his day and he was also aware of the will of God for the community. He was prophesying against what he physically experienced. The abuse of power and exploitation of people was seen by Micah as an offence against God. As a rural prophet and a commoner, Micah was against the negative conduct of the leaders who held political, economic and religious power.

From a historical-materialistic point of view this is an indication that Micah's ideas resulted from the social struggle of the classes. The basis for his concern was that the situation in the Southern Kingdom was characterised by social injustices. Gottwald (1986:83) points out that the injustices done must have been perpetrated by royal officers. He goes on to say that the monarchy was responsible for failing to maintain a judicial system that would preserve free agrarian status. This signifies that the poor were much exploited and oppressed. Exploitation of the poor by the powerful made Micah strongly opposed to the rulers and kings of Judah, since they were according to him

corrupt. The record of class struggles in Micah is presented by Mosala and Tlhagale (1986:194) who give us a vivid picture of rulers and leaders in the Southern Kingdom exploiting the poor classes of society for their own gain. As a result poor people lost their possessions which is the same as losing one's identity. To support this, Gottwald (1986:83) points out that they invaded the rights of the cultivators. They became enemies of the poor people, hence there was a struggle to maintain social order. All in all people were deprived of their rights and their material possessions.

According to Allen (1976:464) the primary means of living in Palestine were agriculture and animal husbandry. This suggests that the majority of people in the Southern Kingdom were producers who depended on the food they produced for their survival. Some were workers who received little for their labour. The rich landowners were the ones who decided on the distribution of goods and resources for living. Coote & Whitelam (1986:138) point out a similar situation in that we find that the elders owned greater amounts of land and capital which resulted in the unequal distribution of capital. Poor farmers got little, yet they were the ones who worked the land. This reveals to us that in Judah people had different modes of life. Peasants did not enjoy the wealth of the city state. Gottwald & Horsley (1993:267) have stated that peasants were exploited classes; some were protected by redistributive land tenure, others were tenant farmers.

The rich confiscated the property of the farmers. They succeeded in this because the ruling elite enjoyed the privilege of controlling more of the goods and services produced in the society (Chaney 1986:61). The rich became richer and the poor farmers were becoming more and more impoverished. Poor farmers faced economic setback because they lost their land and what they possessed. Poor people also lost freedom to possess property. They had to look to the landlords for the possession of land. As a result the people started to practise free production and opposed exploitative and hierarchical control dominated by the powerful (Allen 1976:465). There were immoral businessmen (Micah 7:2) who cheated and killed their fellow men to gain profit. There were also other economic evils found in Judah. Marsh (1959:95) argues that the rich landlords and wealthy traders bought up real estate by economic pressure. In Micah 2:1-5 we find greedy and powerful businessmen who devised some means to possess land belonging to small farmers.

Since poor people in the Southern Kingdom were robbed of their birthrights to own land there was a need later for a redistribution of land. The law in Judah did not protect poor landowners and this resulted in financial difficulties. Poor landowners became victims of the unjust actions of rich

landowners and were also deprived of the traditional means of subsistence. The actions of these wealthy landowners led Micah to condemn them, for they did not care for the weak and the needy who were hungry.

2.3 POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In the Southern Kingdom political leaders were responsible for the decline of the old tribal system of justness. There was conflict between political and some religious leaders on the one hand, and prophets like Micah on the other hand. The ruling class in the Southern Kingdom wished to maintain the *status quo*. According to Gottwald & Horsley (1993:267) ruling class groups, especially the Israelite royal houses and priestly sectors, were dependent on taxes from the peasant communities. Coote & Whitlam (1986:139) put this clearly when they say that the landed class attempted to preserve the power and privilege and that centralisation was perceived to serve the interests of the few rather than the many. They further elaborate on this point by stating that priestly and political representatives could not equal their landed opponents in solidarity. The priests in the Southern Kingdom were preaching for their own profits. The king was also highly considered in the South. The authority in Jerusalem was exercised by people in high military, cultic and civil positions in favour of their king. Ordinary people in the Southern Kingdom had no say in the socio-political sense and in their own affairs (Engelbrecht and Van Dyk 1987:42). They were excluded because they did not form part of the governing structures of the state. A situation like this compelled people in Judah to rebel against the monarchical system of ruling. In this process individual prophets like Micah took the lead. They wished to establish a peaceful society which could produce good rulers who could build a strong nation in the spirit of justice.

The political system in Micah's time goes hand in hand with the unjust practices in many societies today. The political, economic and religious conditions develop on the basis of the mode of production. This is highly supported by Mosala and Tlhagale (1986:187) who argue that there were inequalities in the means of production in different societies. In Palestine there was the royal aristocracy made up of the king and the nobility. It means that Micah had this ruling class in mind when prophesying.

2.4 RELIGIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

In the Southern Kingdom the leaders and prophets neglected their responsibility towards their fellow members. Religious leaders failed to protect the interests of their subjects, hence religious negligence caused injustices and led to conflict (Wittenberg 1994:170). The overall situation in both the South and the North was seen to be unjust because of religious injustice initiated from Jerusalem and Samaria (Micah 1:5):

All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?

The king exercised greater authority at the expense of the priests. The theology in the Southern Kingdom was a politicised one. The poor Southern people believed that their present order was approved by God. Leaders and prophets in the Southern Kingdom were concerned with their own affairs instead of doing the will of God. Yahweh's presence was unconditional in Judah. Micah faced people who were ungodly.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The socio-economic, political and religious circumstances during Micah's time reveal the power of the ruling classes in the eighth century B.C. in Judah. The social struggles are characterised by the upper classes who had ideological structures that prevented them from seeing the importance of the poor who were oppressed. There was inequitable distribution of the land in Judah. Land is, however, not only an economic resource. It also links to the religious values because the absolute owner of land is God. Therefore I am in favour of the idea that landowners should share the land with the landless. If this is practised the problem of poverty in many societies can be reduced. I do not see any reasons why land grabbers should monopolise and control all instruments of production, because the land was Yahweh's (Chaney 1986:61).

With this general background in mind I shall now go into more detail concerning the religious and social problems that we come across in the book of Micah.

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORATION OF THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK OF MICAH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I am going to look at the religious and social problems within the book of Micah itself. The theology of Micah and the themes/motifs found in Micah will be explored. Special attention will be paid to the problem of poverty and God's solution such as judgement, liberation and salvation. The relationship between liberation and salvation is explained.

3.2 SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

The problem in Judah was the injustice practised by the authorities who had the power to exploit and oppress the poor and powerless. This means that the cause of the corrupt or unjust economic system was socio-political structures which existed in the eighth century. What follows is a description of the injustices practised by leaders in Judah.

3.2.1 Oppression

Oppression in Judah involved material goods and all social and religious wrongs. Problems in Judah were caused by the upper class who abused power (2:1-2) by robbing the powerless (2:1-2), hence the upper classes were guilty of oppression (2:1-3).

The government of the time devoured its people instead of defending them as in Micah (3:1-4). Land was taken from the poor illegally and people were silenced when they complained about this. The king and his officials were acting as if they were above the law of God. This shows us that leaders in Micah's time did not fear God, since we do not see them obeying his law. In Micah (3:1-2) we find that rulers from higher social classes misused their positions. Instead of doing what was just they loved evil in political and economic situations. Corrupt authorities were also bribing people (Micah 3:11). At the same time they were perpetrators of violence (Micah 4:13). The situation in Judah is a very good example of how men and women in the entire world are ruled by selfishness.

Smith, Bewer & Ward (1985:56) maintain that the greed of the wealthy in Judah did not satisfy them. They would enrich themselves more and more, and that at the loss of greater poverty and misery for the poor.

3.2.2 Exploitation

The main reasons for dominating the economy was to get hold of the land and property at the expense of the impoverished. Marsh (1959:94) supports this by saying that social and economic evils were also found in Judah and these evils spoken of in Micah 2:1 are those of the wealthy traders and rich landlords who bought real estate by economic pressure. The crimes of the exploiters in Micah 2:8 are seen when the enemy came and evicted farmers in Judah from their properties. The economy in Judah was not shaped in such a way that we can talk of balance because it only favoured the upper class.

Another reason for the unjust economic system is the way in which the poor landowners were forced to rent their own land by the landlords. Poor landowners were also subjected to unfair taxes and levies, for levy was paid by means of a share of the crop. This share was often so large that the farmer and his family were left with virtually nothing to live on. Micah was against the rich people who robbed the poor of their rights. This exploitation by the rich landowners meant that the poor landowners got into financial problems, so it is clear that these poor people in Judah were deprived of their normal human life. It is clear from Micah (6:12-16) that God does not approve of this.

3.2.3 The problem of Poverty

The problem of poverty clearly occurs in Micah. Gutierrez (1974:288) draws a distinction between material poverty and spiritual poverty. Material poverty means to be exploited by others, to be without access to certain cultural, social and political values. Spiritual poverty on the other hand is an attitude of openness to God. In the case of Micah the rich kept the poor people in material poverty (Micah 2:2). The problem of poverty in Micah touches on important issues such as land, economy and culture. In Micah 2:1-2 it is said that the ruling class seized the land and the houses of the people. The poor were deprived of their entire families and ancestry. They were deprived of the right to possess what they had inherited physically, culturally and religiously. These kinds of poverty

were degrading the poor to such an extent that they felt they were less than human beings. That means that they became psychologically poor. As a result they were deprived of their faith.

In 2:8 there is a description of how the rich stripped off the robes from those who owed them money. They literally left them naked and cold. This is not what God requires. In Exodus 22:25-27 God specifies the following:

If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

In Micah 2:9 women and fatherless children are the victims of the ruling class. By driving them from their pleasant homes they are deprived of their legal rights to live as peaceful citizens. The warmth and the joy of a pleasant house are removed from them because of their debt. Widows and children are deprived of their human dignity. They are even sold into slavery to settle their loans. Depriving children is the same as depriving God, because the children belong to God. The rich with their unjust conduct will also be driven out by God.

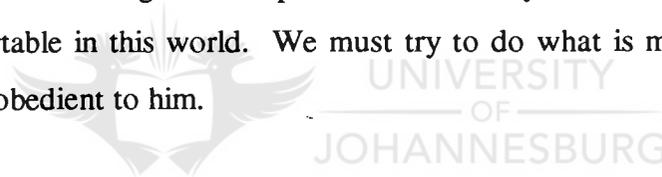
In 3:2-3 the prophet presents the impoverishment in an extreme way by means of the metaphor of the butcher who slaughters a sheep, stripping every piece of skin and meat from the bones. The greediness of the rich and powerful is also depicted by this metaphor. The rich devour the citizens instead of protecting them and thereby practising justice. They make laws to be above God's law. They choose to do evil by oppressing their fellow-citizens.

In 3:11 the covetousness of the rich upper class is set in the open. Judges do their work for bribery and the poor suffer because they cannot pay bribes. Accepting bribes is a form of stealing which God hates (Micah 3:11-12). The primary responsibility of the judges is to take possible decisions, but instead they are controlled by their emotions. The poor are even deprived of their religious education because they have to pay the priests for their teaching. Even the prophets, God's "ministers", tell fortunes for money, leaving the poor in religious darkness. It seems as if these leaders care nothing for the poor. Micah 6:10-12 describes the dishonesty of the rich and how they

exploit the nation, including the poor. The traders accumulate their wealth by dishonest means. They use false weights and measures (Micah 6:10-12).

In 7:3 the conduct of the upper class is depicted as a conspiracy against the poor. The effect thereof is described in the confusion that God brings amongst people in 7:4-6, which includes distrust amongst members of the same family. This also expands to a society as a whole, as no one will trust his fellow-brother. Their opportunity to turn to God is very remote. The conduct of the upper class paralyzes the whole society, including the poor, because it seems there is no one right or godly. There is mistrust everywhere in the society. One cannot trust ones friend or wife. The family and the social ties are gradually destroyed. This results in the unlawful killing (murder) which is much hated by God. People tend in these circumstances to become murderers (Micah 7:2).

In the end the fact remains that spiritual and physical oppression of people, more especially the poor, is disobedience to God. Obedience to the law of God belongs to the same realm as the idea of retribution. God blesses those who are very kind to the poor. Kaizer (1983:110) sees justice to mean avoiding discrimination against the poor. We must try to be on the side of the poor so that they can feel comfortable in this world. We must try to do what is morally right to gain approval from God and to be obedient to him.



3.3 JUDGEMENT AS PUNISHMENT

God's solution to the injustices practised by authorities in Judah was to impose judgement on the nation. It goes without saying that man is the sole cause of God's punishment. We see Micah pronouncing judgement in his message which affected both Samaria in Israel, and Jerusalem, capital of Judah.

Micah 1:5 argues the following:

All this is because of Jacob's transgression, because of the sins of the house of Israel. What is Jacob's transgression? Is it not Samaria? What is Judah's high place? Is it not Jerusalem?

In the light of the above it becomes evident that God judged the sin of Israel and Judah. Prophet Micah pronounced judgement because of the wicked rulers and the rebellious who broke away from the Lord and rebelled against his requirements in the Northern Kingdom and Southern Kingdom. Micah was also objecting to the kind of worship which was going on in both Jerusalem and Samaria (1:5). He attacked Jerusalem for its idolatry and religious syncretism. Idolatry is a serious sin against God (1:7). As a result sacrifice is portrayed as useless to God or offensive to him whatever its place in the society (Hillers 1984:79). The rulers, priests and prophets were all guilty and deserved punishment since they led people astray. Sinful people deserved false prophets (2:6-11) because false prophets cultivated the corrupt state religion (3:5-8).

The powerful were robbing the powerless. They took their property such as their fields and houses. People were evicted from their houses. For all this the spirit of the Lord was angry, hence they were to face judgement. If property is taken by force, God will bring disaster to the nation. Impoverishment by the powerful rich stretches far beyond visible borders. The result of this is that the rich will not get any share in the land because the Lord will take everything they stripped from the poor (2:3-5). Hillers (1984:33) argues convincingly that the covetous oppressors will have no share. This is how God judges his people. Men in power who are robbing the people will be severely punished. God will carry out his plan to bring war to them and send them into exile (2:3-5). In Micah 2:4 the Lord declares that those who ruined other people's fields will experience the same fate because the Lord will send a strong nation to seize their land.

God's judgement against the conduct of the powerful is clearly spelt out in 2:3-5:

Therefore, the LORD says: "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity. 4 In that day men will ridicule you; they will taunt you with this mournful song: 'We are utterly ruined; my people's possession is divided up. He takes it from me! He assigns our fields to traitors.'" 5 Therefore you will have no one in the assembly of the LORD to divide the land by lot.

Hillers (1984:85) says that the punishment has come in the form of the conditions the leaders themselves have created. Allen (1976:225) views things in the same light as Hillers. He says that the individual leaders of society by their anti-social behaviour forfeited their membership of the covenant

community and are doomed to excommunication from God's land. Marsh (1959:96) goes on to say that the exploiters of the poor would not only be exiled from home, but cut off from God and his people. Micah was against those who, with their selfishness and wickedness, worked for their own profit.

In Micah 3:1-2 we read the following about the rulers' notion of justice:

Then I said, "Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil; who tear the skin from my people and the flesh from their bones."

The above shows that the leaders of Israel hated good and loved evil, meaning that they did not know justice. Should these leaders have looked to real justice they would have built a strong nation and a peaceful, just society. Hillers (1984:79) maintains that "justice" and "kindness" are broad terms for what is expected of those to whom one is joined by a social bond such as a covenant. Even "love" fits in the covenant. When these leaders call upon God for help, the Lord will hide his face because of their unjust behaviour. In 3:5 the prophets also proclaimed "peace", but God would not answer them since they were misleading his "people". In contrast to that Micah was filled with the spirit and power to declare people's sins (3:8) like the leaders' disposing of justice and their acceptance of bribes (3:9,11). The prophets were telling fortune for money claiming that the Lord is with them. "No disaster will come to us" (3:11). Prophets gave their revelations for money, hence the Lord imposed judgement on these leaders. Micah predicts in 1:15-16 that:

I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam. Shave your heads in mourning for the children in whom you delight; make yourselves as bald as the vulture, for they will go from you into exile.

Micah here was against the aristocracy of Israel and Judah. In terms of the method being implemented we have the monarchical social classes in Israel and Judah, those who were to take refuge at Adullam. People of Jerusalem were instructed to shave their heads in mourning because their children would be taken into exile. In exile they would become slaves, thus facing oppression and exploitation. The corruption of the Northern Kingdom swept over and included Judah in

Jerusalem. People were thrown into exile because of their sins. In my understanding the Lord did this in order to make a new nation where peace, security and prosperity would prevail.

God, the judge of the nations (1:2), is also the judge of Judah and Israel. God judges from his temple, from amongst his people. His temple is his throne (Guthrie & Motyer 1970:753). The language of lawsuit is being used. From his heavenly abode he appears as sovereign Lord and judge of the whole universe to judge his people (1:3-4). His coming is described as an epiphany.

God is serious in his judgement because of the sins of the leaders of Judah and Israel. Their primary sin is against God himself, because of their idolatry and wages of the temple prostitutes (1:7). God's judgement implies the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem (1:6) by a conqueror (1:15).

In 3:6-7 God judges the prophets. All seers and diviners, thus the majority of soothsayers, will be humiliated in the day of the Lord. Furthermore, there is no revelation to be received from God by them. The darkening of the sky symbolises terrible judgement and despair (Guthrie & Motyer 1970:755).

In 3:12 Jerusalem is judged as the result of the sins of the leaders. The leaders are ungodly, so God will not protect them against their enemies. The temple will be shuttered. Guthrie & Motyer (1970:756) state that because people are ungodly God will not only withdraw his protection from them against their heathen foes, he will also see to it that the holy temple is reduced to rubble.

In 6:6-8 Micah deals with practical religion; thus, more expensive gifts do not satisfy Yahweh. Sacrifices and offerings, that is, gifts and ceremonies, do not have value in the eyes of God. Sacrifices were made with calves. This again does not please Yahweh. Kindness, justice and walking humbly with God are all essentials of true religion.

In Micah 6:13-16 we find that dishonest traders who make money by using false weights will face punishment in the day of the Lord. Everybody will be involved in what God is going to destroy, even the children will experience a similar situation. Omri and the house of Ahab are referred to as the cult of Baal. So they will be condemned (1:16; 2:9). Concerning Israel's punishment, Black & Rowley (1962:633) maintain that punishment will overtake them, meaning that Israel will be

punished because they have forgotten the standards of morality. By doing all this, God wants them to repent. People must stop worshipping false images and worship the true God.

In Micah 7:4-6 the whole of Judah is presented as corrupt. There is no moral order. Children do not respect their fathers. This is strongly supported by Keil and Delitzsch (1965:506) who maintain that the son treats his father as a fool. The confusion amongst people is part of God's judgement. God will not only punish ordinary people; the prophets who are leading people astray will also fall into this confusion.

God's own solution to rectify the very negative situation into a positive one lies in 6:8. In this case the individual "O man" is addressed:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

These are the basic issues (principles) in the relationship between God and the individual that God requires: justice, mercifulness and humility (Ridderbos 1949:106). These are also the basic principles for a peaceful society. We must practise justice and do what God expects us to do. One must do the will of God. He is a merciful God and wants Israel to love mercy or goodness. Solidarity with the needy must be shown. Another principle is that of walking humbly with God. The relationship with God, i.e. true worship, forms the basis of it all. These principles encourage people to do good and to obey God.

Those who want to repent must offer the Lord valid sacrifices and worship which must honestly be accompanied by a godly life. Valid sacrifice and acceptable worship must include a presentation of their own bodies as living sacrifices to Him (Guthrie & Motyer 1970:759). This suggests that God requires a true living faith which requires man to do justice. If this requirement is fulfilled it means that there will be order and peace in society. There will be no more hatred where a child stands up against his father, or brother against his brother. When we are in fellowship with our brothers and sisters it means that we are also in fellowship with the Lord.

The notion of judgement and turning to a godfearing life leads us to the following aspect that we come across in the book of Micah, i.e. liberation as part of judgement.

3.4 LIBERATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF JUDGEMENT

The first direct sign of liberation in the book of Micah is found in 2:7:

Should it be said, O house of Jacob: "Is the Spirit of the LORD angry? Does he do such things? Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?"

From Micah 4:10 and 2:12-13 it is evident that Micah proclaims, in line with the prophets, liberation through judgement:

Micah 2:12-13 12:

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head.

This is a true word of encouragement from the Lord to the remnant of sincere believers (Guthrie & Motyer 1970:754). The Lord is their king, not one of the political leaders Israel expected like king Ahaz, Hezekiah and Josiah. Israel's future lies in her dedication and faithfulness to the Lord. The central idea is that the Lord himself will lead Israel and nobody else. He will liberate Israel.

Micah 4:10

Writhe in agony, O Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you must leave the city to camp in the open field. You will go to Babylon; there you will be rescued. There the LORD will redeem you out of the hand of your enemies.

The judgement becomes a process of purification for the nation. God judges their sin, but does not reject them. They have to bear the consequences of their evil deeds, but in Micah 4:6 we read the following:

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief.”

In this process a new relationship between God and his people was to develop in order for Israel to gain its dignity before God. The above shows that redemption history starts with judgement. Israel experienced redemption history as a divine act of liberation.

In Chapter 4:1-10 Micah predicts what the Lord intends to do. The word of the Lord (Law) will go out from Zion and judge. The nations will come to Zion to hear God’s teachings and to walk in his paths. God will let them beat swords into plows, spears into pruning knives. There will be peace. Everyone will sit under his own vineyard and fig tree. The lame and the exiles will be restored, they will be a strong nation (4:6-7). The Lord’s kingship will return to Zion and he will reign for ever. The Lord’s plan was to rule over Zion and redeem the nation from Babylon, but unfortunately, many nations did not understand God’s plan, hence many nations were to be broken to pieces by Zion. Israel’s liberation becomes God’s judgement over the nations.

In chapter 5:2 the Lord promises a new ruler. A new messianic Davidic ruler from Bethlehem (see 1 Sam 17:12 for the descent of the Davidic family) will come (Micah 5:2). He will institute peace and co-operation among his people:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

Apart from God’s judgement we therefore also have a positive outcome. In the light of the above quotations out of Bethlehem a ruler will come from the house of David. There will be a universal rule of God through this ruler. His greatness will reach the end of the earth. In 4:1-13 the messianic kingdom triumphs over the gentile world. This is an eschatological promise of God. Moriah is depicted as the highest of the mountains (Guthrie and Motyer 1970:756). This suggests that the kingdom of God is located at the supreme position so that all nations, including the gentiles, may come to Zion which is the centre of God's kingdom. Zion is the symbol of God’s revelation. The Lord reveals himself through the scripture in Zion. Many nations will come to Zion so that the Lord can teach them true faith. He wants them to live a godly life, to serve him. The saving work of God

will be known by the whole world, including the gentile world. God is the judge of all nations, he is the arbiter, he even judges strong nations. When the Lord assumes his position he will stop war and thereby bring peace forever. God will initiate order, there will be harmony and peace. Israel worshipped other gods but this time they turn to the Lord, and serve Him. If they walk humbly with God when the day of the Lord comes, those who are unable to walk will stand upright and walk and those who are spiritually crippled will be healed.

In 7:11-13 the idea of restoration is introduced. Israel starts to trust God's mercy. The Lord has stored something for Israel which will be revealed in the near future. The Lord will deal thoroughly with Israel's enemies and her oppressors. God will deliver the righteous people. In the process of restoration the walls of the kingdom of God will be built and boundaries will be extended (4:8; 7:11). The Davidic kingdom will be restored.

McKeating (1971:192) maintains that God could judge his people and destroy them, but he nevertheless saved enough of them (the remnant - Micah 5:7). The purpose of God in allowing Israel to be oppressed and to experience the disaster that he brings over them is a mere fact of bringing his people to a new life, a new understanding of God.

In 7:14-20 God is praised for his mighty works of deliverance. The gentile world will be reduced to give way to the divine power. With his loving kindness Yahweh will remove all sins and guilt of the people, for he wants to forget them (7:18-19). This is part of the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs (7:20).

Wolff (1990:221) expresses the idea of liberation by stating that as the "light" of his community Yahweh liberates it not only from its enemies (7:8), but even more from its own guilt. This suggests that Yahweh is paving the way to a better life, that is, going out from darkness to the light. Salvation from sins and guilt is thus the following issue to be dealt with.

3.5 SALVATION IN THE BOOK OF MICAH

Salvation is the setting free of people from sin and guilt by God, which includes complete forgiveness. The mere fact that the prophet speaks up on behalf of God (3:8) and to the benefit of the people, is an act of salvation initiated by God himself. Because God is sovereign (1:2) he has the power to make independent decisions. Because he is holy (1:2) he wants all his people (Israel and Judah) to be holy. The epiphany depicted in 1:3-7 shows that the living God steps into history to change sinful trends. God is the initiator of the change involved, although his people keep on sinning against him (1:5). He does not stop calling them “my people” (1:9). The primary relationship with God, the covenant relationship, does not completely fall apart, and that is the core of salvation in the book of Micah. The fact that God will send them into exile (1:15-16) has the purpose of reconciliation/salvation, and such is the effect of the word of God, to “do good to Him whose ways are upright” (2:7). This means that people must do what God requires from them. They must do what is desirable and what results in good effects.

The knowledge and practice of justice (3:1) is one of the main issues that will bring salvation. Because God is a just God, He wants his people to be just and to do good. If people do what is morally right, it means they respond to God. The basis of all this is that salvation lies in everyday life. To change attitudes of people, justice must be done to them. To develop a sense of liberation and salvation amongst people, they should experience justice being done to them in all facets of their lives.

God’s salvation is in the first instance universal (4:1-5) because he is king of all nations. He alone can bring peace amongst the striving nations by means of his judging activities (4:3). But while the nations are still worshipping their gods, the people of Israel will walk in the name of the Lord their God (4:5). A specific decision is to be made by the people to let this happen. Salvation, therefore, is the restoration of man’s relationships with both parties involved: God and mankind on the one hand, and man/woman and his/her fellow men/women on the other hand.

Secondly, God’s salvation is also particularistic. It is for those individuals who make the decision mentioned in Micah 4:5:

All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

This is where the Lord will start the process of salvation. Israel will rise from the darkness and the Lord will be their light (7:8), and the enemy will see and cover their faces with shame (7:10).

A major aspect of real salvation is that deep pain is to be experienced first. Because of their extreme sins God sends the people into exile. But it is while they are in Babylon that they will be rescued. In agony God will redeem his people (4:10). Salvation through judgement is God's plan for his people. At this point liberation and salvation coincide. Salvation cannot take place without the deepest change of the heart. In 6:3-8 where the Lord puts his case before the mountains as witnesses against Israel, the main question remains, "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God?" (6:6). "Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression?" (6:7). God's sole answer to this vital question is found in 6:8, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This is what God wants before salvation will commence. A total change of attitude, which means a total turn towards God and fellow brothers and sisters.

But even before that point of real salvation can be reached, Israel is reminded of her sins (6:9-12), and of God's judgement because of those sins (6:13-16). If Israel's guilt before God and before the exploited poor of the country is not dealt with, salvation cannot take place. It will remain a situation of dissatisfaction like when one eats but does not become satisfied (6:14). Only when Israel acknowledges her own misery (7:1-6), can she hope for the Lord and wait for him to react to her prayers (7:7).

The outcome of this internal process of change that must take place in Israel is predicted in 7:11, "The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries." In this whole process of salvation God's wonders will be seen by the whole world in astonishment (7:14-20). The trust in the God who forgives sin (7:18), and who will again have compassion with us (7:19), and who will show mercy to all believers in him, the God of the covenant, is what we need in our situation of distress. This is Israel's prayer and praise that they should live by while they await real salvation.

The underlying idea is that God forgives sin and that there is hope of salvation for those who obey his law (4:1-5). It was not only Zion which would face the reversal; false prophets and false leaders were also to be rejected in order that a new and just society be recreated. A true leadership was to prevail. There was a need for the community to be cleansed from its sins. Hence the community is cleansed like the case of Judah in the Southern Kingdom. People would be given a share in Yahweh's universal rule.

The book of Micah shows clearly God's liberation and salvation for people who suffered under harsh and corrupt rule. God promised to settle disputes of all nations. The poor would no longer be divorced by the wealthy and the powerful. Those who had been driven away into exile and cast off would be brought back by God to become a strong nation under his majesty in the new Kingdom. Jerusalem and the temple, as promised by God, would be restored in a grander style than before.

3.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIBERATION AND SALVATION

To conclude this chapter the relationship between liberation and salvation, as found in the discussion above, will be formulated. It is clear that God wishes to liberate Israel from the bondage of their sinful conduct towards the poor and the needy as well. In order to bring them to their senses they first have to be punished because of their hardened hearts. The process by means of which this is brought about is one of suffering in exile as a result of God's judgement, and the repentance of the people. Only then can salvation be achieved — when God forgives them their sins and expects them to act as righteous people. Liberation and salvation cannot take place unless all exploited poor are cared for. In this way a new relationship between God and his people is developed which forms the basis for the relationship amongst the people themselves.

Both liberation and salvation, therefore, come through judgement. The Lord not only liberates Israel from her enemies, but also saves her from her own guilt to create new life and a new way of understanding God. The purpose of God in sending Israel into slavery was to show them that he is the liberator and saviour.

Therefore the two concepts liberation and salvation are not contradictory or synonymous as perceived by many people. They are closely related and the one complements the other to bring about change in a sinful society.

3.7 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the above that there are many parallels between the socio-political structures of eighth century Judah and that of South African society today, as well as in all Third World countries. The social classes that have been pointed out by way of the historical-materialistic approach (see 1.3 above), such as the ruling, the middle and the exploited classes, represent the socio-political structures which led to a system of economic exploitation in the South African context.

We experience today many problems similar to those in Judah during the eighth century B.C. We find that societies that are characterised by classes oppress their people instead of caring for them. This is an indication that these societies do not fear God. God in essence hates oppression. There is no one in the eyes of God who has the right to oppress his or her fellow man/woman. Those who oppress people today will be judged not by earthly judges but by God.

But God wants change. He himself will bring about the change as he is the universal judge and sovereign ruler. He wants to restore broken societies. He wants to lead his people through a painful process of liberation and salvation through judgement and repentance — *liberation* in the sense of setting people free from injustices of oppression and exploitation and from their enemies, and *salvation* in the sense of forgiving their sins and removing their guilt. Liberation and salvation are both divine acts of God. What God has in mind for his people is a new life and new relationships, and this applies to South Africa today. If the relationship between humankind and God is not healed there is no possibility that human suffering will be ameliorated.

The Old Testament dispensation relates to the present world dispensation because God who saved his people during Biblical times is still our saviour today. At present he is also involved in the process of saving his people. In this way it must be understood that he is busy laying the foundations of our tomorrows. At this point real liberation and real salvation are soul-mates in the only process which can bring about a real peaceful society.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIO-POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA TODAY

4.1 Identification of specific problems and injustices in the South African society.

4.1.1 Legalised segregation as the source of injustices in South Africa

The present South African society consists of whites, coloureds, Indians and blacks, social classes based on racial segregation implemented by the previous government. This legalised political segregation policy (Apartheid) also resulted in socio-economic classes, viz. the upper ruling class, the middle class (mostly whites) and the working class (mostly blacks). The latter group is generally known as the poorest group. Even the sphere of religion did not escape enforced segregation.

Under the previous National Party government the ruling class, of which the majority were white people who were actually in the minority if the population of the whole country is taken into consideration, tried to maintain the *status quo* of power holding at that stage in the history of our country. Since people were grouped in terms of ethnic diversity they expected separate freedoms. The problems experienced by the majority of South Africans were those of oppression, exploitation and suffering caused by the Apartheid system. Smit (1986:89) also confirms that Apartheid is the major cause of the South African problem. It polarised our citizens into black and white, affluent and poor, oppressor and oppressed, dominant and dominated. Smollan (1986:108), in his condemnation of racism, says that the whole system of legalised segregation with its specific controls in specific areas is dependent upon the race of persons. Blacks were segregated in all spheres of their lives, especially in management positions and leadership.

Of course the South African population does reflect real cultural differences in the sense that there are Afrikaners, English, Asians, coloureds and various black cultures. This is not to be denied. But due to legalised segregation these differences became politicised and also spread to other spheres of life. Hence, amongst the Christians the Dutch Reformed Church, for instance, was divided into a white, Indian, coloured and black church. Most of the white Afrikaans churches supported the

system of Apartheid. However, the English churches in particular played an important role in the proclamation of justice, love and human dignity in our society. The South African Council of Churches took a leading role in this regard. According to Nolan (1988:87) Roman Catholic bishops had some years ago already declared Apartheid to be “intrinsicly evil”. Nürnberger and Tooke (1988:38) say that the Dutch Reformed Church has also confirmed that the application of Apartheid as a political and social system by which human dignity is adversely affected, and whereby one particular group is detrimentally suppressed by another, cannot be accepted on Christian-ethical grounds because it contravenes the very essence of neighbourly love and righteousness and inevitably the human dignity of all involved. In my opinion this should be the view of all churches in South Africa, and this view should be implemented in daily life.

From the point of view of the ruling class the intention of the ideology of Apartheid was to create order and peace and also to generate wealth. By employing separate development the forerunners of the system were trying to avoid conflicts that might arise between ethnic groups or races. But I disagree with this idea because instead of solutions more problems were created. Instead of peace, violence was perpetrated which eventually led to a violent society.

4.1.2 Violence resulting from violence



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The theme/motif of violence which played a role in the book of Micah (6:12) is also applicable to the South African situation. During the reign of the previous South African government violence was suppressed by violence. In other words, the state used armed forces to stop violence, which resulted in a situation where the violence of the state was answered by the violence of the people. Eventually we find ourselves in a violent society today instead of a peaceful one.

Many young people in our society today believe that violence is the only option to solve their problems. In black townships we find gangsters fighting in the streets. Workers, too, are using violence when protesting against their working conditions or when they want an increase in their salaries. They might have learned from the previous government to use violence, for example in Sharpeville, Port Elizabeth etc. The proclamation of a state of emergency of 1986 is another example.

Violence has a very negative influence on society. Because of violence we are not free today to move from one place to another. To give a practical example, it is difficult for a white person to go to black townships, the reason being that of violence. Violence goes hand in hand with crimes like house robbery, car hijackings, kidnapping, raping, killing, etc. It has become difficult to stop crime. People fear starting small businesses because they fear armed robbery. People who are unemployed turn to stealing, and they think that this is a better way of overcoming hunger. The problem of violence is reflected by the following statistics from the South African Year Book of 1996:

Crime and Violence in 1995-1996		
Major crimes in South Africa, ratio per 100 000 of the population		
Crime	1994	1995
Public violence	4,49	3,44
Illegal possession of fire-arms	41,16	38,32
Rape	149,55	169,41
Drug-related crime	204,21	172,55
Robbery	318,46	306,96
Murder	85,44	87,18
Child abuse	9,16	10,01
Illegal strikes	0,14	0,13

Table 1

The above comparison of the crime rate statistics of the years 1994-1995 shows in three important instances, viz. rape, murder and child abuse, an increase in the already high crime rate. There must be co-operation between all stakeholders and the police force in combating crime and violence in our society. In explaining the background of the declaration on Ubuntu, the following is said in Burger (1996:117):

South Africa has become a country of conflict and instability, and violence has long been endemic to our society. Disparities which have allowed negative attitudes to exist must be removed; everybody's cooperation is needed to bring about change and to combat violence.

Apartheid can therefore be seen as the major cause of the following injustices which we come across in our society.

4.1.3 Political oppression resulting in political poverty

Apartheid gave rise to a situation of political oppression which has developed through the years. For a long period of time in the history of our country only whites could bring out their political votes at the polls. Black political parties were non-existent. Dr HF Verwoerd, the father of the Apartheid system, tried to immobilize the blacks by means of so-called “tuislande” or homelands like Transkei and Bophuthatswana. The urban blacks were shunted into separate towns like Soweto. These politically oppressed people did not have any say in the socio-political future of the country as a whole. Due to a lack of infra-structure people in the rural areas became poorer and soon it was clear that the policy of homelands would not work out. The situation was maintained by force by the government.

4.1.4 Economic oppression resulting in economic poverty

The social classes which developed from the socio-political structures led to a system of economic exploitation (Strydom 1995:407). The white ruling class controlled the forces of production such as land, raw materials, factories, human labour. In order to uphold this situation they also controlled the distribution of occupations. Deist (1991:5) gives an overview of the South African statistics of 1988 which is a reflection of the bad situation in which the blacks of the country found themselves:

%

Occupation	Whites	Blacks
Non-classifiable work	4,3	82,5
Farmer/fisherman/hunter/farm labourer	6,2	78,3
Unskilled	1,1	76,6
Service worker	10,4	76,3
Mine/quarry worker/operator	7,7	74,1
Transport/communication	15,2	70,4
Clerk/sales person	53,0	27,3
Professional/technical	60,0	27,0
Trades person/apprentice	61,5	16,4
Manager/executive/administrator	87,5	4,2

Table 2

The statistics above clearly shows that the distribution of occupations of a few years ago was a major factor in the problem of poverty and power struggle in our country.

The policies which have resulted in the unbalanced distribution of work opportunities led to disinvestment and sanctions imposed on South Africa by foreign countries. Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak were the men behind this. All this resulted in the class struggle. The poorest class and the working class rose against these injustices. They wanted to be liberated from racism, sexism and capitalism, since this meant that they could not enjoy the political freedom that the other section enjoyed. If people are unemployed it means that they are hindered from developing their own talents. They are not in partnership with God because they do not fulfil his intention. Villa-Vicencio (1992:214) has the following to say concerning unemployment: "Unemployment and inflation make the market a grim and depressing place for people who have nothing to sell except muscle and sweat." Most of the young people who are unemployed end up being hooligans, criminals and beggars.

The historical-materialistic approach opens our eyes for reading the Bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. The problem of poverty is an acute problem in modern societies as it was in Judah (van Heerden 1991:211).

The speech by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in Parliament on Poverty reported in The Sowetan of Thursday, 24 October (1996:9) indicates that "most of the people in South Africa lived like those in the poorest countries in the world". Furthermore he says that "poverty brings hunger, disease, inadequate shelter and homelessness, it hinders the education of children. As a caring society, we cannot fold our arms and leave this blight on the lives of millions of our people. As a Government we have declared war on poverty". Mbeki's speech is an indication that poverty is still a threat and a problem in South Africa because many people in South Africa are still homeless. A good example is the street children in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. They sleep without food. Many poor people cannot even read and write. All of these injustices were caused by the previous regime. The working classes are struggling to get bread day after day because they are hungry. What we also have to note is that it is not only blacks are suffering. Also unemployed whites are suffering, as can be seen in the streets of Johannesburg and Pretoria where they often beg for money.

I concur with Pixley (1989:140) who states that “socio-economic poverty is a fact that must be condemned in the strongest terms and that it is not willed by God, is not part of God’s plan.” It therefore represents a contradiction of God’s will, and this makes it a social sin which must be condemned. The present government must undo what was done in the past. Today rich people in this country must take care of the poor and should not create unjust situations like in the past. All of us in the country must show solidarity with these people in their struggle for liberation. The Government of National Unity should meet the needs and interests of these groups for they must be liberated. Nürnberger (1991:546) says that “science and technology should become the means for socio-economic liberation of this country.” This is possible. The majority of blacks are still behind with science and technology. But fortunately they are given the opportunity now. In this way poverty will be reduced.

4.1.5 Sex-based oppression resulting in inferiority (psychological poverty)

The situation of women in the Republic of South Africa is a good example of oppression which in principle is rejected in Micah 2. At home women were and still are responsible for doing domestic duties and were also regarded as inferior to men. Even at the working place they were discriminated against. Their social and political role, according to Lapchick and Urdang (1982:14), was undermined by the system, yet their labour enabled the economic system to work. Men from the rural areas were forced to leave their families to work in urban areas, which laid a heavy burden on the women at home. Many families broke up as a result of this separation. The majority of black women were not allowed to enter the labour market. This was done to open space for underprivileged whites. Women who did enter the labour market did not receive large enough salaries to enable them to support their families adequately.

4.1.6 Landownership

The central issues around which the problems of wealth and poverty cohere are land, economics and culture. Land was a means of production in Palestine. This means that ownership or non-ownership formed the basis of wealth and poverty in Palestine. This is also applicable to the South African situation. According to Mosala (1991:23) “The struggle to free oneself from poverty caused by landlessness is an act of culture. This is so because the wealth of the powerful classes, both in the

Bible and in black history, was also a product of cultural domination.” Therefore people must also be culturally liberated.

Strydom (1995:407) maintains that those from the higher social classes misused their positions in the socio-political and economic situation within which the economically strongest had the real say. They dominated the economy and as a result the equality in terms of landownership which previously existed amongst families was destroyed. It is only the white capitalists who benefited whereas it was a loss to the working class. The oppressor class held control over the economic surplus produced by poor peasant classes and this led to alienation and conflict. Alienation has two different forms, the first of these being that of peasants falling into debt slavery. This we have seen in Micah as they used their plots of land as security to obtain loans so that they could manage the next season’s harvest. Secondly, land was alienated by means of dispossession. Wealthy classes took land from the powerless, but productive, peasants.

The situation in South Africa was also worsened by land acts. Sono (1993:4), for example, says that “the natives land act of 1913 passed by the all-white Parliament gave legal approval to this white-black division of the land.” This act prohibited black Africans from buying land outside the small government-approved tribal reserves (homelands) which constituted 7% of South Africa’s land area. There is no doubt here that people who were dumped in the so-called homelands, never had access to a large amount of land but had rights to utilize only a small piece of land. Since the land was illegally taken from the people it must be returned to the rightful owners peacefully. The land question in South Africa is the most complex problem confronting us today. The Group Areas Act exacerbated the problem, because it not only separated people ethnically, but also restricted people to own land. So there is a need to redress this problem. According to the African National Congress (1994:21) the democratic government must provide substantial funding for land redistribution. This will help many people to utilise and to promote productivity of the land.

It is of course not only a matter of landownership but also of cultivating the land by means of highly developed skills. One can own land but not know how to develop it. In such a case development of the country is restricted. This is why there is a great need for knowledge and skills amongst black farmers in order to become productive.

4.1.7 Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that blacks were politically discriminated against and socio-economically separated. This allowed the minority white upper class to monopolize the forces of production at the expense of the majority lower classes. The socio-economic and socio-political systems caused the economic inequity which extends into the new South Africa today. Although the situation has improved since 1994, the issue at stake here is that oppression and exploitation were the major social initiatives that enhanced the class differentiation and class struggle over a long period of time in this country. In many instances this is still the same in our present situation. Many of the oppressed and exploited people still need to be liberated and also to be recognised as people with dignity. They must also enjoy the basic human rights and share in real freedom. They must be completely liberated from the burden of oppression and exploitation. If the poor have access to land and the rights of women are restored, the burden of oppression and exploitation can be lifted.

4.2 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

4.2.1 The role the church can play in South Africa today

First we must return to the book of Micah. Micah makes it clear that the Lord hates the following sinful acts:

- * disobedient people (4:5);
- * bribery (3:11);
- * enslaving people and enforcing refuge (4:6);
- * injustice (3:10);
- * murder (7:2);
- * robbery (2:9);
- * idolatry (1:5);
- * false images (1:7);
- * fortunetellers (5:12);
- * burnt offerings based on wrong intentions (6:6).

All churches in South Africa should confront our society and continually warn people against all the above-mentioned sinful acts which form the basis of a degenerate society. But part of the process of liberation in which all Christians and other faiths can participate is the living of a positive life. Therefore people should be encouraged continuously to:

- * live uprightly (Micah 2:7);
- * know justice (3:1);
- * be filled with the power of the Spirit and with justice and might to declare the transgression of evildoers (3:8);
- * go to the house of God to be taught his ways (4:2)
- * walk in God's paths (4:2);
- * beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (initiate peace - 4:3);
- * walk in the Name of the Lord (4:5);
- * to do what is just and love mercy (6:8);
- * walk humbly with your God (6:8);
- * watch in hope for the Lord (7:7);
- * shepherd your people (7:14).

In practice it means that the church should participate in the building of our nation and reconstructing a democratic society. De Gruchy (1979:226) stresses that the church must not expect too much of the state. The state is not the kingdom of God. Therefore the church (all Christians) must proclaim by word and deed God's will as illustrated in the above-mentioned principles found in the book of Micah. The church should encourage our president and his deputies to do right and lead people in the right direction. When they do wrong the church leaders should guide them in the good spirit of love.

Furthermore, the church should see to it that justice is done in South Africa in a proper and acceptable manner. Opposing parties should be brought together in a good spirit of kindness and reconciliation.

Even on the economic level the church can have influence. Calls for sufficient wages should be supported and poor people should be helped by the church in addition to the support of the state.

The church should combat racism and should try to evangelize the people to understand that God does not take side with a particular group but is for us all.

The church should always be the bearer of hope to the people. Trust in God must fill our lives. Only then can God's will be proclaimed through the power of the Spirit and without fear (3:8).

4.2.2 Women and Liberation

Women were and very often still are excluded from decision-making as if we are still living under the yoke of a kind of patriarchal society. There is a continuous need for women to be liberated because they can also play important roles in the society. In the church, for example, women can preach, dance and sing. Women were also active in the past. They established, for example, the Women's Association of African Independent Churches (WAAIC). They organized in-service training for leaders and the emphasis was placed on literacy, cooking, sewing and knitting (Appiah-Kubi Torres 1979:151). This shows that women can participate actively in the development of our society. I hope that the present government will introduce more reforms where many women can be involved in public sectors, for they have played and can still play a major role in the liberation of this country.

4.2.3 Freedom of religion

In a multi-cultural society like South Africa freedom of religion is one of the basic principles for establishing a peaceful society with healthy relationships. If all religious groups work towards the establishment of a peaceful society, each in its own way but also in co-operation with each other where possible, much will be achieved in obtaining stability and building our nation. This does not take away the commission of the church to spread the word of God. From the perspective of Christianity, idolatry, which was also common in Micah's time, is still a problem today. Therefore it would be necessary for Christians to get involved in dialogue with other religions. In the end only the true God could bring about real liberation and salvation in our country, and he is the one who wishes to be worshipped by his people.

4.2.4 Justice

The kind of justice we need is the one that can reform our society, the one that will be determined by all people. Micah says that the leaders must be concerned about justice (3:1). And if the leaders do not practise justice, how can the people practise justice? The implication is that the justice done by the leaders must be illustrated and taught to the people so that everybody could become involved in practising justice in our society. Even ordinary people must be involved in the process of reforming our society. So it is the duty of all the people, those who are suffering, church leaders, and the government to work for real change, a form of change that can be accepted by all the citizens of this country.

This justice must be done in all spheres of life — in education, economic, political, religious and social matters. The education system in this country was not accepted in the past. It was regarded by the majority as unjust, since there was no equality in education. The following comparison of the 1980-1982 statistics on the South African pupils who passed matriculation with exemption, given by Pillay (1984:20), serves to confirm this statement:

Year	% Whites	% Africans	% Indians	% Coloureds	Total %
1970	14412 (88,0)	1104 (6,7)	410 (2,5)	454 (2,8)	16380 (100)
1975	20850 (76,9)	3725 (13,8)	1189 (4,4)	1337 (4,9)	27101 (100)
1978	22288 (73,8)	4963 (16,4)	1805 (6,0)	1163 (3,8)	30219 (100)
1980	255223	n.a.	2055	1622	-

Table 3

The above statistics show that the whites were far in the majority in this respect and that the emphasis of the previous government with regard to education reflected great imbalances.

The liberation of this country should be based on justice because justice can end divisions which might come in the near future. Justice cannot simply come. We need to struggle for it but not in a radical way. If we can all struggle for peace and justice there can be unity in our society very soon and we can also be united in the Lord. Justice which destroys, enslaves or impoverishes whites will not be justice (Nürnberger & Tooke 1988:129). If one group is not satisfied with the prevailing system, spiritual guidance is needed. Christians have a role to play in our society: they must guide

those who want justice by force to collaborate with those who reject it for a real justice to be established. But justice cannot be real without reconciliation.

4.2.5 Reconciliation

In order to resolve the problem or injustices of oppression and exploitation in the socio-political and socio-economic structures, reconciliation is the best weapon. Innocent children were killed during the 1976 riots: "... hundreds of pupils had been killed and thousands injured" (Nolan 1988:150). With these killings and other social sins I see reconciliation as crucial. Killing is what God hates. Reconciliation should also extend to every member of the society. I am fully aware of the fact that reconciliation is not cheap and easy, but the two parties, black and white, should humble themselves and reconcile. They must share experiences which must be accompanied by forgiveness and acceptance of all the wrongs done. The injustices must be completely removed, i.e. all corrupt practices that made the other party benefit from injustices. So if the two parties can agree to remove these barriers, social justice, order and stability will be enhanced in the South African society. To bring about social order our political and religious leaders should gather their heads and take the real problem of class divisions (including those which cause many people today to feel that they are alienated, unemployed and are suffering). Nürnberger (1988:84) is of the opinion that "groups or individuals that work for reconciliation must be seen to have taken sides against a system characterized by injustices and oppression and for a new social order based on social justice and equal dignity."

A major part of the solution to the problem lies in education. But the education received by black children was not career-orientated; it was designed for one to be able to read, write and listen to the master. Currently many changes with regard to education are on the table and about to be implemented. The acceptance and implementation of these changes by all parties involved, as spelt out in the white paper, will only enhance the process of reconciliation if agreement could be reached on all the issues involved.

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the chairmanship of Desmond Mpilo Tutu can also be mentioned here. It is seen by the majority of people in South Africa as a giant step in healing the old wounds caused by the injustice of the past. This commission will be successful if it is not one-sided. All people who have killed should be brought to the table to confess irrespective of

their colour or class. If truth is revealed then there is hope for justice which God requires from us. I therefore cannot agree with Smit (1995:13) when he says that retribution and punishment could serve the cause of justice but not necessarily promote healing.

4.2.6 Peace

The principle of peace is one that God requires (Micah 4:3). Peace without justice is short-lived. To me there will be no peace in South Africa as long as we are killing one another. We have a good example of factions in the conflict between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC) where hundreds of people lost their lives because of political violence. Even today killings are still the order of the day. The solution to what disturbs peace in South Africa is for us all to be involved in peace-making. In short, we must all be peace-makers instead of waiting for the government to call for peace.

In the end we should all agree with Tutu (1974:76) that Black Theology “knows that white oppression is not the only bondage from which the blacks need to be liberated. Sin and evil are as dehumanising as white racism. When the white oppressor is removed, far too often he is succeeded by his black counterpart.” Let this be a timely warning to the new government and to us all.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis that I posed at the beginning of this mini-thesis is that in order for a society in conflict to be peaceful, real salvation must be obtained, and this is only possible after real liberation. It was also stated that this hypothesis relates to the problem of class conflict as a result of political and economic imbalances during the time of the prophet Micah in the Old Testament as well as to the current South African situation. The main purpose was to investigate the relationship between *liberation*, which is the setting free of people from injustices of oppression and exploitation, and *salvation*, which is the setting free of people from sin and misdeeds by God, accompanied by forgiveness. The book of Micah was taken as the point of departure in order to formulate principles that can be used to help to bring about a peaceful and just society in South Africa.

Certain aspects of the historical-materialistic approach, as explained by Chesnokov (1969), have been implemented to investigate the class struggle in the book of Micah and in South Africa. It is specifically the tension between the ruling class on the one hand and the middle and exploited classes on the other hand that received attention.

An investigation into the background of the book of Micah made it clear that the struggle between the classes continued on the socio-economic, socio-political and religious levels. The abuse of power and exploitation of people were seen by Micah as an offence against God. On the *socio-economic* level Micah, as a rural person and a commoner, was against the exploitation of the poor by the landowners. The rich landowners were the ones who decided on the distribution of goods and resources for living. Poor people in the Southern Kingdom were robbed of their birthrights to own land. Land is not only an economic resource, since it also links to the religious values because the absolute owner of land is God. *Politically* speaking the ordinary people in the Southern Kingdom had no say in their own affairs. People in Judah therefore rebelled against the monarchical system of ruling. In this process individual prophets like Micah took the lead. They wished to establish a peaceful society which could produce good rulers who could build a strong nation in the spirit of justice. On the *religious* level leaders failed to protect the interests of their subjects, hence religious negligence caused injustices and led to conflict. The theology in the Southern Kingdom was a politicised one. The poor Southern people believed that their current present order was approved by

God. Leaders and prophets in the Southern Kingdom were concerned with their own affairs instead of doing the will of God.

Specific social injustices occur in the book of Micah. *Oppression* and *exploitation* involved material goods as well as social and religious wrongs. The higher social class's misuse of their positions was the order of the day. The core of the problem was an unjust judicial system based on bribery (3:11) and religious exploitation where the poor were deprived of their religious education because they had to pay the priests for their teaching (3:11). Even the prophets, God's "ministers", told fortunes for money, leaving the poor in religious darkness (3:11). In the end the fact remains that spiritual and physical oppression of people is disobedience to God.

God replied to the injustices practised by authorities in Judah by imposing judgement as punishment on the nation. The judgement which Micah pronounced affected both Israel and Judah. Syncretism practised at both Samaria and Jerusalem was judged. The people of God had to go into exile, and this was an indication of God's punishment as a result of their sins. Exploiters of the poor would not only be exiled from home, but cut off from God and his people. They would receive punishment relating to their sins, i.e. they would themselves be exploited and face oppression in exile. Not only the leaders are guilty. Corruption spread to the whole nation and affected all relationships.

God's own solution, however, was for man to do what the Lord requires, i.e. to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God in justice, mercifulness and humility (Ridderbos 1949:106). These are the basic principles for a peaceful society, and true worship forms the basis of them all.

But liberation should be seen within the context of the judgement of the people of God. From Micah 4:10 and 2:12-13 it is evident that Micah proclaims, in line with the prophets, liberation through judgement. The judgement becomes a process of purification for the nation. God judges their sinful conduct, but does not reject them. They have to bear the consequences of their evil deeds, but God will liberate them from the burden of the exile. God could judge his people and destroy them, but nevertheless save enough of them (the remnant - Micah 5:7). The purpose of God in allowing Israel to be oppressed and to experience the disaster that He brought over them was a mere fact of bringing his people to a new life, a new understanding of Himself.

Yahweh liberated Israel not only from her enemies (7:8), but even more from her own guilt. This suggests that Yahweh is paving the way to a better life. Liberation at this point then coincides with salvation which is the setting free of people from sin and guilt by God. Because he is holy (1:2) he wants all his people (Israel and Judah) to be holy. God steps into history to change sinful trends. He is the initiator of the change involved, although his people keep on sinning against Him (1:5). He does not stop calling them “my people” (1:9). Salvation lies in everyday life. Salvation, therefore, is God’s restoration of man’s relationships with both parties involved, with God and with fellow men/women. This can be both a universal and a particularistic act of God after man has repented. Salvation cannot take place without the deepest change of the heart. A total change of attitude is necessary, which means a total turn towards God and fellow brothers and sisters. This is what God wants before salvation will commence.

The outcome of this internal process of change that must take place in Israel, is predicted in 7:11, “The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries.” Restoration of the nation will be observed by the whole world in astonishment (7:14-20). This is Israel’s prayer and praise that they should live by in their expectance of real salvation. Could this become true in our situation in South Africa? Rebuilding our country and our nation and not breaking down what has been built up in the past should be one of our main aims in order for the world to see God’s hand in the restoration of our society.

Liberation and salvation find themselves in a very close relationship in the book of Micah. It is clear that God wishes to liberate Israel in the first instance from the bondage of their sinful conduct towards the poor and the needy, and secondly from their bondage of the exile which resulted from their sinful conduct. The process by means of which this is brought about is one of suffering as a result of God's judgement, and the repentance of the people. Only then salvation comes into the picture when God forgives them their sins and expects from them to act as righteous people. This also applies to our situation today. Liberation and salvation cannot take place unless all the exploited poor are cared for. In this way a new relationship between God and his people in South Africa is developed which forms the basis for the relationship amongs the people themselves. In principle God teaches us to liberate ourselves and other people from daily bondage as a result of our misdeeds towards the poor and deprived, but also to develop an attitude of forgiveness in order for salvation to heal the wounds of the past and the present. On this foundation a peaceful nation and society can be built.

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