

Research Article

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Micah 1–3 and Cultural Trauma Theory: An Exploration

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Abstract: Trauma studies have seen rapid growth in popularity within the past two decades, moving from a psychological phenomenon to a concept utilized by literary critics, sociologists, and now biblical scholars. Yet, most of the work on trauma theory within biblical studies focuses on psychological aspects of trauma instead of sociological or cultural aspects of trauma. Drawing on Jeffery Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, a cultural trauma reading of Micah 1–3 reveals how Micah 1–3 as a book transforms Micah's localized psychological trauma to become a national trauma, explaining why scribes preserved Micah 1–3. Like holocaust testimony that became a cultural trauma, Micah's testimony to his trauma became a trauma for all of Judea. To create a cultural trauma, Micah 1–3 define the trauma as divine punishment through an Assyrian invasion due to a breakdown of social order seen in the corrupt owners, rulers, and religious leaders. This cultural trauma then becomes one of the early texts to shape later biblical writers' understanding of divine punishment. This article offers a different perspective of trauma theory and shows how cultural trauma theory explains why Micah 1–3 were preserved.

Keywords: cultural trauma, Micah, Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, social theory, Shephelah, prophets

Trauma theory is one of the emerging theoretical frameworks within biblical studies.¹ Often, these works highlight the psychological trauma associated with prophets using theories of trauma from the 1990s and 2000s. However, some scholars are moving beyond psychological trauma theory and advancing novel theories such as cultural trauma theory. Instead of mining Micah 1–3 for psychological trauma, cultural trauma theory examines how society constructs a narrative that interprets an event as a cultural trauma, leaving a lasting impression on the community and altering the society's identity. A society understands an event as a cultural trauma that modifies a society's identity by answering four fundamental questions: what is the nature of the pain, who is the victim, what is the relationship of the trauma to the broader audience, and who is the perpetrator.² Micah 1–3 constitute a cultural trauma as a narrative that answers these four questions and interprets significant events during the late eighth-century BCE. This cultural trauma asserts that YHWH brought judgment in the form of an Assyrian invasion of Samaria, the Shephelah, and Jerusalem and assigned guilt to the nation's leaders, serving as a precursor to the Deuteronomistic history and other prophetic literature.³

¹ Key works and theories in trauma theory are Alexander, *Trauma*; Boase and Frechette, *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*; Carr, *Holy Resilience*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; Daschke, "Desolate Among Them;" Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*; Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History*; LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; O'Connor, *Jeremiah*; Smith-Christopher, "Trauma and the Old Testament;" Stulman and Kim, *You Are My People*.

² Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 12–5.

³ I derived this independently of Wolff, who has a similar conclusion. He states, "The heart and center of Micah's message can be stated briefly: Yahweh is bringing inexorable doom on Samaria, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah. The guilt for this rest with the authorities and the leading citizens, such as judges, prophets, and priests." See Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, 14.

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1 Trauma theory

During the early 2000s, a new theory of trauma emerged from a sociological perspective: cultural trauma.⁴ If physical trauma is a blow or wound to a physical body and psychological trauma is a wound to a person's psyche, then cultural trauma is a wound or blow to a society's identity and coherence. Ron Eyers argues that a cultural trauma is a "tear in the social fabric, which requires interpretation and repair. It represents a fundamental threat to established individual and collective identity."⁵ This definition reveals that cultural trauma depends upon a collective feeling or affirmation, making cultural trauma a subjective endeavor as to whether something constitutes a cultural trauma; cultural trauma is not natural or automatic. Instead of an objective list of events that cause trauma or a list of events that do not cause trauma, cultural trauma theorists recognize that all trauma is mediated. Events do not create cultural trauma; rather, societies interpret an event as traumatic. Vamik Volkan calls such interpretations or collective memories as "chosen traumas," meaning that a group comes to define itself by a specific trauma.⁶ Thus, cultural trauma is the result of a cultural meaning-making process.⁷ A cultural trauma is a narrative that interprets an event as a trauma for a society that has a lasting impact on that society.

A cultural trauma may or may not result from an event that causes psychological trauma. An event that psychologically destroys a person's well-being is considered a psychological trauma but may not necessarily cause a cultural trauma. It may cause psychological trauma for those involved, and that trauma may even be passed down from generation to generation. However, for this trauma to be a cultural trauma, someone must interpret the event that leaves a mark on a society's consciousness.

If a cultural trauma is an interpretation of an event, then different historical atrocities may never become cultural traumas depending on how society perpetuates specific interpretations. Consider how the horrors from the Holocaust today include an enduring trauma for humanity while the atrocities of Japanese Unit 731 are hardly known.⁸ Both historical atrocities consist of some of the most horrific treatments humans have ever done to each other. Both atrocities occurred during the same historical period and included extreme violence toward human beings. The scale of the atrocities may account for some of the differences in the cultural memory of each. However, the Holocaust left an imprint on western society today and still influences western society today.⁹ This illustrates how an interpretation of psychologically traumatic events may impact society to the extent that it is a cultural trauma (the Holocaust) or may not impact society like the atrocities done by Japanese Unit 731. Thus, Smelser declares that "cultural traumas are for the most part historically made, not born."¹⁰

For a cultural trauma to be born, a group of societal influencers – a carrier group – must perpetuate a specific interpretation of an event or a "shared mental representation" of an event.¹¹ This carrier group consists of different people depending on the society. Today, social media influencers, radical news outlets, and celebrities often monopolize the narratives surrounding events. These modern-day carrier groups provide narratives via websites, social platforms, and televised broadcasts.

In ancient society, this group consisted of prophets, scribes, and royal figures, perpetuating an interpretation of an event through speeches, oracles, and written books. Scribes often controlled the narrative by

⁴ A precursor to cultural trauma would be a collective trauma championed by Erikson, *Everything in Its Path*; Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community;" another precursor to cultural trauma is a chosen trauma. See Volkan, *Bloodlines*, 36–49. Major works on cultural trauma are: Alexander, *Trauma*; Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*; Eyerman, *Identity, Memory, and Trauma*; Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma;" Sztompka, "Cultural Trauma."

⁵ Eyerman, *The Assassination of Theo Van Gogh*, 22.

⁶ Volkan, *Bloodlines*, 48; *Immigrants and Refugees*, 88.

⁷ Eyerman, "Social Theory and Trauma," 43.

⁸ For the atrocities of Japanese Unit 731, see Kristof, "Japan Confronting Gruesome War Atrocity;" Gold, *Unit 731*.

⁹ While Alexander sees the Holocaust as a cultural trauma, Volkan does not see the Holocaust as a chosen trauma because the Holocaust is too recent. For Volkan, chosen traumas reflect the transmission of a distant ancestor's trauma. See Volkan, "Trauma, Prejudice, Large-Group Identity and Psychoanalysis," 148–9.

¹⁰ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 37.

¹¹ The phrase "shared mental representation" refers to the concept of a chosen trauma. See Volkan, *Bloodlines*, 48.

preserving and editing prophetic books, making scribes a key carrier group of cultural traumas. Other carrier group literature found within the biblical text would include the historiography found in the so-called Deuteronomistic history or the Chronicler's history, both of which provide a theological interpretation of Israel and Judah's history that apparently had come to be the dominant and lasting interpretation of Israel and Judean history since it was preserved in the biblical text. Indeed, the biblical text itself shows evidence of competing interpretations between carrier groups. This conflict is often seen through competing prophetic claims with a prophet's material being labeled as false prophecy or true prophecy.¹²

Narratives become cultural traumas by incorporating four elements into the narrative. Each narrative must describe the nature of the pain inflicted, identify the victim, explain the relationship of the victim to a wider audience, and assign responsibility for the trauma.¹³ The first element of cultural trauma begins with some claim of injury. While this seems to be a straightforward question, various interpretations may be given for any one event. Consider the damage done by the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Of course, many tragically lost loved ones, but the United States' sense of security was shattered to the point that one may speak of America pre-9/11 and post-9/11. Others may argue that America's symbol of its economy physically and symbolically was lost on that day. Any of these, loss of life, loss of security, or loss of a symbol, describe some form of injury suffered during 9/11. A cultural trauma emerges when a narrative that articulates and defends a claim of injury becomes dominant.

The second element of a cultural trauma is the nature of the victim. This element identifies the injured party. This element and the first element, the nature of the pain, go hand in hand to construct a cultural trauma.

The third element of a cultural trauma is the relation of the trauma victim to a wider audience. Typically, a trauma does not victimize everyone. The events of 9/11 mostly affected those in New York City and the Pentagon; however, almost all Americans felt they were attacked that day; 9/11 became a trauma for all Americans as the event was interpreted as an assault on freedom and the American way of life. For a narrative to become a cultural trauma, the narrative must show how the suffering of a few relates to the larger collective.

Jeffery Alexander shows how a cultural trauma takes on significance for a society by universalizing the trauma. He charts how the Holocaust came to symbolize evil and characterized it as a crime against humanity through a complex system of creating the Holocaust as such a symbol. The Nuremberg trials characterized the mass murder of Jews as a crime against humanity, a characterization that began the process of universalizing the trauma.¹⁴ Similarly, the 1955 play *The Diary of Anne Frank* chose to put Anne's Hebrew Hanukkah song in the vernacular language to relate to those in the audience.¹⁵ Those hearing the song would picture Anne Frank not as a Jewish victim, but as a victim that could well be their own daughter, niece, or neighbor. Such universalization creates the perception that a trauma extends beyond those who were immediately victimized.

The fourth element assigns a responsible party for the trauma. This element pinpoints the culprit. Like the nature of the victim, the responsible party may be difficult to identify or be a combination of multiple parties. For example, a person may blame 9/11 on various entities: Osama bin Laden, extremists, Islamic extremism, or the Afghanistan government. A trauma narrative answers this question of who is the responsible party for the trauma, creating a cohesive narrative that interprets past experiences.

¹² For more on prophetic conflict and true and false prophecy, see Arena, *Prophetic Conflicts in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Micah*; Hibbard, "True and False Prophecy."

¹³ These four questions come from Alexander, *Trauma*, 15–9; Alexander is not without his critics. See Joas' critique of Alexander's cultural trauma theory in Joas, "Book Review." See also Emirbayer, "The Alexander School of Cultural Sociology," 9.

¹⁴ Alexander, *Trauma*, 47.

¹⁵ Ibid., 66–7.

2 Cultural trauma in Micah 1–3

Micah 1–3 are the subject of study for this cultural trauma because many scholars see these chapters stemming from the same time period.¹⁶ Similarly, the theme of judgment upon Jerusalem and Samaria forms an *inclusio*, starting Chapter 1 and ending Chapter 3.¹⁷ Hence, these chapters function as a unit.

2.1 The nature of the pain

Micah 1–3 contain the four markers of a narrative that suggest that this narrative underwent a process to become a cultural trauma. For cultural traumas to be unforgettable, these traumas must describe the nature of the pain in terms of something sacred being damaged such as a value or a sacred trust.¹⁸ Chapters 1–3 identify three valuable entities that are damaged, describing the pain that constitutes a cultural trauma.

On the surface, Micah 1 identifies the physical destruction of Samaria and the Shephelah as the traumatic event that eventually extends to Jerusalem's gate.¹⁹ The passage moves from a cosmic focus to a national level in verses 2–7 and then to a specific region in verses 8–15, ending with a focus on Jerusalem. While this destruction may have served as a trigger for psychological trauma,²⁰ a different trauma dominates this passage: a broken relationship between Israel and YHWH (Micah 1:5b–7).

Several literary elements point to Micah's concern with the broken relationship between YHWH and Israel based on the sins listed in verses 5–7. First, the structure of Micah 1 highlights YHWH's anger toward his people by hiding the YHWH's intent of appearing. The text deliberately lures the hearer into a false sense of security in verses 2–4 by calling all nations to gather to witness judgment and then portrays a powerful deity coming to judge using theophanic language. Within a theophany, YHWH appears to either save a nation or punish a nation.²¹ Within an eight-century BCE context, YHWH's appearance could be salvific in nature, meaning YHWH appears to defeat the Assyrians. Indeed, YHWH often appears to save his people.²² Thus, Micah's audience may have welcomed the news of YHWH's coming since they were under a constant Assyrian threat and frequent raids.

However, verse 5 turns the hope of YHWH's appearance as a form of deliverance on its head. Instead of judging the nations, YHWH judges Israel and Judah.²³ It is Israel and Judah's conduct that invoked YHWH's wrath. Indeed, YHWH punishes Israel and Judah because their actions have harmed their relationship with YHWH, as verses 5b–7 show.

¹⁶ See note 19 below for relevant views and literature on the dating of Micah 1–3.

¹⁷ I'm grateful for a reviewer of this article who brought this to my attention.

¹⁸ Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 36.

¹⁹ The dating of this passage is highly debated. Many scholars see Micah 1:2–7 as an independent oracle stemming from a period before 722 BCE while Micah 1:8–16 is another independent oracle arising from a time around 701 BCE. According to this view, a redactor merged the two oracles at a later date. See Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah*, 84; Dempster, *Micah*, 58; Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 50. However, due to critical considerations, I see Micah 1:2–16 as a single unit. Thus, I see the entire passage as dating to Sennacherib's invasion around 722 BCE. For others who date the entire unit to around 722 BCE, see Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, 259; Rudolph, *Micah*, 39; Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, 49. Many others date Micah to the Persian period and see the book as set within the eighth-century BCE but not reflecting historical events. See Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 10–1; O'Brien, *Micah*, xlviii.

²⁰ Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 206.

²¹ Jeremias, *Theophanie*, 11–3; Westermann, *The Praise of God in the Psalms*, 97–8.

²² See for example: Ps 144:5; Isa 13:5–9; 19:1; 26:21; 30:27; 40:10; 59:19–20; 64; 66:15. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 47; Limburg, *Hosea–Micah*, 166.

²³ Stansell is a major proponent of this view. See Stansell, *Micah and Isaiah*, 23; likewise, Rudolph reads the entire chapter containing surprises to its audience. Verse 8 surprises the hearers after verses 2–4, just as verse 5 surprises hearers after verses 2–4. See Rudolph, *Micah*, 39. Ben Zvi disagrees, but he is reading Micah from an exilic perspective where judgment has been experienced and presupposed. His comments are insightful regarding the function of this text in the Persian period. See Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 29. For a discussion on the prophets' use of poetry to include the "rhetoric of entrapment," see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 144.

Verses 5b–7 stipulate that Israel and Judah’s sin is a reliance on idols.²⁴ Naming idolatry as the specific sin Israel and Judah committed emphasizes a broken relationship with YHWH because Israelite ideology often claimed that worshiping idols was being unfaithful to YHWH.²⁵ Being unfaithful to YHWH by worshiping idols strains Israel and Judah’s relationship just like being unfaithful in a marriage would strain a relationship.

Micah uses two terms to describe Judah and Israel’s sins, and both terms reside within the ethical and religious sphere.²⁶ The word *pešaʿ* is often translated as “rebelled.” Knierim shows how this term connotes breaking a relationship with YHWH or robbing something due to YHWH.²⁷ Similarly, *pešaʿ* also has political connotations as the word describes political entities with a broken relationship.²⁸ *Pešaʿ* is no mere rebellion or protest; this is a breach in Israel and YHWH’s relationship.

Like Chapter 1, Micah 2 identifies another area of pain that masks a larger trauma. Micah 2:1–5 describes the pain of having one’s land taken away.²⁹ In an agrarian rural society, seizing someone’s land strips away their economic means of production.³⁰ In a society that relies upon subsistence agriculture, land is more than a place to build a house or business; land is the business. Losing land thus becomes equivalent to stripping someone of their job, their means to make a living.³¹ Land seizing is stealing another’s livelihood.

The violation of one’s right to land and the economic strain caused by the loss of land constitute a type of pain involved with a cultural trauma. Such an incident would not be worth mentioning unless this created some form of egregious violation of the rights of those in Israel.

Micah 3 adds to the growing list of pains that are part of a cultural trauma. On the surface, this passage describes various forms of social injustice. The analysis of the social setting reveals four types of sins: hating right and loving wrong, despising justice, misleading people, and accepting money in return for favoritism. The key complaint may be summarized as a lack of justice. Yet, these are mere symptoms of the larger traumatic pain: the violation of trust by the country’s leaders.

The structure of Micah 3 entails vivid descriptions of the leaders of the country and their injustices. The chapter names four groups of leaders, presenting a holistic picture of the core leadership within Judah (Table 1).

The pain is the lost trust and the broken relationship with these leaders who were entrusted to administer justice. These are the critical offices that administer the nation’s justice, and they have become unjust themselves; Israel’s leadership has betrayed their duty and their people.

²⁴ Several scholars see these verses as a later addition, likely stemming from a Deuteronomistic redactor’s hand. For example, Mays sees this section along with 13b and 5:10–14 as stemming from the time of the Babylonian crisis. See Mays, *Micah*, 25. For a helpful summary of this position from a Book for the Four Hypothesis, see Werse, *Reconsidering the Book of the Four*, 186. Scharf sees Micah’s original composition as containing 1b; 5a; 6–7. See Scharf, *Die Entstehung des Zwölfprophetenbuchs*, 201–3.

²⁵ For example, see Hosea chapter 1. Hosea is generally considered a contemporary of Micah.

²⁶ One key term is *pešaʿ* used in Micah six times. Micah 1:5, 13; 3:8 all refer to an action against YHWH. Other references of *pešaʿ* in Micah refer to YHWH’s forgiveness of an action (7:18) and as something for which someone should give an offering (6:7).

²⁷ For supporting his position, Knierim lists Isa 1:2; 43:27; 66:24; Jer 2:8, 29; 33:8; Ezek 2:3; Zeph 3:11; cf. also Isa 46:8; 48:8; 53:12; 59:13; Jer 3:13; Ezek 18:31; 20:38; Hos 14:10; Amos 4:4. See Knierim, “*Pešaʿ*,” 1298–9.

²⁸ Sweeney lists 1 Kgs 12:19; 2 Kgs 1:1; 3:5, 7; 8:22 as support for this assertion. See Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, 351. HALOT defines this word as “crime in general” and also includes in parenthesis “acts which break relationships within the community and with God.”

²⁹ Scholars have proposed three major reconstructions of the text’s setting. The first scenario identifies a few maligned actors seizing property in isolated occurrences. See Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 24; Mays, *Micah*, 61. A second scenario championed by Premnath sees a large scale upheaval to the land management system during the late eighth century that disadvantages smaller landowners. See Premnath, *Eighth Century Prophets*, 95–6. See also, Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets*, 74; Coomber, “Caught in the Crossfire?” Beor claims that the land hoarders expanded their estates through taxation. This theory may sound similar to Premnath’s approach (taxation leading to debt and finally foreclosure), but Beor claims that taxation would have been in the form of labor. The estates with more labor would have the ability to till more land, encroaching upon others’ land. Likewise, taking workers from a village as a means of tax reduced the village’s ability to produce its food, adding to the nefarious nature of land seizing. See Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 120–1.

³⁰ McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 73; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 193; Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*, 72–3.

³¹ Hillers, *Micah*, 33; Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law*, 11.

Table 1: Distribution of Leadership Labels in Micah 3

	Verse 1	Verse 5	Verse 9	Verse 11
Rulers	X		X	X
Commanders	X		X	
Prophets		X		X
Priests				X

In ancient Israel, the leaders were their local rulers with whom people likely had personal relationships.³² A betrayal from them would be a greater source of pain than a national politician or king because such a national officer would be more distant than local leaders. A better analogy would be a betrayal by a police officer assigned to a specific city block or local mayor. Other prophets, as late as Zechariah, also spoke about such leaders, revealing that corrupt leaders were a systemic and noteworthy issue.³³

The loss of trust also extends to YHWH because amidst all this oppression YHWH's help is nowhere to be found within the text. The structure within Micah 3 indicates that each oracle ends with a statement that emphasizes the lack of YHWH's involvement. Each oracle progresses the theme of YHWH's inaction or hiddenness with YHWH's refusal to answer Judah's leaders in Micah 3:4 to withholding of special divination to prophets in Micah 3:7. The final oracle in Micah 3 announces a complete removal of YHWH's protective hand on Jerusalem as Jerusalem is reduced to a field. Such statements contradict the leadership's ideology, which claims in Micah 3:11 that YHWH is with them; YHWH will protect them. In summary, Micah 1 and 2 expose YHWH as actively punishing Judah, but in Micah 3, Israel feels the punishment in the form of YHWH's removal of YHWH's protective presence.

YHWH's withdrawal from Jerusalem makes this a trauma for everyone. While injustice traumatizes a few, YHWH's hiddenness and the removal of YHWH's protection impact all people in Judah. Micah 3:11–12 describe how vegetation will overgrow the spot where the temple once stood, and Jerusalem will be a field. No one rebuilds because they are all either dead or deported.³⁴ This is the trauma experienced when YHWH withdraws.

Together, these chapters present the pain of a cultural trauma in the form of a loss of Israel's relation to YHWH, in the loss of land, and in the breach of trust in both YHWH and the rulers entrusted over the people.

2.2 Identity of the victims

The second element of a cultural trauma that Micah identifies is the victim. The victim that Micah identifies is Samaria and a trail of victimized cities that reach Jerusalem. Micah 1:10–16 do not portray Jerusalem as being invaded or captured. Instead, Micah's narrative focuses on the victimization of those in the Shephelah. Such a focus stems from Micah's rural location and suggests that this narrative retains an old tradition.³⁵ Many other prophets focus on Jerusalem, especially when the conflict directly involves Jerusalem. Yet scribes retain Micah's victimization of the rural populations.

³² McNutt notes how villages were politically and economically isolated from the state. See the literature she cites in McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel*, 174.

³³ See Zechariah 11 and the discussion of the three shepherds within that chapter.

³⁴ Moberly, "In God We Trust? The Challenge of the Prophets," 25.

³⁵ Micah as a historical prophet, his geographical location, and his social location are all debated. For those who see Micah as an eighth-century prophet with rural ties, see Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, 254; Allen, *Micah*, 240; Smith, "Micah," 23; Rudolph, *Micha*, 32; Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, 18; Gignilliat, *Micah*, 76. Sweeney, whom I agree with, opines that it was the Assyrian advance that forced Micah to flee from Moresheth to Jerusalem. See his *The Twelve Prophets*, 340. Others view the book of Micah as a product of the fifth century. Ben Zvi notes that scholars that reconstruct a historical setting for Micah in the eighth century all share the assumption that there is a "high degree of direct correspondence between the world in the text and that of monarchic Judah in the 8th century." See Ben Zvi, *Micah*; O'Brien, *Micah*, xlviii.

Chapter 2 also contributes to a cultural narrative by painting a more vivid picture of the victims of the trauma. Unlike Chapter 1's general description of the victims, Chapter 2 identifies specific victims of YHWH's judgment: women and children. Chapter 2 begins describing criminals suffering for their evil deeds, as seen in YHWH's speech in verses 2:4. This statement reiterates what Micah 1 announced: judgment on those who do evil. Micah 2:8 invokes YHWH's punishment as having consequences for women and children.

Specifically, Micah's mention of women and children not only indicates a vulnerable group in society but hints at siege warfare. The conventional ancient battlefield consisted of warriors fighting each other in open areas devoid of women and children. Siege warfare is unconventional warfare in that this warfare incorporates women and children.³⁶ Having children and women present complicate an attack because siege warfare inherently targets anyone in the city to include women and children. When soldiers penetrate a city, they face a confusing mix of people: some warriors to engage in battle and fleeing women and children. For warriors accustomed to fighting on a battlefield with other warriors, siege warfare blurs the moral and social lines between a warrior and an innocent party. For example, Assyrian reliefs show children and women as captives, illustrating the unconventional aspect of siege warfare.³⁷

Ultimately, the mentioning of women and children expresses the gravity of YHWH's judgment. Yet, Micah 2 expands the list of victims within this cultural trauma to the entire household as seen in Micah 2:2, with households depending upon the land for survival. Attacks on the land are attacks on an entire home. Thus, Chapter 2 outlines the most vulnerable in society as the victim.

Like Micah 2, Micah 3 identifies the victims in this cultural trauma narrative as the oppressed people. Presumably, Micah addresses these oppressed people when he speaks about Judah's leaders in the third person (Chapter 3, verses 3, 4, 6, 10, and 11).³⁸ Not only did these innocent people suffer from the leader's injustices, but they will suffer the absence of YHWH's protection. YHWH's withdrawal from Jerusalem makes this a trauma for everyone. While injustice traumatizes a few, the absence of YHWH in YHWH's temple impacts all people in Judah. YHWH's protection is gone.

2.3 Relationship to the wider audience

The third element of a cultural trauma is the relationship between the victim and the wider audience. While it is odd that the scribes kept the rural population as the victim, the scribes knew that these passages linked the rural victims with their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. The reason scribes likely retained the Shephelah as the victim of this narrative because this foreshadows what will happen to Jerusalem. The genre of lament found in Micah 1:8–16 allows this passage to function as a warning, implying that this wave of destruction heads for Jerusalem. YHWH's punishment keeps spreading from Samaria to the Shephelah to Jerusalem. The relationship between the victim and the wider audience is one of mutual punishment with a different temporal order. The rural areas received their punishment first, with Jerusalem to follow. This universalizes the trauma, making the narrative about more than the Shephelah.

2.4 Identity of the perpetrator

The fourth element of a cultural trauma that Micah identifies is the perpetrator of the trauma. Chapter 1 identifies several perpetrators of this trauma. The perpetrator could be Assyria though the passage does not name Assyria. The passage names YHWH as the agent that brings pain and suffering. Micah uses the genre of a theophany to depict a powerful warrior deity coming to judge:

³⁶ Kern, *Ancient Siege Warfare*, 4.

³⁷ Layard, *The Monuments of Nineveh* 2, 37–8.

³⁸ Andersen and Freedman, *Micah*, 369.

The picture is of Yahweh astride the mountain peaks, the heat of his wrath and greatness causing them to melt and flow like hot wax or water poured down a steep slope. Before such a majestic God Samaria and Jerusalem stand no chance of survival, for he comes as conqueror of the mountain ranges, the sanctuaries thus succumbing to the intense heat of divine anger.³⁹

The text leaves little doubt that YHWH is the source of judgment, and the description of YHWH's arrival evokes sheer terror in those that stand before him.⁴⁰ Micah 1 makes the agent of judgment even more evident by having YHWH announce his judgment in verse 6. This cultural trauma narrative fixes on YHWH as the primary perpetrator of this trauma.

Like Micah 1, Micah 2 states loud and clear that YHWH is the one who will bring calamity due to the sins of the people. As in Micah 1, Micah 2 reports YHWH's judgment with direct speech. Micah seldom reports YHWH's direct speech, so the occurrence of direct speech here stresses YHWH's direct involvement and removes any ambiguity as to who is causing the judgment.

The dispute in Micah 2 centers upon YHWH's character as the perpetrator of traumatic judgment. Micah's interlocutors resist the emerging cultural trauma narrative that YHWH brought judgment based on their ideology about YHWH as seen in Micah 2:6–7. Within these verses, prophets claim that YHWH is not so impatient with his people and such disaster will not come upon the people of YHWH. Micah's interlocutors deem the idea of YHWH judging his people as improbable as long as YHWH is among them (Micah 3:11), which is the opposite of Micah's prophecy.

This type of dispute is common when a cultural trauma begins to form. As a carrier group begins to make sense of an event, the wider audience may challenge what the carrier group offers as their interpretative narrative.⁴¹ Consider the American Civil War as a national cultural trauma. Various groups debate the narrative that interprets the Civil War. One narrative asserts that the war eradicated the national sin of slavery, valorizing those who fought for the north. Similarly, another narrative claims that the Civil War was a loss of southern identity, whose heroes should be remembered.⁴² Indeed, the debates surrounding Civil War leaders (especially Confederate leaders) continue to form and solidify the cultural trauma the Civil War has upon America. Like the Civil War in America, Micah's narrative is challenged by other groups and is part of the meaning-making of what happened in the late eighth-century BCE. In the end, Micah's narrative dominates and becomes the national narrative that interprets the Assyrian invasion into Samaria and Judah as YHWH's judgment.

Micah 3 presents a shift from YHWH as the primary perpetrator to the leadership in Judah as the cause of Israel's trauma. Chapters 1 and 2 place a heavy emphasis on YHWH as the perpetrator with first-person speech and a theophany that identifies YHWH as the agent of this trauma. Micah even disputes a group concerning his claim that YHWH is the cause of all of this (Micah 2:6–7). In contrast, Chapter 3 places the blame squarely on the leaders of Judah.

Micah identifies these leaders for their lack of justice. The text pays great attention to these leaders and describes them in detail to highlight them as those responsible for Judah's inequity. Micah traces YHWH's ultimate destruction of Jerusalem back to the leaders of Judah. The third oracle clarifies that the leaders are the cause of Jerusalem's destruction. The emphatic "because of you" in Micah 3:12 leaves no doubt in the hearers' mind that it is these leaders' actions that cause the downfall of Jerusalem. Micah 1–3 then identify both YHWH and Israel's leadership as the perpetrator of the trauma found within Micah 1–3.

3 Conclusion

Micah 1–3 perpetuate a cultural trauma that asserts that YHWH brought judgment in the form of an Assyrian invasion on Samaria, the Shephelah, and Jerusalem and assigned guilt to the nation's leaders,

³⁹ Crenshaw, "W'dōrēk 'al-Bāmōtē'āres," 45.

⁴⁰ Mays explains how the true tragedy is YHWH's action in this judgment. Mays says "that the reality of the tragedy is the work of YHWH. It is Israel's God who is manifest in the ravaging power of the Assyrians." See Mays, *Micah*, 54.

⁴¹ Alexander, *Trauma*, 12.

⁴² Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," 49–50.

serving as a precursor to the Deuteronomistic history and other prophetic literature. Samaria, Jerusalem, and particularly, the Shephelah suffered from the trauma of a military campaign. However, the pain extends beyond the loss suffered by a military invasion. Micah 1–3 pinpoint the pain of broken trust in both the leaders of Israel and YHWH. The narrative makes an active attempt to show the broad scope of the trauma portraying a more ruralized military invasion as an assault on the entire nation. Finally, the narrative includes the powerful realization that YHWH is the perpetrator of this trauma.

Labeling Micah 1–3 as a cultural trauma has two implications for the study of Micah. First, Micah's cultural trauma serves as a precursor of Deuteronomist theology. For example, one idea shared by Micah and Deuteronomist theology is that Samaria serves as an example for Jerusalem.⁴³ Micah ties Samaria and Jerusalem's fate together using the phrase "to make as a heap" to describe Samaria's destruction in Chapter 1 and then again to describe Jerusalem's fate in Chapter 3. Likewise, Samaria's incurable wounds pour through the Shephelah and make their way to the gate of Jerusalem. Samaria serves as a warning for Jerusalem to change her practices.

Another correlation between Deuteronomistic theology and Micah 1–3 is Micah's strict negative perspective in these chapters, which corresponds to Nelson's exilic editor of the Deuteronomistic history. This editor sought to justify YHWH's judgment within the Deuteronomistic history.⁴⁴ Micah too wrestles with this idea by placing such an emphasis on YHWH's involvement and even goes so far as to record a dispute between YHWH and others about YHWH's involvement. Micah 3 mitigates YHWH's action by laying the blame on Judah's leaders. The Deuteronomist likewise justifies YHWH's action by placing blame on the king.

The second implication of a cultural trauma reading of Micah is that cultural trauma theory explains why Micah's narrative retained its influence while other narratives died. These other narratives are not preserved but could be, for example, narratives that interpreted these invasions as a purging of sin from Judah or evidence of poor foreign policy by the Judean king. Isaiah may preserve a counter-narrative concerning Sennacherib's invasion during the eighth century. While Micah interprets this military expedition as a trauma, Isaiah records how YHWH spared Jerusalem. Micah's narrative became a dominant narrative as a cultural trauma, showing the four elements of a cultural trauma. Such narratives leave a mark because the narrative describes the violation of something sacred. Micah obliterates any idea that YHWH will save them from the Assyrian onslaught and destroys a Zion-like ideology that YHWH will ultimately save Jerusalem.⁴⁵ Judah experiences shame by having their deity abandon them. All these factors make a cultural trauma that leaves an indelible mark on Judah's collective consciousness. Micah 1–3 created a cultural trauma that explains why these negative passages that are focused upon the rural areas of Israel are still read today.

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⁴³ Nelson sees the exilic editor of the Deuteronomist history uses Samaria as an example of Judah's fate. He cites 2 Kings 17:7–20, especially 19; 21:13; 23:17. See Nelson-Jones et al., *Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History*, 126.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁵ In this regard, Micah is at odds with Isaiah. In fact, Micah's narrative may have become dominant because Micah 3 was proved true with the destruction of Jerusalem.

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